A CRITIQUE OF HUME'S EMPIRICISM IN HIS EPISTEMOLOGY

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project work was carried out by **ADELABU GODWIN DAMILOLA,** with matriculation number **ART2101061,** and it meets the requirement for an award of Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy.

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Ag. Head of Department

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God almighty for his mercies.

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I give thanks to God for his unwavering presence, provision, mercies and strength throughout this journey and for the successful completion of my project.

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ABSTRACT

David Hume's notion of impression and idea distinguishe between two types of mental content. Impressions are direct, vivid sensory experiences, such as seeing a bright light or feeling pain, while ideas are weaker copies of these impressions that appear in memory or imagination. This work explores fundamental questions about human perception, knowledge, and reality. Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas challenges traditional views on how we acquire knowledge, making it relevant to debates in philosophy, psychology, and cognitive science. The analytic method in philosophy focuses on breaking down complex ideas into simpler components to achieve clarity and precision. The critical method in philosophy involves evaluating and questioning existing beliefs, ideologies, and assumptions. This topic addresses the problem of how humans acquire knowledge and the reliability of our thoughts and perceptions. Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas challenges the notion of innate knowledge, arguing that all ideas stem from experience. This project employs analytic/critical method critical, The method in philosophy involves evaluating and questioning existing beliefs, ideologies, and assumptions. The finding of this project is that the empiricist stance can be summarized without too much caricature in two simple slogans rooted firmly in the sensory realm "seeing is believing" and "noting in the mind that is not first been in the senses"

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

David Hume (1711-1776) played a crucial role in the Scottish Enlightenment and is often considered one of the most significant philosophers within the empiricist framework. He built upon the ideas of earlier thinkers like John Locke and George Berkeley to develop a bold version of empiricism that highlighted sensory experience as the core basis of all human understanding. In his major writings, especially in *A Treatise of Human Nature*[1] (1739-1740) and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*[2] (1748), Hume proposed that all concepts originate from impressions, which are the immediate and vivid experiences we encounter, asserting that experience holds greater importance than reason.

Hume's views on knowledge challenge longstanding beliefs about causation, personal identity, and metaphysical concepts, paving the way for modern skepticism and analytic philosophy. He criticized the idea of innate knowledge, examined the process of induction, and questioned metaphysical thinking, which pushed against rationalist views and changed the conversation surrounding how we understand the world.

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[1] Hume, D. (1740). *A treatise of human nature*. London: John Noon. P. 23

[2] Hume, D. (1977). *An enquiry concerning human understanding*. Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Co. p.10

Nevertheless, Hume's approach to empiricism has received considerable criticism due to its perceived flaws. Thinkers like Immanuel Kant, who claimed that Hume had sparked his awakening from what he called a "dogmatic slumber," offered alternative perspectives that aimed to overcome the limitations they attributed to strict empiricism. Hume's doubts regarding causation, identity, and abstract knowledge remain topics of discussion in today's debates about knowledge, rendering his contributions both essential and contentious.

The quest for knowledge that is completely certain has persisted over time. However, there exists a significant tradition of epistemology focused mainly on human experience—dating back to at least Aristotle—that does not seek absolute knowledge. This line of thought embodies the philosophy of empiricism. Empiricists argue that striving for all-encompassing knowledge is irrational, especially when it is possible to acquire practical knowledge through slower but more dependable methods.

Empiricists are content with forming a framework of understanding that is likely to be accurate, even if complete certainty cannot be achieved. David Hume emerged as a radical empiricist, consistently representing this perspective throughout the development of epistemology and metaphysics. He maintained that the only authentic knowledge comes from experimental observation, and any concept not grounded in sensory experience is merely conjecture. According to him, quantity and number are the sole

subjects of abstract science, and any efforts to expand this superior kind of knowledge beyond these limits are nothing more than clever speaking and illusion.[3]

He calls for a campaign to burn any metaphysical books with great passion. He states: What damage should we inflict on libraries that accept these (empirical) ideas? If we choose any text, such as one on metaphysics, can we find any reasoning that involves quantity or numbers? No. Is there any reasoning based on actual facts or existence? No. It should be burned: it only contains misleading arguments and false ideas.

Hume's idea of strong sensism as a substitute for our natural and learned scientific, metaphysical, and cultural understandings brings more issues than solutions. It undermines all scientific and philosophical principles. It leaves us trapped in a random, fragile subjectivism of dry empiricism.[4]

In terms of knowledge, David Hume's empiricism is valuable, but someone who relies solely on empiricism will ultimately ruin the essential base of knowledge. We think about more than just a series of impressions, based on humanity's understanding of knowledge, science, and existence.

To limit them to just impression collections is narrow-minded. It is unwise to view people merely as collections of sensations, as Hume suggests.

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[3] Hume, D. (1977). *An enquiry concerning human understanding*. Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Co. p49

[4] Hume, D. (2000). *A treatise of human nature* (D. F. Norton & M. J. Norton, Eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.34

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Hume's concept of empiricism has weaknesses. The main issue comes from trying to determine how reliable our senses really are. Often, our senses mislead us. This can happen when we view a mirage, notice objects changing size based on our mental or physical condition, have hallucinations, or encounter various kinds of illusions.

The problem is that, in these situations, distinguishing between what is real and what is not is impossible. For instance, a mirage occurs due to hot air, making it seem like there is water in deserts or on roads when there isn't any. The question then becomes, how can we differentiate between a genuine sensory experience and one that is false or deceptive? This leads to the well-known arguments regarding illusions, which raise doubts about the accuracy of sensory experiences.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

It has been established that David Hume adopted an extreme viewpoint on how we obtain knowledge, asserting that it can only arise from sensory experiences. He achieved this by pointing out the weaknesses found in reason as a pathway to understanding.

This research aims to examine Hume's viewpoint and to show that, although we all concur that humans acquire knowledge through sensory experiences, these experiences alone do not create or ensure true knowledge. As noted by Jacques Maritain, every philosophical system contains some degree of truth and offers insight into reality;

however, certain philosophies overstate their claims, leading to complications. This was evident in Hume's case, as he encountered difficulties by asserting that knowledge could solely come from sensory experiences, exaggerating his position.

Thus, one objective of this study is to identify many of these problems to illustrate that while knowledge is derived from sensory experiences, it does not conclude there. This is because there are limitations to what our senses can perceive in the process of knowledge acquisition, meaning that any information gathered through the senses must be evaluated before it is accepted.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Once we conclude this project, we aim for it to hold significance through our success in highlighting key elements of David Hume's empiricism and addressing some of its issues.

This research will also benefit students interested in exploring David Hume's empiricism, as it will give them a clearer understanding of his ideas. Nonetheless, it is crucial to understand that this work does not represent the complete picture of Hume's empiricism. Additionally, we were not able to include certain references. Thus, the references listed at the end of the project will be adequate in guiding students to find information on those subjects.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The heading of this piece clearly shows that it focuses on critiquing the empiricism of David Hume. However, much like any analysis, we won't dive straight into the critique. Instead, we will set a direction or focal point for what we intend to critique. Hume's empiricism acts as our roadmap because we must first outline it to clarify its components. Once we understand the essence of Hume's empiricism, we will be able to ground our critique in the challenges we will face.

This analysis delves into Hume's fundamental ideas about knowledge, specifically that knowledge arises from sensory experiences, that reason should follow sensory impressions, and that concepts like causation and personal identity do not have rational support apart from habit and tradition.

1.6 Methodology

This work will utilize the critical analytic approach. Since the essay focuses on empiricism as presented by David Hume, our initial step will be to provide a thorough summary of empiricism. After this, we will direct our attention specifically to Hume's idea of subject matter empiricism. Once we have presented these points, we will start to critique them.

To make things simpler, we will separate our critique into two sections. The first section will address the criticisms that others have made against Hume's empiricism, acknowledging that it has faced criticism throughout history.

The second part of our critique will reflect our own perspectives. We will aim to emphasize the problems associated with Hume's empiricism stemming from his extreme ideas, and our criticism will be grounded in these issues.

1.7 Definition of Related Terms

This study involves different terms, and understanding these terms will help us gain insight into the main areas of the research.

a priori and a posteriori. These are terms primarily used to describe two species of propositional knowledge but also, derivatively, two classes of *propositions or "truths, namely, those that are knowable a priori and a posteriori respectively. Knowledge is said to be a priori (literally: prior to experience) when it does not depend for its authority upon the evidence of experience, and a posteriori when it does so depend. [5]

Personal identity. This refers to the idea of a self that continues over time. The way philosophers refer acts about "persons which are expressed in identity judgements such as "the person over there now is identical to the person who was there yesterday', the truth

[5] Honderich, T. (1995). *The Oxford companion to philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.42

of which is a consequence of the fact that persons remain in existence over time. The problem is to say in an informative way what the necessary and sufficient conditions are for this kind of fact. These conditions are called criteria of identity for persons.[6]

Scepticism. This is a philosophical viewpoint that involves doubting accepted beliefs or knowledge. Philosophical scepticism questions our cognitive achievements, challenging our ability to obtain reliable knowledge.[7]

Induction. Induction has traditionally been defined as the "inference from particular to general. More generally an inductive inference can be characterised as one whose conclusion, while not following deductively from its premises, is in some way supported by them or rendered plausible in the light of them.[8]

Ideas. These are entities that exist only as contents of some mind. Ideas in this sense should be distinguished from Plato's Ideas or "Forms", which are non-physical but exist apart from any conscious beings.[9]

Epistemology. Like 'epistemological', an adjective derived from 'epistémé', a Greek word for knowledge. Anything thus described has some relation to knowledge (or at least to the justification for belief), or to the general theory of these (epistemology). A

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[6] Honderich, T. (1995). *The Oxford companion to philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.654
[7] *Ibid*., p.794
[8] *Ibid*., p.405
[9] *Ibid*., p.389

proposition is epistemic if and only if it has some implication for what, in some circumstances, is rationally worthy of belief.[10]

Empiricism. Any view which bases our knowledge or the materials from which it is constructed on experience through the traditional five sense. [11]

Impressions: A perception or sensation that is received through the senses, often considered a fundamental aspect of experience and knowledge. According to David Hume, Impressions are our lively and strong perceptions, and ideas are the faint images of these impressions in thinking and reasoning.[12]

Causation according to Collins English Dictionary is "the act or fact of causing; the production of an effect by a cause" or "the relationship of cause and effect[13].

