

Louise Marcil-Lacoste

Hume's Scepticism and Reid's Challenge

It is well-known that Hume's philosophical views were actively criticized by a number of his countrymen and that Thomas Reid is usually given as the paradigmatic example of Hume's opponent. In a letter to Hume, Reid indeed has written that a "little philosophical society," of which he was the founder,

is much indebted to you for its entertainment And since we cannot have you upon the bench, you are brought oftener than any other man to the bar, accused and defended with great zeal but without bitterness. If you write no more in moral politicks or metaphysicks, I am afraid we shall be at a loss for subjects.¹

It is equally well-known, however, that Hume made little effort to defend his views from these criticisms, a failure which has been puzzling enough to give rise to about five patterns of interpretation. The first is autobiographical: it focuses on Hume's vow never to enter into any dispute, and his proclaimed indifference to social conventions in his publications. The second pattern of explanation, made famous by Kant's *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, says that Hume did not have to answer his opponents because they failed to understand his so obviously correct position. The third line of answer, to be found, for example, in James Boswell's *Private Papers*, is that Hume did not reply to his critics because he was so obviously wrong that indeed he was silenced. A fourth explanation, usually ascribed to Thomas Brown but more recently argued by Norman Kemp Smith and Richard H. Popkin, is that on many issues, Hume did not have to reply because there was no basic disagreement between his views and those of his critics. Finally, a fifth explanation, formulated by David F. Norton, is that Hume's silence on the matter derives from the fact that he had already answered his critics' objections in his published writings.²

Be that as it may, there is one topic on which it would seem that Hume had no reason to undertake the writing of any reply: the issue of scepticism. The current view is that Hume's special form of scepticism went unchallenged on its very grounds, however often it was discussed, misconstrued, overemphasized, underrated, or simply misunderstood. For example, since the Eighteenth Century, most dictionaries and encyclopaedias of philosophy mention the debate aroused by Hume's scepticism in Scotland, usually referring to the well-known trio of "Reid-Beattie-Oswald" as philosophers who altogether rejected it, on the mere basis of its dangerous consequences for metaphysics, morals, politics, and religion.³ There seems to be no question that such debates were not about scepticism itself, let alone Hume's special form of scepticism: they were rebuttals which amounted to no more than asserting bluntly the very proposition which Hume had challenged.

My basic contention here is that, far from being a paradigm, Thomas Reid is a counter-example to this general view, not only because, as correctly argued by Popkin, Reid's system does come close to many of Hume's final conclusions, especially in Hume's moral philosophy, but also because Reid did challenge Hume's scepticism on Humean grounds. My second contention is along the lines of David Norton's explanation: I think that Hume did answer Reid's criticisms in his writings. More specifically, I will argue that Hume is not ironical when he presents his *Enquiry concerning the Human Understanding* as a "compleat answer" to Dr. Reid and that proofs to this effect appear in his section devoted to the "academical or sceptical philosophy". My third contention is that Hume's answer to Reid is not "compleat". It has left unanswered Reid's main argument, a fact which might be explained by Hume's awareness of only the *Abstract* of Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind* and further understood by noting that Reid's most explicit formulation of this criticism appeared in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, that is, after the publication of Hume's *Enquiry*. My final contention is that Hume's failure to answer Reid's main objection concerning his special form of scepticism is the origin of a now widespread paradox. The irony is that recent interpretations of the main thrust of Hume's philosophy, especially his mitigated scepticism, would have us believe that Hume was another Thomas Reid. Though conveniently referring to Reid as Hume's best known opponent, most studies indeed ascribe to Hume philosophical positions which were clearly held by Reid, including some on the issue of scepticism.⁴

