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This book attempts a comprehensive analysis and re-evaluation of the first book of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. Kant viewed Hume as the skeptical destroyer of metaphysics. Yet for most of this century the consensus among interpreters has been that for Hume skepticism was a means to a naturalistic, anti-skeptical end. The author seeks here to achieve a balance by showing how Hume's naturalism leads directly to a kind of skepticism even more radical – and more “Kantian” – than Kant imagined. In the process it offers the first systematic treatment of Humean associationalist psychology, including detailed exploration of his views on time-consciousness, memory, aspect-seeing, and the comparison with animal reason. Within this framework, Hume's views on language, belief, induction, causality, and personal identity emerge in a novel and revealing light.

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à Béatrice

*Mon Dieu! des mœurs du temps mettons-nous moins en peine,
Et faisons un peu grâce à la nature humaine;
Ne l'examinons point dans la grande rigueur,
Et voyons ses défauts avec quelque douceur.
Il faut, parmi le monde, une vertu traitable;
A force de sagesse, on peut être blâmable;
La parfaite raison fuit toute extrémité,
Et veut que l'on soit sage avec sobriété*

Molière, *Le Misanthrope*

*It is a history-book, sir, (Which may possibly
recommend it to the world) of what passes in a
man's own mind; and if you will say so much of
the book, and no more, believe me, you will cut
no contemptible figure in a metaphysical circle.*

Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*

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Preface

This book is a perpetuation “of the time honored and conventional myth enshrined in textbooks that present David Hume as the notorious negative and destructive thinker” (Capaldi). Hume’s contemporaries, nearly every major thinker since, and most philosophers today are believers in this “myth.” For them, as for me, Hume’s importance as a philosopher derives from the challenge he levelled at rationalistic assumptions of the unrestricted validity of such notions as cause and effect, substance, space and time, and identity. They credit him further with developing the first thoroughgoing psychologistic skepticism, effectively reducing to associative imagination everything philosophers had formerly attributed to intellect. He is thus the first in a line of thinkers, extending through Kant, to treat the object of knowledge as its own construction, thereby shifting the focus of subjective philosophy from regulative principles of our experience of objects to constitutive principles of the objects we experience.

Why then have so many of those who ostensibly know Hume best turned their backs on the accepted view? The reasons are complex: the desire to re-examine orthodoxy and be original; Hume’s elusiveness (he does not yield his secrets easily); developments like the rejection of subjectivism in twentieth-century philosophy which set the stage for those who would “rehabilitate Hume and make him one of our own; and recent trends in the history of philosophy which have transformed its methodology and focus. But, when all is said and done, an interpretation stands or falls by the quality of its textual analyses and its success in elaborating basic notions of Hume’s system, like vivacity, custom, relation, association, etc. Whatever its shortcomings, the view of Hume “enshrined in textbooks seems to me preferable on both counts to the new revisionism. The Hume it portrays is a more powerful and coherent thinker, very much of his time, whose place in the great line of metaphysicians and anti-metaphysicians from Descartes to Kant and beyond both makes sense and is deserved. Still, the revisionism undoubtedly creates the need for new work to probe Hume’s basic concepts and to take the analysis deeper than before. The present book is intended as a contribution to this effort.

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I owe an extra special debt of gratitude to Arthur Melnick and Wade Robison for their unstinting support and encouragement. I appreciate the invaluable comments and criticisms of David F. Norton and Fred Wilson. Additionally, I am grateful for important feedback on my work at various stages of development from Francis Dauer, Ken Gemes, Hidé Ishiguro, Béatrice Longuenesse, Patrick Murray, and the readers for Cambridge University Press. I am grateful to the editors of *Hume Studies* and Professors Robison and Malherbe, organizers of the 1992 Hume Conference in Nantes, for permissions to reprint, respectively, chapter 1-B and the conclusion. Judith Ayling, Gillian Maude, and others at the Press have performed their tasks splendidly and treated me with unfailing kindness and patience. Finally, I thank Alberto Hernandez-Lemus for his indispensable assistance in the production of the final manuscript, and my students for their many insightful questions and comments.

Abbreviations

Works by Hume

<i>T</i>	<i>A Treatise of Hume Nature</i> . Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978.
<i>TApp</i>	Hume's appendix published with Book III of the <i>Treatise</i> , Nidditch edition.
<i>TAbs</i>	Hume's abstract of the <i>Treatise</i> , Nidditch edition.
<i>E</i>	<i>Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals by David Hume</i> . Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1902. The page numbers of passages excised by Hume from the final edition of <i>Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> and which are omitted from the Oxford edition are preceded by "H" to indicate the page number in the edition by Charles W. Hendel (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1955).
<i>D</i>	<i>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</i> . Edited by Richard Popkin. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980.
<i>EMPL</i>	<i>Essays Moral, Political, and Literary</i> . Edited by Eugene Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1985.
<i>LGFE</i>	<i>A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh</i> . Edited by Mossner and Price. Edinburgh: The University Press, 1967.
<i>L</i>	<i>The Letters of David Hume</i> . Edited by J. Y. T. Greig, in two volumes. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1932.
<i>ML</i>	"My Own Life" in <i>An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> . Edited by Charles W. Hendel (see reference above).

Works by other authors frequently cited

<i>ECHU</i>	<i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> , by John Locke. Edited by P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975.
<i>PHK</i>	<i>Principles of Human Knowledge</i> , by George Berkeley, in

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xvi Abbreviations

Berkeley: Philosophical Works. Edited by M. R. Ayers.
London: Dent and Sons, 1975.

CPR *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, by Immanuel Kant. Hamburg:
Felix Meiner Verlag, 1956. All translations of Kant are my
own.

AA *Kants Gesammelte Schriften.* Berlin and Leipzig: Preussische
Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1906–.