1.8 Literature Review

Our purpose in this text is to inform the reader about some of the literatures relevant to this work. At the core of this is David Hume's book, which is essential reading.

In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume demonstrates that an investigation will reveal that the components of human reasoning consist solely of ideas and facts. These two categories encompass all specific knowledge. According to David

[10] Chisholm, R. (1966). *Theory of knowledge*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, ch. 1.
[11] Honderich, T. (1995). *The Oxford companion to philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press., p.226
[12] Hume, D. (1740). *A treatise of human nature*. London: John Noon, Book I, Part I, Section I
[13] http://collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/causation

Hume, all numerical matters are viewed as intuitively certain and thus categorized under "relations of ideas," while any findings gained through experience are classified as "matters of fact." David Hume refines and presents his core philosophical ideas in a more accessible form than in his earlier *Treatise of Human Nature*. The work focuses on the nature and limits of human knowledge, emphasizing empiricism and skepticism[14]

In another work, *David Hume and the Problem of Reason: Recovering the Human Sciences*, David Hume discusses how doubt about the capability of reason leads to knowledge influenced his viewpoint. He argued that when reason is disconnected from experience, it only results in uncertainty and confusion.[15]

Edward Caird, in his work *A Critical Account of Kant's Philosophy*, illustrates Hume's views on the passive role of the mind in gaining knowledge through the concept of the "association of ideas." This perspective shows that the mind does not actively engage with information to create knowledge. Instead, it identifies natural connections or associative principles present in sensory data, where one idea triggers another, thereby offering a clear understanding to the mind.[16]

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[14] Hume, D. (1977). *An enquiry concerning human understanding*. Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Co.. p.57

[15] Hume, D. (1990). *Hume and the problem reason; Recovering the human sciences*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p45

[16] Caird, E. (1876). *A critical account of Kant's philosophy*. Glasgow: James Maclehose Publishing, p.64.

According to Robert J. Fogelin, in his book *Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature*, He offers a detailed and nuanced interpretation of David Hume's skepticism as presented in his seminal work, A Treatise of Human Nature. Fogelin argues that Hume is not a radical skeptic who denies all knowledge, but rather a moderate skeptic who acknowledges the limitations of human reason and the inconsistencies in our cognitive faculties. Fogelin emphasizes Hume's distinction between the natural instincts that guide everyday belief (like belief in causality and the external world) and the philosophical scrutiny that undermines those beliefs. While reason can question these beliefs, Hume ultimately sees them as inevitable and psychologically grounded. He discusses Hume's view that reason itself is limited and often unreliable, especially when applied to metaphysical questions. Hume critiques our tendency to trust deduction and induction without a rational basis.[17]

According to James Wiley, in his work *Theory and Practice in the Philosophy* of David Hume, he examines the relationship between Hume's theoretical philosophy—especially his epistemology and metaphysics—and his practical philosophy, which includes his views on ethics, politics, and religion. He challenges the idea that there is a major divide between these areas of Hume's thought. Wiley argues for a coherent and unified interpretation of Hume's work, asserting that his theory and practice are not disconnected but deeply integrated. He shows how Hume's skepticism and empiricism influence both

[17] Fogelin, R. J. (1985). *Hume's skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature*. New York, NY: Routledge., p, 67

his abstract ideas and his practical conclusions. The book explores how Hume's insights into human nature and belief shape his views on morality, social institutions, and political stability. Wiley suggests that Hume's empiricism leads to a pragmatic approach to social and moral norms. Highlighting Hume's rejection of rationalist systems and his emphasis on custom, habit, and sentiment as the basis for both belief and action. This supports Hume's idea that real-life decision-making is driven more by feeling than by logic.[18]

In accordance to Tim Milnes work, *The Testimony of Sense: Empiricism and the Essay from Hume to Hazlitt*, he explores how the essay form influenced the development and transmission of empiricist philosophy from David Hume to William Hazlitt. He argues that the literary and rhetorical style of the essay was not just a vehicle for philosophical ideas but shaped the content and method of empiricism itself. He shows how empiricism, particularly Hume's, relies not just on observation and sense experience, but also on how those experiences are communicated. The essay's informal, personal tone allows philosophers to engage with subjective experience, which is central to empiricist thought. [19]

David Hume is presented as a pivotal figure whose philosophical method is closely tied to the essay form. His skepticism, emphasis on custom, and exploration of human

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[18] Wiley, J. (2012). *Theory and practice in the philosophy of D. Hume*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, p.55

[19] Milnes, T. (2019). *The testimony of sense: Empiricism and the essay from Hume to Hazlitt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.76

understanding are expressed in a literary style that balances clarity and philosophical depth. Milnes traces how later writers and thinkers—especially William Hazlitt—picked up and transformed Humean empiricism in their own essays, often blending literature, philosophy, and political critique.

In Margaret Atherton's edited version of the book, *The Empiricists: Critical Essays on Locke, Berkeley, and Hume*, she brings together a collection of critical essays that explore the key ideas and interconnections between three major British empiricists: John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume. The essays are written by prominent scholars and aim to both analyze and challenge the central doctrines of these thinkers. Offering side-by-side examinations of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, showing how each philosopher built on and reacted to the others. For example, how Berkeley developed idealism in response to Locke's materialism, and how Hume radicalized empiricism beyond both.[20]

Several essays focus on Hume's treatment of causality, induction, personal identity, and skepticism. Critics in the volume engage with Hume's argument that reason cannot justify beliefs in causality or the self, and they explore the philosophical consequences of his extreme empiricism. Also examines how the empiricists' methodologies—especially their reliance on introspection and sense experience—shape their metaphysical and epistemological positions, considering how the empiricist tradition influenced later

[20] Atherton, M. (Ed.). (1988). *The empiricists: Critical essays on Locke, Berkeley, and Hume*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. p34

thinkers and movements, particularly in the realms of modern epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of language.

According to Norman Kemp Smith, in the book, The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of Its Origins and Central Doctrines. In this influential work, he provides a comprehensive and critical examination of David Hume's philosophy, focusing particularly on the origins and central doctrines of his thought. First published in 1941, the book is widely regarded as one of the most important studies of Hume in the 20th century. He challenges the view of Hume as a radical skeptic. Instead, he argues that Hume's skepticism is constructive and naturalistic, aiming to understand how human beings form beliefs, rather than to dismantle knowledge altogether. He emphasizes the impact of Newtonian science on Hume's method, portraying Hume as a philosopher who sought to apply scientific reasoning to human nature. According to Kemp Smith, Hume's project was to establish a "science of man" modeled after empirical observation. Highlighting Hume's idea that custom and habit are the real foundations of belief—not reason. Kemp Smith explains how this insight underpins Hume's theories of causation, induction, and the self.[21]

[21] Smith, N. K. (1966). *The philosophy of D. Hume: A critical study of its origins and central doctrines* (5th ed.). New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, p72

CHAPTER TWO

DAVID HUME IN HISTORICITY

2.1 Life and Works

David Hume, who was born on May 7, 1711, and passed away on August 25, 1776, was a philosopher, historian, economist, and essayist from Scotland. He is most renowned for his significant contributions to empiricism, philosophical skepticism, and metaphysical naturalism.[1] Starting with his work A Treatise of Human Nature, published between 1739 and 1740, Hume aimed to develop a scientific approach to understanding humanity that focused on the psychological aspects of human behavior. Following the ideas of John Locke, Hume dismissed the concept of innate ideas and argued that all knowledge comes from experience. This places him alongside notable empiricists such as Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and George Berkeley.

Catherine and Joseph Hume (originally Falconer) had two sons, with David being the second child. Catherine was the daughter of Sir David Falconer from Newton, Midlothian, and Mary Falconer, and Joseph was an advocate from Chirnside in Berwick. Joseph passed away shortly after David turned two. Catherine, who did not remarry, raised her three children alone. The family owned a small estate called Ninewells, located near Chirnside, about nine miles from Berwick-upon-Tweed on the Scottish side of the border. Catherine was in Edinburgh when David was born, and his father died when he was three. He started his studies at the University of

[1] Biography.com. (2014, April 2). *David Hume*. A&E Television Networks. https://www.biography.com/scholar/david-hume.

Edinburgh around the age of 12 and left at 14 or 15, which was typical at that time. Later, when encouraged to pursue law, following family expectations, he found it unappealing and instead devoted himself to reading widely in literature. His intense intellectual pursuits led to a nervous breakdown in 1729, and he required several years to recover.[2]

In 1734, Hume altered the spelling of his family name from 'Home' to 'Hume,' as the name 'Home' was not well recognized in England. He never married and spent part of his time at the family residence in Chirnside, Berwickshire, which had been in his family since the 16th century. Financially, he faced challenges as a young man because his family was not wealthy, and as a younger son, he inherited little. Hume enrolled at the University of Edinburgh at an unusually young age, between 10 and 12, at a time when the normal age was 14. His initial career interests leaned towards law due to family tradition. However, he later stated that he developed an overwhelming dislike for anything except the study of philosophy and general knowledge, noting that while his family thought he was studying legal texts, he was actually engrossed in Cicero and Virgil.[3] He held little regard for the professors of his era and shared with a friend in 1735 that "there is nothing taught by a Professor that cannot be found in books. " He did not complete his degree.