One reason for this set of misunderstandings may be traced to Hume's own irony concerning Reid's attempt to discuss his *Treatise*. As is well-known, in his famous Advertisement which first appeared in 1777, Hume disowned the *Treatise* as a juvenile production, complained that critics had quoted it against him, and asked that in the future only the Essays and Treatises be taken to represent his philosophy. The connection between this Advertisement and Reid's *Inquiry* was made by Hume himself, in a letter to William Strahan. Hume wrote that his Advertisement was "a compleat answer to Dr. Reid and to that bigotted silly Fellow, Beattie". Many would have it that Hume could have skipped the conjunction here and talked of two bigotted silly fellows. This reading would seem to be all the more natural given the fact that Reid—as Dugald Stewart once complained—persistently came back to Hume's "rejected" *Treatise*, and "lost time" on the question of Hume's scepticism.⁵ This interpretation is further reinforced when one peruses Hume's sole letter to Reid. Besides commenting on Reid's style and good English, and besides ascribing Reid's "obscurities" to the fact that he "never had the whole performance before him", Hume writes:

It is certainly very rare that a piece so deeply philosophical is wrote with so much spirit . . . when I enter into your ideas, no man appears to express himself with greater perspicuity than you do; a talent which, above all others, is requisite in that species of literature which you have cultivated.

Then, referring to Reid's claim that he had detected the groundless origin of Hume's system—that is, Reid's well-known thesis about the hypothetical nature of the "way of ideas"—Hume writes:

I shall only say, that if you have been able to clear up these abstruse and important subjects, instead of being mortified, I shall be so vain as to pretend a share of the praise; and shall think that my errors, by having at least some coherence, had led you to make a more strict review of my principles, which were the common ones, and to perceive their futility.

My claim that Hume is not ironical when he presents his *Enquiry* as an answer to Dr. Reid may be substantiated by perusing his chapter devoted to the "Academical or sceptical philosophy". There, Hume distinguishes among three kinds of scepticism: the antecedent, the consequent and the mitigated forms of scepticism. In the latter case—a point which is usually overlooked by commentators—Hume

distinguishes two sub-classes: a general and an unspecified form of mitigated scepticism. The general one is defined as "excessive doubts corrected, in some measure, by common sense and reflection". The more specific form is defined as "the limitation of our enquiries to the subject best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding".⁶

The intimation is—I shall argue—that in Hume's opinion, Reid's approach is of the first (undistinguished) form, whereas his attempt is of the specified kind. As we shall see, Reid's argument is that Hume's special form of scepticism is, at bottom, of the consequent rather than of the mitigated form, and that as such it cannot stand as an alternative to antecedent scepticism. But what must be emphasized, at this point, is that Hume's concern to assess critically the role which *excessive* doubts must play in philosophical disquisitions is a direct answer to Reid's attacks, whose best recalled target was precisely "extremism": as we know, folly, delirium, monster, are among the epithets Reid uses to refer to scepticism as a Trojan horse which carries a depreciating picture of human nature as mere Yahoos.

But this is not all the story, nor is irony the sole point at issue. On the one hand, Hume's earnestness to distinguish among different kinds of scepticism derives from his subtle understanding and reassessment of the Cartesian strategy of hyperbolic doubt; his claim is that excessive doubts are at once futile and necessary. On the other hand, Reid's numerous references and objections to Hume's special form of scepticism are not all of the kind suggested by his rhetorical and unsympathetic coinages.

One way to go beyond mere irony is to consider the nature of Reid's reply to Hume's ironical letter. Reid—who, incidentally, chose to see in Hume's watchful eye over his style an instance of candour and generosity towards an antagonist—writes:

In attempting to throw some new light upon those abstruse subjects, I wish to preserve the due mean betwixt confidence and despair. But whether I have any success in this attempt or not, I shall always avow myself your disciple in metaphysics Your system appears to me not only coherent in all its parts, but likewise justly deduced from principles which are commonly received among philosophers; principles which I never thought of calling in question, until the conclusion you draw from them in the Treatise of Human Nature made me suspect them. If these principles are solid, your system must stand; and whether they are or not can better be judged after you have brought to light the whole system that grows out of them, than when the greater part of it was wrapped up in clouds and darkness. I agree with you

therefore that if this system shall ever be demolished, you have a just claim to a great share of the praise, both because you have made it a distinct and determined mark to be aimed at, and have furnished proper artillery for the purpose.