Hume contended that reasoning through induction and the belief in causality cannot be rationally justified; instead, they arise from habit and custom. We do not directly observe one event causing another; we only recognize the "constant conjunction" of events. This issue with induction

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[2] Mossner, E. C. (2001). *The life of D. Hume*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.49

[3] Morris, W. E., & Charlotte, R. B. (n.d.). David Hume. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Retrieved from Metaphysics Research Lab website: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/hume/. Retrieved 18 May 2020.

indicates that drawing causal conclusions from past occurrences requires the assumption that the future will be like the past, and this metaphysical assumption cannot be based on prior experience.

Opposing philosophical rationalists, Hume argued that our emotions, not our reasoning, dictate our actions. He famously stated that "Passions should rule over reason. " Hume was also a sentimentalist who believed that ethics derive from feelings rather than abstract moral laws. He early on committed to naturalistic explanations for moral events and is recognized by scholars of European philosophy for clearly presenting the is–ought dilemma, the idea that stating a fact does not inherently lead to a conclusion about what should be done.

Hume rejected the notion that individuals possess a clear idea of self, claiming that we instead experience a collection of sensations, with the self merely being this collection of perceptions linked by associations. Hume's compatibilist viewpoint on free will asserts that causal determinism is fully compatible with human freedom. His thoughts on religion, including his dismissal of miracles and criticism of the design argument for God's existence, stirred considerable debate during his time. Hume's influence extended across various disciplines, such as utilitarianism, logical positivism, science philosophy, early analytic philosophy, cognitive science, and theology, impacting numerous thinkers. Immanuel Kant acknowledged Hume as the figure who had stirred him from his "dogmatic slumbers. "

At about 18 years old, Hume encountered a philosophical insight that revealed "a new Scene of Thought," motivating him "to abandon all other pleasures and pursuits to focus entirely on it. " He did not specify what this scene entailed, leading to various interpretations by commentators. One widely accepted view among modern scholars is that this "scene of thought" was Hume's

realization that Francis Hutcheson's theory of moral sense could help comprehend morality more effectively.[4]

Inspired by this, Hume dedicated at least ten years to reading and writing. He soon faced mental exhaustion, initially manifesting as a coldness he attributed to a "Laziness of Temper" that persisted for about nine months. Following this, sores appeared on his fingers, leading his doctor to diagnose him with the "Disease of the Learned. "

Hume mentioned that he followed a regimen of bitter medicines and anti-hysteric pills, and drank a pint of claret daily. He also chose to engage in more physical activities to enhance his education. His health saw some improvement, but in 1731, he experienced extreme hunger and heart palpitations. After a period of good eating, his appearance changed from being “tall, lean, and raw-boned” to “sturdy, robust, and healthy.” In fact, Hume became quite famous for being overweight and for his love of fine port and cheese, often using them as examples in his philosophical ideas. Although Hume came from a distinguished family, by the age of 25, he lacked a steady income and a professional career. Like many of his contemporaries, he took up a job as a merchant's assistant, which required him to leave Scotland. His journey took him from Bristol to La Flèche in Anjou, France, where he frequently engaged in discussions with the Jesuits at the College of La Flèche.

Hume's ambition to pursue a career in academia was interrupted by controversies related to his supposed "atheism. " He also expressed disappointment that his first major work, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, was not well-received, saying it "fell dead-born from the press. " Nevertheless, he

[4] Berlin, I. (2013). *The roots of romanticism* (2nd ed.). New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013, p.23

achieved literary recognition during his life as an essayist and served as a librarian at the University of Edinburgh. This role brought him essential income, and it was during this period that he wrote *The History of England*, a comprehensive six-volume work that became widely popular and established itself as the definitive account of England's history. For more than six decades, Hume was the leading figure in interpreting English history. He referred to his “love for literary fame” as his "ruling passion," and he considered his later works, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* and *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*—often called the "first" and "second" enquiries—his most significant literary and philosophical accomplishments. Hume requested that his peers evaluate him based solely on these later texts, rather than his earlier, more radical ideas, which he dismissed as youthful writings: “A work which the Author had projected before he left College.” However, many scholars today maintain that his most vital arguments and distinct philosophical ideas are best found in the original text of the Treatise. Even though he began this work at just 23 years old, it continues to be viewed as a monumental contribution to Western philosophy.[5]

In 1734, after spending time in a merchant's office in Bristol, Hume reached a crucial moment in his life when he decided to move to France for three years. He spent a significant portion of this time at La Flèche on the Loire River, in the historical region of Anjou, where he focused on studying and writing *A Treatise of Human Nature.* This Treatise was Hume’s attempt to create a comprehensive philosophical framework. It is structured into three books: Book I, "*Of the Understanding*," explores the origins of ideas, the concepts of space and time, knowledge and

[5] Hume, D. (1778). *My own life*. In *The history of England, from the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Revolution in 1688*. London. p46

probability, causality, and the skeptical implications of these theories. Book II, "*Of the Passions*," presents a complex psychological framework to elucidate the emotional aspects of human beings and minimizes the role of reason in this process. Finally, Book III addresses morality, framing moral goodness through the "feelings" of approval or disapproval that individuals experience when evaluating human actions based on their agreeable or disagreeable outcomes, whether for themselves or for others.

Although Hume's Treatise represents his most comprehensive examination of his ideas, he strongly rejected it later in life, claiming it was naïve and that his thoughts were more fully developed in his subsequent works. The Treatise suffers from poor organization, excessive subtlety, and confusion due to unclear important terms, particularly "reason. " Additionally, its bold statements and somewhat dramatic personal declarations detract from its effectiveness. Thus, his later criticism of the work may have been justified. However, Book I has still been more widely read by academic philosophers than any of his other texts.

Upon returning to England in 1737, he focused on getting the Treatise published. Books I and II were released in two volumes in 1739, while Book III came out the next year. The disappointing response to this ambitious first work left him feeling disheartened. In his Autobiography, he mentioned that “it fell dead-born from the press, without reaching such distinction, as even to excite a murmur among the zealots.” His subsequent project, *Essays, Moral and Political*, published between 1741 and 1742, achieved some success. Perhaps buoyed by this, he applied for the position of moral philosophy chair at Edinburgh in 1744. Some critics accused him of heresy and atheism, citing the Treatise as proof, even though it had not been ignored despite what he

claimed in his Autobiography. After his unsuccessful attempt, Hume departed from the city where he had resided since 1740 and entered a phase of wandering: a challenging year near St. Albans serving as a tutor to the unstable marquess of Annandale (1745–46); a brief stint as secretary to General James St. Clair, a notable figure in Scotland, during a failed military mission to Brittany (1746); a short time in London and at Ninewells; and then several more months alongside General St. Clair on a diplomatic mission to the courts of Vienna and Turin (1748–49).[6]

2.1.2 Hume's Work

Throughout his years of traveling, Hume was earning the funds he needed to create time for his academic pursuits. Some results from his research had emerged by the time his journeys concluded, notably *Three Essays, Moral and Political* (1748) and *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (1748). The latter work is a revised version of Book I from the Treatise, enhanced with an essay titled "*On Miracles*," which gained fame for arguing that no miracle can be substantiated by any type or amount of evidence. It is more commonly referred to as *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, the name Hume assigned to it in a revision made in 1758. *The Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) reworked Book III of the Treatise. Hume's developed ideas are articulated in these later works.

An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding aims to outline the foundational principles of human knowledge. It presents important questions in a logical format related to reasoning about facts and experiences, answering them through the principle of association. Hume's analysis rests on a dual categorization of awareness objects. Firstly, all objects fall into two categories:

[6] Ted, M. (2018). D. Hume biography. In *The Hume Society*. New York, NY: Routledge. p.55

“impressions,” which come from sensations or internal awareness, and “ideas,” which are formed from these impressions by combining, rearranging, amplifying, or reducing them. In other words, the mind derives all ideas from impressions and does not invent them. Following this, Hume formulates a theory of meaning in language. A word that does not directly represent an impression only holds meaning if it invokes an object that can be obtained from an impression through one of the mental processes listed earlier. Secondly, two ways exist to interpret meaning: an analytical method that emphasizes the “relations of ideas” and an empirical method that highlights “matters of fact.” Ideas can be simply understood as meanings, allowing for their logical connections to be recognized through rational examination. For instance, the idea of a flat triangle includes the equality of its internal angles to two right angles, while the concept of motion involves the notions of space and time, regardless of whether triangles and motion truly exist. Hume claims that demonstrative knowledge exists only at this level of pure meanings. Conversely, matters of fact present themselves to the mind just as they are, with no logical connections revealed; their characteristics and associations must be accepted as they appear. The facts that primroses are yellow, lead is heavy, and fire burns things each exist independently and are logically unproductive. From a reasoning perspective, any of these could differ: each fact's opposite is imaginable. Thus, a logically demonstrative science of fact cannot be established.[7]

From this foundation, Hume develops his theory regarding causality. He claims that the concept of causality suggests a "necessary connection" between facts. But where does this idea come from? Hume argues that one cannot see any causal relationship among sensory experiences. When

[7] Sher, R. B. (2008). *The Enlightenment and the book: Scottish authors and their publishers in eighteenth-century Britain, Ireland, and America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p.85

people think certain events are connected by cause and effect, all they notice is that the events often appear together in a consistent manner. In this sense of being together, it is evident that the impression or thought of one event brings to mind the idea of the other. A repeated connection forms in the mind, and, similar to other habits, this connection acts as a kind of compulsion. Ultimately, Hume concludes that this sensation is the only observable source of the concept of causality.

Belief

Hume examines how people infer causation, introducing the idea of belief in this context. When individuals observe a glass falling, their thoughts extend beyond merely anticipating its shattering; they also expect and trust that it will indeed break. Similarly, when they see the ground is wet, they not only consider rain but also hold the belief that it must have rained. Consequently, belief plays a crucial role in the process of drawing causal connections. Hume continues by exploring what belief is, asserting that he was the first to tackle this topic. He applies the term specifically to beliefs about factual matters. He characterizes belief as a kind of intensity or clarity that comes with grasping an idea. In simpler terms, a belief is a bright or lively concept. This brightness is inherently linked to some of the things we perceive—like impressions and our straightforward memory of them. Through connection, this liveliness can also attach to specific ideas. Thus, during the act of inferring causality, a person moves from an impression to an idea that is

commonly connected with it. Hume claims that the liveliness aspect inherent in the impression transfers to the idea. This lively quality is what he identifies as the core of belief.[8]

Hume does not assert that occurrences themselves lack causal links or that future events will not relate similarly to past ones. In fact, he strongly believes the opposite and argues that everyone else does too. The belief in cause-and-effect relationships and that the future will be alike to the past are fundamental human beliefs, deeply rooted in our nature (excluding madness), and crucial for our existence. Rather, Hume aims to show that these intrinsic beliefs do not arise from, nor can they be validated by, direct observation or logical reasoning, whether intuitive or deductive. While careful thought reveals no evidence supporting these beliefs, it also highlights that people are inherently inclined to hold them, and it is rational and sensible to do so. This captures Hume's skepticism: it acknowledges the existing tension, challenging not the beliefs themselves, but the certainty behind them.

Morals and historical writing

The Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals offers a more developed perspective on Hume's views about ethics, highlighting sympathy as a key aspect of human nature that underpins both community life and individual joy. He characterizes morality as qualities that are recognized (1) in any individual and (2) by almost everyone, and he seeks to uncover the fundamental reasons behind these approvals. Just like his understanding of belief, he identifies the roots of moral judgments in "feelings" rather than in "knowledge." Moral choices rely on moral sentiments. Traits are appreciated for either their usefulness or their pleasantness,

[8] Rivers, I. (1780). *Reason, grace, and sentiment: A study of the language of religion and ethics in England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p58

depending on whether they benefit their owners or others. Hume's ethical framework focuses on the well-being of others (without adhering to a principle like "the greatest happiness for the greatest number") alongside personal happiness. However, consideration for others plays a significant role in his concept of morality. He places a strong emphasis on altruism, associating the moral feelings he claims exist in humans mainly with empathy and concern for others. According to him, it is natural for people to share joy with those who are happy, to feel sorrow for those in distress, and to pursue the welfare of others as well as their own. Two years after releasing the Enquiry, Hume expressed, "I have a fondness for that work"; and toward the end of his life, he considered it "without a doubt the best of all my writings." These remarks, along with hints in his later work, suggest that he perceived his moral philosophy as his most important contribution. In this work, he presents himself as someone who shares the same dedication to responsibility as others. The common belief that he was an indifferent critic is significantly mistaken; his skepticism was directed not at morality itself, but rather at the extensive theorizing concerning it.

After these works were published, Hume spent several years from 1751 to 1763 in Edinburgh, with a couple of trips to London. There was an attempt to have him take over Adam Smith's position in logic at Glasgow, as Smith would later become a close friend. However, word of Hume's atheism got in the way. In 1752, he became the keeper of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh. As the keeper of 30,000 books, he finally had the chance to follow his longstanding interest in writing history. His History of England, covering the time from Caesar's invasion to 1688, was released in six quarto volumes from 1754 to 1762, preceded by his Political Discourses in 1752. His earlier works had begun to gain him some recognition, but these two volumes

brought him widespread acclaim, both at home and internationally. Additionally, he published Four Dissertations in 1757, which he thought was unimportant, even though it included a revision of Book II of the Treatise, finishing his reworked version of this text and also a remarkable examination of "the natural history of religion." In 1762, James Boswell, who wrote a biography of Samuel Johnson, referred to Hume as "the greatest writer in Britain," and in 1761, the Roman Catholic Church acknowledged his contributions by placing all of his works on the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, the list of books they prohibited.

An exciting chapter of his life followed: in 1763, he departed from England to serve as secretary to the British embassy in Paris under Earl Hertford. Despite his awkward appearance and clumsy nature, the Parisian society welcomed him. He was recognized for his broad knowledge, sharp thinking, and writing style, and people valued him for his genuine kindness and joyfulness. The salons welcomed him openly, and he was received with warmth by everyone. In 1765, he worked as the chargé d'affaires at the embassy for four months. When he returned to London early in 1766, with plans to become undersecretary of state a year later, he brought along Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the Swiss philosopher linked to the Encyclopédie of Denis Diderot and d'Alembert, offering him safety from persecution in a house in Wootton, Staffordshire. This troubled genius suspected a conspiracy against him, fled secretly back to France, and accused Hume of betrayal. Hume, feeling partly aggrieved and partly convinced, decided to publish the relevant letters between them along with a narrative that connected them in A Concise and Genuine Account of the Dispute Between Mr. Hume and Mr. Rousseau, released in 1766.[9]

[9] Alan, B. (2024). Hume on race and slavery. *Journal of Scottish Philosophy, 22*(2), 127–142.

In 1769, feeling somewhat weary of both public life and England, he chose to return to his cherished Edinburgh, where he greatly appreciated the stimulating and friendly company of both old friends and new acquaintances (he remained unmarried). During this time, he also focused on revising his written works. Between 1762 and 1773, he published five additional editions of his History and released eight editions of his collected writings titled Essays and Treatises, which excluded the Treatise, History, and other minor works, from 1753 to 1772. He also prepared the final version of this collection, which was published after his death in 1777, along with Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, where he critiqued the cosmological and teleological proofs for God's existence (this work was delayed due to pressure from friends and came out posthumously in 1779). His oddly detached autobiography, titled The Life of David Hume, Esquire, Written by Himself (1777; he chose this title himself), is dated April 18, 1776. He passed away at his home in Edinburgh after a prolonged illness and was interred on Calton Hill.

Adam Smith, who managed his literary estate, included a letter in the Life that ends with his opinion of his friend as “coming as close as possible to the ideal of a completely wise and moral person as human limitations allow.” His esteemed friends, some of whom were religious leaders, certainly held him in high regard and cared for him, while younger individuals benefited from his guidance or financial support. The public, however, only knew that he was an atheist and questioned how such a feared figure would face death. Yet Boswell has recounted, in a passage in his Private Papers, that, when he visited Hume in his last illness, the philosopher put up a lively, cheerful defense of his disbelief in immortality.

2.2 Influences

It is difficult to question that Hume was a key figure of his time. This was the belief of those who lived alongside him, and looking back at his accomplishments supports this view, even if it places a different focus on them. There are several reasons for this evaluation, which can be categorized into four main points:

2.2.1 As a writer

Hume's writing was admired during his life and has continued to receive acclaim afterward. His work reflects the classical ideals of his time. It does not have much personal flair or vibrancy, as he consistently kept a strong control over his feelings. The tone is gentle, except when dealing with minor topics, where it becomes somewhat weighty. However, his philosophical texts provide an unexpected delight. In these works, his ability to remain detached, even, clear, and straightforward are commendable qualities. He is recognized as one of the finest authors of philosophical prose in the English language throughout the history of writing.[10]

2.2.2 As a historian

Between the time of his passing and 1894, at least 50 versions of his History were published, and an abridged version, The Student's Hume, released in 1859 and frequently reprinted, was widely used for half a century. Although it is considered outdated today, Hume's History is an important cultural work. Furthermore, at the time it was released, it was a groundbreaking piece, far surpassing its limited predecessors. It provided a more comprehensive view and established a new

[10] T Hugh, T. R. (2010). *History and the Enlightenment*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p.52

level of neutrality. Hume's History of England not only followed the actions of monarchs and politicians but also showcased the intellectual pursuits of educated individuals. This is evident in the sections concerning literature and science, found at the end of Chapter 3 during the Commonwealth period and at the conclusion of Chapter 2 during James II's reign. Its readability was unmatched, both in its design and language. Events and figures were interconnected in ways that created a story, highlighting objectives and significant moments of rising action. This approach would later influence the style of future historical books aimed at general audiences.

2.2.3- As an economist

Hume emerges as a notable economist in the Political Discourses, which were included in Part II of Essays, Moral and Political as part of Essays and Treatises. It is unclear how much he impacted Adam Smith; both thinkers shared similar ideas and excelled in using historical examples to back up their points. Unlike Smith, who created a comprehensive economic theory in his Wealth of Nations, Hume put forth important concepts that laid the groundwork for 18th-century classical economics. One can understand the depth of his insights through his key arguments: he believed that wealth is made up of goods rather than just money; he argued that the money supply should relate to the availability of products in the market (echoing thoughts by the Anglo-Irish philosopher George Berkeley); he posited that low-interest rates indicate thriving trade rather than an excess of money; he suggested that no country can rely on exporting solely for precious metals; he noted that every country has unique advantages in resources, climate, and expertise, making product exchange generally beneficial, with some exceptions; and he argued that poorer nations hinder others by not producing enough to engage effectively in this exchange.

He viewed the shift from an agricultural to an industrial economy as essential for any form of society beyond the most basic levels.

2.2.4- As a philosopher

Hume viewed philosophy as the inductive study of human nature and determined that people are primarily driven by emotions and practical feelings rather than by rational thought. Many philosophers and historians consider his significance to stem from the fact that Immanuel Kant developed his critical philosophy directly as a response to Hume, famously stating that Hume had roused him from his "dogmatic slumber." Hume influenced Auguste Comte, a 19th-century French mathematician and sociologist, in his creation of positivism. In Britain, the impact of Hume can be seen in Jeremy Bentham, an early 19th-century legal scholar and philosopher, who was inspired to embrace utilitarianism—the idea that moral actions should be judged based on their outcomes—by reading Book III of the Treatise, and even more so in John Stuart Mill, a later 19th-century philosopher and economist.[11]

By questioning the belief in an essential connection between cause and effect, Hume became the first thinker of the postmedieval era to reinterpret ancient skepticism. Furthermore, he approached this reinterpretation in an innovative and persuasive manner. While he had great respect for Newton, Hume's nuanced challenge to causality questioned the philosophical foundations of Newton's perspective of science, which relied on identifying fundamental causal principles that govern the universe. Consequently, the positivists of the 19th century had to address Hume's

[11] *Ibid*..p57

doubts about causality in order to achieve their goal of establishing science as the core framework of human understanding.

Throughout much of the 20th century, it was Hume's naturalism that drew interest, particularly among analytic philosophers, rather than his skepticism. Hume's naturalism rests on his view that philosophical justification should be based on patterns observed in the natural world. This idea appealed to analytic philosophers as it appeared to offer a resolution to the challenges arising from the skeptical tradition that Hume had significantly revitalized through his other philosophical contributions.

2.3 General Notion of his Empiricism

David Hume's philosophy of empiricism asserts that all human understanding emerges from what we perceive through our senses and what we observe. He posited that vivid and immediate experiences, referred to as impressions, are the basis for our ideas and concepts. According to Hume, the mind lacks genuine content or knowledge without these initial sensory impressions. His empiricism can be divided into the following categories:

Sensory Experience: Hume emphasized the importance of sensory experiences in developing knowledge. He contended that our understanding of the world comes through our senses, with all our ideas and concepts ultimately connected to those sensory experiences.

Impressions and Ideas: Hume made a key distinction between "impressions," which are the strong, immediate sensory experiences, and "ideas," which are the weaker, less vivid reflections

of those impressions. He maintained that all ideas originate from impressions, and without the original sensory input, our minds would lack content.

Copy Principle: Hume introduced the "copy principle," claiming that our ideas are fundamentally replicas of our sensory impressions. He suggested that we understand complex ideas by breaking them down into simpler impressions and combining them.

Inductive Reasoning and the Problem of Induction: Hume explored inductive reasoning, questioning the belief that future experiences will mirror those of the past. He pointed out that our trust in nature's uniformity stems from habit and tradition, not from logical reasoning, leading to potential skepticism.[12]

Custom and Habit: Hume believed that many of our convictions, such as the existence of an outside world or the continuity of the self, are rooted in custom and habit rather than logical reasoning. He argued that these beliefs are established through repeated sensory interactions and serve as a crucial base for our daily live

[12] Hume, D. (1977). *An enquiry concerning human understanding*. Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Co.. p.34

CHAPTER THREE

EMPIRICISM: A FOUNDATION FOR HUME'S PHILOSOPHY

3.1 Hume's Conception of Empiricism

David Hume’s conception of empiricism is one of the most influential in the history of philosophy. As a radical empiricist, Hume argued that all human knowledge originates in sensory experience. His empiricism covers core areas such as;

Impressions and Ideas: Hume distinguished between, Impressions and Ideas, For Hume, Impressions are Immediate, vivid sensory experiences for instance, seeing a color, feeling heat. While Ideas are Faint copies of impressions in the mind for instance remembering a sunset. According to Hume, all ideas are derived from impressions. We cannot have an idea unless we have experienced its corresponding impression.

The Copy Principle: This is central to Hume’s empiricism, Hume is of the position that, "All the materials of thinking are derived either from our outward senses or inward feelings. "So, every complex idea must be traceable to simpler impressions.

Causation and Induction: Hume famously challenged the rational basis of causal inference. We never observe causation directly—only sequences of events (e.g., a ball hitting another and it moving). Our belief in causation arises from habit or custom, not reason.

Skepticism about Metaphysics: Hume's empiricism led to skepticism about many metaphysical concepts like the self, God, or substance. If we can't trace an idea to an impression, it's meaningless or suspect.

Limits of Human Knowledge: Hume concluded that much of what we believe—like the continuity of the self or the uniformity of nature—cannot be rationally justified but is instead a product of psychological habits formed by experience.[1]

3.2 Impression and Ideas

David Hume's theory of Impressions and Ideas is a foundational part of his empiricist philosophy, particularly laid out in his work A Treatise of Human Nature and An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.

1. The Distinction Between Impressions and Ideas: Hume begins by dividing all the contents of the mind (what he calls "perceptions") into two broad categories:

A. **Impressions**: For Hume, Impressions are the original experiences of sensation or feeling. They are vivid, forceful, and lively. A typical example of Hume's view point is; The sensation of heat when near a fire, The feeling of joy or anger, The visual experience of a bright color.

[1] Hume, D. (1748). *An enquiry concerning human understanding*. London: Millar Press. p53

Hume also distinguishes between two kinds of impressions, categorizing them as follows; Impressions of Sensation and Impressions of Reflection.

(a) Impressions of Sensation: Arise from physical senses (sight, sound, touch, etc.).

(b) Impressions of Reflection: Arise from internal experiences (e.g., emotions or passions that come from thinking or remembering something).

B. **Ideas**: Hume argues that ideas are the faint images of impressions in thinking and reasoning. They are less lively and forceful. For instance, remembering the sensation of heat, Imagining a mountain of gold, Recalling the taste of an apple.

2. The Copy Principle: This is a cornerstone of Hume's epistemology, For Hume, "All our ideas or more feeble perceptions are copies of our impressions or more lively ones." In other words, Every idea we have is ultimately derived from some prior impression. If we can't trace an idea back to a specific impression, it's likely invalid or meaningless. For instance, You can imagine a unicorn (idea), but it's composed of parts you've already experienced: a horse (impression) and a horn (impression).[2]

3. Simple and Complex Impressions/Ideas: Hume further divides impressions and ideas into two parts namely; simple and complex. For Hume, simple impressions and ideas cannot be broken down further (for example, the color red). Hume also

[2] Gopnik, A. (2002). *Hume: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press p57

establishes that the complex is made up of multiple simple ones (e.g., an apple = color, shape, texture, taste). Both impressions and ideas can be simple or complex. Complex ideas are formed by recombining simple ideas we've already acquired from impressions.

4. The Test of Meaning: Hume uses the impression-idea distinction as a test for meaningfulness. If a word or concept cannot be traced to an impression, it is meaningless. For example, metaphysical terms like "substance" or "infinity" may lack corresponding impressions and thus be suspect.[3]

5. Exceptions and Challenges: Hume does recognize a potential exception: the idea of a missing shade of blue. Suppose someone has seen every shade of blue except one. Can they imagine the missing one? Hume admits they probably can, which slightly contradicts the Copy Principle—but he treats it as an isolated case.

Hume's empiricism, establishes a vital interplay in philosophy, rejecting innate ideas (contrary to rationalists like Descartes)and laying emphasis on experience as the only source of knowledge.

[3] Norton, D. F., & Taylor, J. (Eds.). (2009). *The Cambridge companion to Hume*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p75

3.3 Principles of Induction

David Hume's principle of induction (or more precisely, his problem of induction) is one of his most influential philosophical contributions, found in An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding. It deals with how we reason about cause and effect based on experience—and why this reasoning is not logically justified.

3.3.1 What is Induction?

Inductive reasoning is when we make general conclusions based on specific observations. For instance, The sun has risen every day in the past and therefore, it will rise tomorrow, Another example is, every time I drop an object, it falls and therefore, things fall due to gravity. This kind of reasoning is central to science, everyday life, and learning from experience.

2. Hume's Central Question: Hume pose a question thus:

"What reason do we have to believe that the future will resemble the past?"

In other words, Why should we assume that patterns we've seen in the past will continue in the future?, What justifies our belief that cause and effect relationships we've observed will continue to hold

3. Hume's Critique of Induction: Hume's argument breaks down like this;

A. Knowledge from Experience Is Limited, We never observe causation directly, We see one event followed by another (for example, a billiard ball hitting another), but we do not perceive a necessary connection.

B. The Assumption of Uniformity of Nature: Inductive reasoning assumes that nature is uniform that the future will resemble the past. But this uniformity principle cannot be proven by experience without circular reasoning; Why do we believe nature is uniform? Because it always has been. But that's using past experience to justify future predictions—the very thing under question.[4]

C. The Problem: Induction Is Not Rationally Justified. There is no logical necessity that future events must follow past patterns. Our belief in causality or future patterns is not derived from reason or deduction, Instead, it arises from habit or custom—we're psychologically conditioned to expect certain outcomes.[5]

4. The Role of Habit or Custom: Hume explains that habit (or custom) is what causes us to expect outcomes, "Custom, then, is the great guide of human life." After seeing two events constantly conjoined (e.g., fire and heat), our mind associates them. This association leads us to expect one after the other, but it's not based on any rational proof. So, while induction works in practice, it lacks rational or philosophical justification.

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[4] Hume, D. (1740). *A treatise of human nature*. London: John Noon. p.77

[5] Hume, *An inquiry concerning the principles of morals*, *Op. Cit.,* p68

5. Implications of Hume's Problem of Induction: Hume's skepticism about induction has far-reaching effects as it challenges the foundation of scientific knowledge, which relies heavily on induction. It shows that we must rely on custom and probability, not certainty. Later philosophers like Immanuel Kant, Karl Popper, and Bertrand Russell engaged deeply with Hume's challenge.

3.4 Skepticism

David Hume's skepticism is one of the defining features of his philosophy. It is subtle and nuanced, combining both radical doubt and practical common sense. Hume doesn't reject all knowledge, but he questions the rational foundations of many of our most basic beliefs—about the world, the self, causation, and God.

What is Skepticism?

Skepticism in philosophy refers to doubt about the possibility of certain or absolute knowledge. Hume practices a mitigated skepticism, meaning he accepts some practical beliefs while rejecting the idea that we can have perfect certainty in metaphysics or speculative reasoning.

3.4.1 Skepticism about Causation

This is perhaps Hume's most famous skeptical challenge. We often assume that one event causes another (for example, fire causes heat). But Hume argues that we never observe causation itself only a sequence of events. The "necessary connection" between cause and effect is something our minds project onto the world based on habit. Thus, our belief in causation is not grounded in reason, but in custom. The Implication here is that, we cannot justify causal relationships rationally they are psychological habits, not logically necessary truths.[6]

3.4.2 Skepticism about Induction

Related to causation, Hume critiques inductive reasoning (drawing general conclusions from past experiences). A typical example is the sun has risen every day → It will rise tomorrow. Hume asks an important question, which is; How do we know the future will resemble the past? His answer which is not the focal point but the question states that; We don't. The principle that the future will mirror the past is itself based on past experience—a circular argument. The Implication of this is that, science and everyday reasoning, which rely on induction, have no rational foundation only pragmatic usefulness.

3.4.3 Skepticism about the Self

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[6] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, *Op. Cit.,* p.85

Hume also doubts the existence of a permanent, unchanging self. When he looks inward, he finds only a bundle of perceptions: thoughts, feelings, sensations. There is no impression of a constant "I" only a stream of experiences. The Implication here is that, the idea of a fixed, unified self is a fiction—we are just collections of perceptions.

3.4.5 Skepticism about Metaphysics and Religion

Hume is highly critical of abstract metaphysical concepts and speculative theology. He argues that if an idea cannot be traced back to a sensory impression, it is meaningless. This leads him to reject or question: (a)The existence of substance, (b)The idea of necessary existence, (c)Arguments for the existence of God, such as the design or cosmological argument. The Implication of this is that, much of metaphysics and theology is nonsense cloaked in big words.[7]

3.4.6 Hume's "Mitigated Skepticism"

Despite his deep doubts, Hume does not fall into total despair. He promotes a practical, moderate skepticism. Recognizing the limits of human reason, he accepts that we are guided by custom, not certainty. Trust in common sense and experience for everyday life. Avoiding speculative metaphysics. As Hume puts it; "Be a philosopher; but amidst all your philosophy, be still a man."

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[7] *Ibid*.,p.86

3.5 Principles of Causality

David Hume's principle of causality (often referred to as Hume's problem of causation) is a cornerstone of his epistemology and has profound implications for how we understand the world. In essence, Hume challenges the very nature of causal relationships and the justification for believing that one event causes another. Let's explore Hume's principle of causality in detail, focusing on its origins, arguments, implications, and significance.

For Hume, causality refers to the idea that one event (the cause) brings about or necessitates another event (the effect). The cause must be connected to the effect in a way that one cannot occur without the other.[8]

Hume's Criteria for Causality

Hume describes causality in terms of three essential components: namely; Priority, Contiguity, and Necessity.

Priority: The cause must precede the effect in time.

Contiguity: The cause and effect must be spatially or temporally close.

Necessity: There must be a necessary connection between the cause and the effect—meaning that the cause must produce the effect in a predictable or law-like manner. For example; When a billiard ball strikes another, the contact (cause) happens before the

[8] *Ibid*.,p92

second ball moves (effect), they are close together, and there is an expectation that the strike will cause the ball to move (necessary connection).

3.5.1 Hume's Problem of Causation

Hume's central problem with causality is that we never directly observe the causal connection between events. What we actually experience are only consecutive events.

For instance, we observe that: A match is struck, and then it catches fire, We never observe the necessary connection between striking the match and the fire only that one event follows the other. Hume's famous question is: How do we know that the future will resemble the past? In other words, how can we be certain that the next time we strike a match, it will also produce fire?

3.5.2 Hume's Skepticism About Necessary Connection

Hume argues that we have no rational foundation for believing in the necessary connection between cause and effect. Here is an explanation to why he posits this;

A. Observing Sequences, Not Causes: When we see two events occur in succession (e.g., the match being struck and catching fire), we are only observing the succession of events. We never directly observe the necessity or the power that links the two.This habit of association is a product of custom or experience, not rational deduction.

B. The Problem of Induction: Hume also connects causality with the problem of induction. Induction is the reasoning process where we generalize from specific observations (e.g., "Every time I've struck a match, it has caught fire"). Inductive reasoning assumes that because something has happened repeatedly in the past, it will continue to happen in the future. However, this assumption is not rationally justified. There is no logical necessity that the future will resemble the past. Thus, our belief in causal relationships is based on habit, not rational proof.[9]

3.5.3 The Role of Custom or Habit in Causality

Hume argues that our belief in causality does not come from logical reasoning or experience of necessary connections, but from habit or custom. Custom teaches us to expect certain effects to follow causes because we have seen them happen together repeatedly. For instance, after witnessing many instances of fire following a struck match, we come to expect it. The psychological force that causes us to expect this outcome is not derived from reason, but from habitual expectation. For example; If you repeatedly observe that when the sun rises, it is followed by daylight, you eventually expect daylight after sunrise, not because you have logically deduced it, but because you are conditioned by custom to think this way. The Implication of this is; Hume is essentially saying that the necessity we associate with causality is a psychological habit, not a rationally derived

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[9]Harris, J.A. (2008). *Hume's Enquiry concerning Human Understanding: A reader's guide*. London: Bloomsbury. p.55

truth. We act as though the cause-effect relationship is certain, but it is simply a customary expectation based on repeated observations.[10]

3.5.4 Hume's Theory of Causality in Terms of "Constant Conjunction"

Instead of seeing causality as a necessary connection between two events, Hume suggests that cause and effect are simply two events that are constantly conjoined or habitually linked in experience. This is known as the doctrine of constant conjunction. Constant Conjunction: If we consistently observe that event A is followed by event B, we come to expect that A causes B. Thus, causal inference is based on the regular sequence of events, not any underlying necessary connection.

3.5.5 The Limits of Human Knowledge

Given Hume's skepticism about the nature of causality, he concludes that our knowledge of the world is not grounded in absolute certainty but in probability. We can predict the future based on past experiences, but we can never know for certain that the future will follow the same pattern. Science, which relies heavily on causal reasoning, is built on this habitual expectation, not rational proof of necessary connections.[11]

3.5.6 Hume's Influence on Modern Philosophy

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[10] *Ibid*.,p65

[11] Smith, N.K. (1934). *Hume's theory of knowledge: A critical examination*. London: Macmillan.. p.45

Hume’s problem of causation influenced many later philosophers and scientists, including. Immanuel Kant, who famously claimed that Hume "woke him from his dogmatic slumbers." Kant took Hume’s skepticism seriously and sought to reconcile it with the possibility of scientific knowledge in his Critique of Pure Reason, arguing that causality is a category of understanding that the human mind imposes on experience. Karl Popper, in the 20th century, developed a philosophy of science based on falsifiability rather than inductive confirmation, reflecting Hume’s concern with induction and causal inference.

3.6 A-priori and A-posteriori Knowledge

David Hume’s distinction between a priori and a posteriori knowledge is central to his epistemology and forms an essential part of his analysis of how humans acquire knowledge. This distinction allows Hume to categorize different types of knowledge based on their origins and the kind of justification they require. Let's explore Hume's views on a priori and a posteriori knowledge in detail.

3.6.1 A Priori vs. A Posteriori Knowledge

The distinction between a priori and a posteriori knowledge goes back to the ancient philosophers, particularly Immanuel Kant, who made the terms famous. However, Hume provided a critical contribution to this discussion in his own way. Here's a breakdown of the terms:

A Priori Knowledge: This is a knowledge that is independent of experience. It is known through reason alone, without needing sensory experience or empirical evidence. For instance, Mathematical truths (e.g., 2 + 2 = 4),Logical statements (e.g., "All bachelors are unmarried").

A Posteriori Knowledge: This is a knowledge that is dependent on experience, It is gathered through sensory experience or empirical observation. For Example, "The sun rises in the east", "The grass is green.

Hume offers a sophisticated approach to the a priori/a posteriori distinction in his works, particularly in the "Treatise of Human Nature" and the "Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding". Here's how Hume addresses these concepts.[12]

3.6.2 A Priori Knowledge and Relations of Ideas

Hume argues that a priori knowledge is knowledge that is based on the relations between ideas. He identifies a specific kind of knowledge that is analytic, meaning that it is true by definition and does not require empirical observation.

Relations of Ideas: These are necessary truths that are discovered purely through reason and do not depend on the world's empirical facts. They are intuitively or demonstrably

[12] *Ibid*.,p47

true. Hume categorizes mathematical and logical truths under this category. Some examples of A Priori Knowledge (Relations of Ideas) are; Mathematical statements (e.g "All bachelors are unmarried"), Logical truths (e.g., "A triangle has three sides").

These truths are necessary, eternal, and universally applicable, and their truth is known independently of experience, they are self-evident. Hume's distinction between relations of ideas is a logical and conceptual distinction. These are truths that can be known simply by analyzing the terms involved without needing to look at the world or sensory experience.

3.6.3 Hume's Skepticism Toward A Priori Knowledge in Metaphysics

Hume is skeptical about metaphysical a priori claims (i.e., claims about the world that are supposed to be knowable through reason alone). He questions the rationality of concepts like substance or God, arguing that such ideas do not arise from sensory experience and are thus meaningless or unjustified. For instance, Hume argues that the idea of "substance" (as something underlying all objects) cannot be derived from experience—there is no impression of a substance that corresponds to this abstract idea. Hence, he dismisses many of the metaphysical claims as beyond human reason.

3.6.4 A Posteriori Knowledge and Matters of Fact

Hume identifies a posteriori knowledge with matters of fact. Unlike relations of ideas (a priori knowledge), matters of fact are truths about the world that are not known through reason alone but through experience.

Matters of Fact: These are empirical propositions—they can only be known by observing the world and experiencing phenomena. They are contingent truths, meaning they depend on the world's state of affairs.

Examples of A Posteriori Knowledge (Matters of Fact);"The sun will rise tomorrow", "Water boils at 100°C at sea level", "The Eiffel Tower is in Paris." These propositions are not necessarily true—they are true based on empirical observations and could be otherwise. For instance, while the sun has risen every day in recorded history, there is no logical necessity that it will rise tomorrow.

3.6.5 The Problem of Induction

Hume's skepticism about a posteriori knowledge primarily focuses on inductive reasoning, which is central to empirical knowledge. Induction involves inferring general principles from specific observations (e.g., "The sun has risen every day, so it will rise tomorrow").

Hume points out a critical flaw in induction, like, We have no rational justification for assuming that the future will resemble the past, We can't prove that the sun will rise tomorrow just because it has risen every day before. Our belief in future events following

past patterns is based on habit, not reason or empirical evidence. This leads to Hume's problem of induction, which undermines the certainty we typically associate with empirical knowledge.

3.6.6 Hume's View on the Relationship Between A Priori and A Posteriori Knowledge

Hume believes that a priori and a posteriori knowledge are distinct in their sources and justification.

A Priori: Knowledge that is certain, necessary, and derived from reason alone (e.g., mathematical or logical truths).

A Posteriori: Knowledge that is empirical, contingent, and derived from experience (e.g., facts about the physical world). He also suggests that while a priori knowledge (like mathematics) is certain, a posteriori knowledge (about the external world) is probabilistic—we can't be certain of the truths we learn from experience. Our knowledge of cause and effect, for example, is based on habit or custom, not on any necessary rational connection.

Hume Concludes on Knowledge, arguing that the two kinds of knowledge function differently, Hume says; A priori knowledge is certain but limited to analytic truths, while A posteriori knowledge is uncertain and contingent on experience. His skepticism towards metaphysical claims leads him to conclude that much of what we believe about

the world (especially beyond simple empirical facts) is built on habit and custom, not rational justification. Hume's views on a priori and a posteriori knowledge had a huge influence on later philosophy, particularly the work of Immanuel Kant. Kant was profoundly influenced by Hume's skepticism, particularly the problem of induction and the lack of rational justification for causality. Kant attempted to solve these issues by arguing that some knowledge, such as causality, is a priori but is still necessary for experience itself.[13]

[13] Else, G. F. (1953). *The philosophy of D. Hume*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, p.54

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Evaluation

One of the most extreme expressions of the epistemological view that all knowledge originates from sensory experience is Hume's empiricism. Although groundbreaking, his epistemology has faced several criticisms throughout the ages. A structured critique of Hume's empiricism is given below, with an emphasis on its intrinsic flaws, philosophical implications, and subsequent responses from later philosophers. These critiques have given rise to significant philosophical schools of thought, ranging from Kant's transcendental idealism to modern epistemology's focus on justification, coherence, and reliability. Hume's epistemology, despite its flaws, is still fundamental because of the potent questions it poses, not the solutions it offers. Although it was influential, Hume's empiricism fails due to its own skepticism and philosophical shortcomings. His effort to base all knowledge in sensory experience leads to a type of extreme skepticism that calls into question the very notion of knowledge rather than a solid epistemology.[1]

Despite being revolutionary in its challenge to rationalism, David Hume's empiricism ultimately falls short of offering a viable theory of knowledge. It destroys the boundary between true and false opinions, undermines the objectivity of cause, breaks the self apart,

[1] Kant, I. (1998). *Critique of pure reason*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. p.56

and falls into skepticism. Hume doesn't explain how we know; instead, he demonstrates what happens when knowledge is devoid of logic: it breaks down. Hume's empiricism should be seen as a philosophical dead end that raises the critical issue of the need for superior solutions, rather than as a strong basis for epistemology. His theories have been criticized for several reasons, including the following:

1. The Problem of Induction: Hume famously pointed out the issue of induction, which states that we cannot logically support inductive inferences (such as the sun will rise tomorrow because it always has). However, the core of his empiricism is the idea that repeated experience leads to knowledge. This results in a self-undermining tension: if inductive reasoning cannot be supported by reason or experience, then much of empirical knowledge (science, causality, etc.) is based on shaky foundations. For instance, Hume observes that we anticipate bread to feed us since it always has, but there is no logical reason to believe that the future will be like the past. This contradicts the uniformity upon which scientific laws are based. Later, philosophers like Kant tried to address this by proposing that the human mind uses inborn categories to organize experience, which means that induction is essential to experience rather than merely a habit.[2]
2. Causation and Necessary Connection: According to Hume, causation is merely the constant conjunction of events (A is always followed by B) and the mind's

[2] Atherton, M. (1999). *The empiricists: Locke, Berkeley, Hume*. Indianapolis, USA: Hackett Publishing Company. p.69

propensity to anticipate B after A. Because he rejects any observable relationship between cause and effect, he takes a psychological perspective on causality. This view holds that our perception of causality is a result of our mental habits rather than an objective aspect of the world. However, this undermines the epistemological basis of science, which is dependent on strong, objective causal connections. According to realist philosophers, this perspective ignores our intuition and habit of explaining events through causes that are not just observed patterns.

3. Skepticism About the Self: Hume argues that we are just a collection of perceptions rather than a lasting self. This perspective, which is logically consistent with his empiricism, contradicts the idea of a persistent sense of self. Hume's exclusive reliance on sense impressions and rejection of a priori knowledge results in profound skepticism that undermines the very basis of empirical investigation. Hume undermines even the fundamental tenet of science by demonstrating that inductive reasoning, our primary means of learning from experience, cannot be defended either logically or empirically. If empiricism leads to the conclusion that we cannot trust empirical reasoning, the position refutes itself; hence, this scepticism is counterproductive. This complicates moral responsibility, memory, and personal continuity. How do we ground ethical responsibility or even personal experience if the self is merely a passing flow of

impressions? According to critics, Hume's method ignores the unity of consciousness and doesn't account for how different perceptions are integrated into a cohesive whole. As a result, a philosophical framework that renders us unable to support our most fundamental conclusions cannot be a good theory of knowledge. Hume's empiricism results in epistemological hopelessness rather than providing clarity.[3]

4. Practical Restrictions on Theoretical Concepts: According to Hume, all thoughts are poor reflections of impressions. However, several abstract ideas, such as infinity, justice, and causation, do not readily boil down to straightforward impressions. This raises doubts about how we might acquire universal or abstract knowledge through empirical methods. For instance, mathematical and logical truths (such as 2+2=4) do not appear to originate from empirical experience in any obvious manner, but we are certain of them. This resulted in the creation of rationalist or Kantian epistemologies, which hold that certain ideas are known a priori, regardless of sensory experience.
5. Habitual Reliance Undermines Normativity: Hume argues that belief formation and expectation (particularly in relation to causation) are the products of habit or custom. By reducing causation to just a habitual association of events, Hume strips the notion of causality of any genuine explanatory value. If causation is

[3] Fogelin, R. J. (2009). *Hume's skeptical crisis: A textual study*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. p.75

simply the mind's expectation that one event would occur after another, then scientific explanation transforms into psychology rather than an objective description of the world. The objective reality of cause-and-effect relationships, which are essential to both science and common sense, is refuted by this perspective. It is a prerequisite for consistent thought and action, not a psychological projection, that natural occurrences adhere to causal rules. But habit is a descriptive idea rather than a normative one. It explains how people actually create ideas, not how they should do so. There is no way to evaluate a belief as rational or irrational because this obscures the distinction between psychological explanation and epistemological justification. Therefore, Hume's theory provides no foundation for epistemic normativity since it bases belief on habit rather than reason, hence removing any yardstick by which beliefs might be judged. When our beliefs are the result of habit rather than justification, rationality loses its significance. Instead of attempting to assess beliefs, this method simply describes mental patterns, which reduces epistemology to a description of them. Because of this, Hume's empiricism is unable to differentiate between legitimate faith and superstition, as well as between science and mythology.[4]

6. The Theory of Ideas' Incoherence: Hume's assertion that all ideas come from impressions is overly strict and does not adequately explain the entire spectrum of

[4] Kemp Smith, N. (2005). *The philosophy of David Hume*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. p.48

human thought. It is impossible to completely convey abstract ideas such justice, infinity, or mathematical truth via sensory perceptions. Additionally, his empiricism fails to account for universal or necessary truths, such mathematical or logical statements, that are known with certainty and do not depend on experience. The theory fails to account for how the mind creates meaningful, nonempirical material that is precisely the sort of information necessary for philosophy, science, and ethics.[5]

7. The Fragmentation of the Self: Hume's "bundle theory" of the self, which posits that the self is just a collection of shifting sensations, obliterates the idea of personal identity. Memory, accountability, and identity become meaningless without a unified self. Hume's explanation fails to account for how we tell the difference between our own thoughts and those of others, or how we keep a sense of continuity throughout time. For psychology and ethics, this perspective is not just illogical but also quite dangerous. Hume's empiricism cannot supply the ongoing agent that moral accountability requires.

4.1.1 Positive aspects

1. Clarity and Simplicity: Hume's distinction between impressions (sensory experiences) and ideas (faint copies) provides a straightforward and methodical

[5] Heidegger, M. (1997). *Kant and the problem of metaphysics*. Bloomington, Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press. p.47

way to approach human thought, bringing epistemology closer to reality and making it more understandable.

2. Focus on Experience: Hume laid the intellectual groundwork for contemporary science and empirical inquiry by orienting all knowledge in sensory experience and redirecting philosophy towards observation and evidence.
3. Critical Examination of Induction: By bringing out the philosophical flaws in inductive reasoning, his analysis compelled subsequent scholars to carefully reconsider the justification for both scientific and common sense reasoning.
4. Psychological Insight: Hume's investigation of habit, belief, and expectation connected epistemology with human cognitive processes, foreshadowing advancements in psychology and cognitive science.
5. Against Dogmatism: Hume's skepticism acts as a useful counterargument against baseless metaphysical presumptions. His need for empirical data reduced speculative excess in theology and philosophy.
6. Stimulus for Philosophical Development: Hume's challenges sparked significant advances in philosophy, notably Kant's critical philosophy, and are still relevant in discussions of epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of science.

4. 1. 2 Negative aspects

1. Extreme Skepticism: Hume's rejection of rational justification for induction results in a profound skepticism that calls into question both common sense and

science. Knowledge becomes unstable if we are unable to support our conviction that the future will be similar to the past.

2. Subjective Perspective on Causation: Hume diminishes the objective necessity of causation by reducing it to psychological habit (i. e. , constant conjunction and expectation), thereby diminishing its function in scientific explanation and practical reasoning.
3. Insufficient Explanation of Abstract Knowledge: Hume's exclusive dependence on sensory impressions fails to account for how we comprehend abstract or necessary truths, such as mathematics, logic, or moral principles, which are not immediately derived from experience.
4. Fragmented Concept of the Self: His "bundle theory" contradicts a steady, unbroken self, making it hard to explain moral accountability, memory, personal identity, and responsibility.
5. Absence of Normative Justification: Although Hume explains how habits shape our beliefs, he does not provide a criterion for assessing their rationality or legitimacy. This undermines the prescriptive aims of epistemology.
6. Overreliance on Empirical Input: In contrast to Kant and others, Hume's system downplays or overlooks the active role of the mind in structuring experience. His empiricism is not active enough to account for the development of complicated information.

4.2 Summary

David Hume's empiricism, which holds that all knowledge comes from sensory experience, represents a watershed moment in contemporary philosophy. But his extreme dependence on impressions and ideas, where all complicated concepts are ultimately traceable to simple sensory impressions, is excessively limiting. His explanation of how the mind acquires knowledge has flaws, as seen by how he struggles to reduce several abstract concepts like moral values, the self, and causality. His treatment of induction is one of the most glaring flaws in Hume's epistemology. He recognizes that inductive reasoning, which draws broad inferences from previous events, cannot be supported by logic. This realization results in a cynical perspective that calls into question the very basis of science. The predictability that science depends on is questioned if we are unable to support our conviction that the future will be like the past.

Furthermore, Hume's perspective on causality gives cause for alarm. He eliminates objective necessity from causality by defining it as simply the habitual association of events. In this paradigm, causal laws are patterns of reasoning rooted in habit rather than aspects of the universe. This psychological explanation of causality ignores the fact that we perceive it as a real and essential force in the outside world, which makes it challenging to support scientific explanations. According to Hume's theory of the self, there is just a "bundle" of transient impressions rather than a continuous sense of personal identity. This perspective, which is consistent with his empirical approach, presents

challenges in accounting for moral accountability, agency, and memory. [6]Despite the fact that the idea of a persistent self is fundamental to many facets of human experience, Hume's explanation fails to provide a sufficient basis for it. All in all, Hume's empiricism is a potent challenge to rationalist metaphysics, but it ultimately results in extreme skepticism. His ideas highlight the bounds of human comprehension and call into question beliefs about knowledge, but they also leave us without a solid foundation for our sense of self, our morals, or our science. As a result, several philosophers have considered Hume's work to be a crucial but insufficient step in the evolution of contemporary epistemology.

4.3 Recommendations

By basing all knowledge on sensory experience, David Hume's empiricism, a cornerstone of contemporary philosophy, challenges conventional metaphysics and rationalism. But Hume's epistemological paradigm also raises significant doubts, particularly about causality, induction, and personal identity. For this reason, a thorough examination of Hume's empiricism gains from interacting with both historical answers and current events. The following suggestions provide crucial guidelines for enhancing one's comprehension or critique of Hume's epistemology.

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[6] Hume, D. (2007). *Hume: An enquiry concerning human understanding*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. p.88

It is first necessary to examine Immanuel Kant's reaction to Hume, which represents one of the most significant changes in contemporary philosophy. Alarmed by Hume's assertion that causation has no logical foundation, Kant argued that specific notions such space, time, and causality are essential prerequisites for any experience and cannot be learned through experience. Kant refuted Hume's skepticism without resorting to rationalist metaphysics by demonstrating in his Critique of Pure Reason that the human mind actively contributes to organizing knowledge. A thorough review of Hume's epistemology should focus on how Kant's transcendental idealism attempts to maintain objectivity while acknowledging the boundaries of empirical knowledge.

Secondly, a thorough examination of Hume should consider alternatives to his theory of causality. It is well known that Hume maintained that causation is a mental habit that we acquire through observing constant conjunctions rather than something we directly see. However, this perspective robs causation of its ability to explain. This psychological reduction is rejected by philosophers such as Elizabeth Anscombe and modern causal realists, who instead highlight the objective nature of causality, which may be studied in both scientific and metaphysical ways. A more thorough explanation of causal necessity is provided by studying these perspectives than Hume's totally empirical approach permits.

One of the most enduring issues brought by Hume is the problem of induction, which is still up for debate. Modern philosophers have attempted to address the lack of logical

support for inductive reasoning, as demonstrated by Hume, using probabilistic or falsificationist frameworks. For instance, Karl Popper asserted that science is founded on the audacious creation of hypotheses that may be refuted by empirical evidence, as opposed to induction. Furthermore, Hume's bundle theory of the self, which argues that there is just a stream of sensations and no continuous identity, has been criticized for failing to account for personal unity over time. Derek Parfit and Paul Ricoeur are among the scholars who have put out more sophisticated theories of identity that take into consideration psychological continuity, memory, and narrative structure. By interacting with these viewpoints, we can question Hume's reductionist view and discover more nuanced notions of the self, which are necessary for establishing moral agency and accountability.

A thorough analysis of Hume's epistemology should, in conclusion, address the normative aspect of knowledge. Although Hume's psychological analysis of belief as the result of habit and custom is insightful, it fails to explain why certain beliefs are valid and others are not. The confusion of descriptive psychology with epistemic normativity is a major flaw. Modern epistemologists like Laurence BonJour stress the necessity for theories to differentiate between the process by which we acquire beliefs and the question of whether those beliefs are logically justified. Their work offers the tools for assessing the epistemic flaws in Hume's method and for building a more normatively sound epistemology.

4.4 Conclusion

Although David Hume's empiricism is one of the most enduring and influential contributions to contemporary philosophy, it is also one of the most perplexing. His effort to boil all knowledge down to sensory experience, albeit revolutionary in its methodological precision, eventually highlights how weak human comprehension is when devoid of rationalist and metaphysical support. When critically analyzing Hume's epistemology, one must contend with not just the force of his arguments but also their unsettling consequences: if knowledge is restricted to what may be directly experienced, then a large portion of what we assert to know about ourselves, causality, the outside world, and even science is left on dubious ground. The fundamental and unanswered tension between empirical humility and philosophical scepticism lies at the center of Hume's worldview. On the other hand, his focus on thoughts and impressions as the cornerstone of knowledge gave philosophical investigation much-needed structure and rigor. Hume insisted that all claims to knowledge be based on observable experience, rejecting centuries of theoretical metaphysics.[7]

The modern scientific viewpoint was greatly influenced by this methodological revolution. However, his rigorous empiricism results in findings that call into question the possibility of justified belief itself. His analysis of cause and effect reduces it to a

[7] Stove, D. C. (1986). *Hume's problem: Induction and the justification of belief*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. p.41

psychological habit, breaking the connection between natural law and need. His issue with induction demonstrates that no amount of prior experience can logically predict future events. Additionally, his bundle theory of the self rejects the notion that there is a consistent identity behind the ever-changing stream of impressions. Though theoretically problematic, these understandings still leave us with an epistemological vacuum. Rather than giving us answers, Hume's method shows us the boundaries of what we can say. The best and worst aspects of his thinking are represented here. He compels us to examine the fundamental presumptions of popular sense and scientific thought, but he provides no feasible solution. The practice of investigation itself seems to be weakened by the mere act of accepting Hume's conclusions. For example, scientific laws are not truths about the world but rather habits of expectation if causality is simply a custom rather than an objective relationship. Moral responsibility, personal identity, and memory become incoherent if the self is merely a fleeting collection of perceptions. These results imply that Hume's empiricism is not just contentious but maybe counterproductive.[8]

Despite these restrictions, Hume's epistemology has been immensely influential. His work sparked a wave of crucial reactions that altered the course of Western philosophy. Perhaps most significantly, Hume's skepticism was directly refuted by Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy. In his response to Hume's challenge, Kant maintained the certainty of scientific knowledge by asserting that the mind actively organizes experience

[8] Bunge, M. (2009). *Causality and modern science*. Mineola, New York, USA: Dover Publications. p.54

through a priori categories such causality and unity of the self. Although he was unable to entirely overcome the challenges posed by Hume, Kant tried to address them in this manner. The legacy of Hume's empiricism has continued to be debated by later advancements in cognitive science, phenomenology, and even analytic philosophy, either by improving, refuting, or expanding upon it. Ultimately, Hume's empiricism should be seen as a significant philosophical turning point rather than a full or adequate epistemology.

By compelling us to differentiate between what can be known with certainty and what must be accepted with caution, his severe skepticism exposes the flaws in our belief systems. Nevertheless, Hume's empiricism, despite its analytical strength, is unable to provide a positive theory of knowledge that takes into account the entire spectrum of human comprehension, including the scientific, ethical, metaphysical, and personal. His perspective is best understood as a significant challenge: it eliminates unfounded speculation but leaves us looking for a more solid base. As a result, anyone who takes epistemology seriously must confront Hume, not to fall into skepticism, but to counter him with a more profound understanding. Following Hume, the philosophical challenge is to reconstruct what his criticism so effectively deconstructed, be it through realist metaphysics, Kantian synthesis, or modern theories of justification. In this way, Hume's empiricism is one of the most vital and persistent challenges in epistemology, rather than the conclusion of it.

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