For my purpose, three important segments of this letter require attention. The first is the passage on Hume's having "furnished the proper artillery for the purpose", because it clearly suggests that Reid wants to challenge Hume on his own grounds. The second is the passage on "whether or not your system must stand": it shows that Reid wants to argue on the basis of the major premises of Hume's system as well as its consistency, and not merely on the basis of "dangerous" consequences for metaphysics or religion. The third segment which needs attention—if only because it has been so often misconstrued as a proof of Reid's dogmatism—is the one where Reid says that he never thought of calling into question the doctrine of ideas until he had read Hume's *Treatise*. To many, this admission is fatal, and Reid's further claim to be "Hume's disciple in metaphysics" is sheer nonsense. Yet, a passage of Reid's dedication of his *Inquiry* adds a crucial element here. Reid writes: "If I may presume to speak for my own sentiment, I once believed the doctrine of ideas so firmly as to embrace the whole of Berkeley's system with it". And, as aptly noticed by Dugald Stewart—quoting a saying ascribed to Turgot, "he who had never doubted of the existence of matter might be assured he had no turn for metaphysical disquisitions". As we shall see, having rejected Berkeley's revolutionary attempt to reconcile philosophy and common sense by means of *esse percipi*—having rejected, that is, the idea that if we pursue to a certain point those principles which at first glance lead to scepticism, we shall bring philosophers back to common sense—Reid did *not* go on to claim that if we pursue the opposite road, from common sense to philosophy, we will wholly escape scepticism. Actually, what he did say, and I will show that we can take his word seriously, is that "In attempting to throw some light upon those abstruse subjects, I wish to preserve a due mean betwixt confidence and despair."

The second, and most important way to go beyond mere irony on the question of Reid's challenge to Hume's scepticism, is to analyse the Reidian references to scepticism in the light of Hume's distinction between the antecedent, the consequent and the mitigated form of scepticism. The issue here is not so much the extent of Reid's accuracy in his discussion of *every single* argument taken from the *Treatise*—specifically, its section on scepticism with regard to the

senses or to reason, but rather the aptness of his assessment of the basic structure of Hume's scepticism. In so doing, one will not only have a better understanding of Reid's qualified view of scepticism, but also of the exact nature of his objections to Hume. In effect, when viewed in this perspective, Reid's qualified view of scepticism may be summarized by saying that, for him, the only tenable position for a philosopher who, like Hume, admits the speculative insuperability and the practical untenability of antecedent scepticism is not a consequent form but rather a mitigated form of scepticism.⁷

Reid's negative stand on antecedent scepticism

My first argument concerns Reid's negative stand on scepticism as it relates to Hume's description of antecedent scepticism. This is what Reid calls "total scepticism", which he defines in the very sense in which Hume talks of antecedent scepticism, that is, a doubt concerning the reliability of our faculties and the preliminary request to prove that we can truthfully use them.

As Hume did, Reid thinks that the best example of an antecedent sceptic is Descartes, whom he charges with circularity for the kind of reasoning he proposed as a solution to hyperbolic doubt. Reid's arguments further indicate that there is no remedy to this form of scepticism because the "total" sceptic makes the "all or nothing" request. If Reid fully admits that the "all" side of the dilemma cannot be maintained—one instance of error is sufficient to conclude that we cannot hold it—he also argues that the "nothing" side of the dilemma cannot be maintained for any one who does *not* "sit down and wait". This is the point of his numerous remarks that there is no philosopher who is not "half sceptic".

In brief, and with Hume, Reid holds that if we were to wait for a solution to this doubt we would wait in vain, because this type of scepticism is unanswerable. To such a sceptic "I have nothing to say" because "nothing can oblige him to yield anything else" but that we cannot be sure of anything. This is the "no-remedy" argument which for Reid concerns demonstrative reason and reasoning from experience. As Reid puts it concerning experiments, reason would direct a man sensitive to our condition to "sit down and wait", to do nothing "till he knew what could be done with safety".

Much in the line of Hume's own argument, Reid says that it is *practically* impossible to withhold persistently from trusting one's faculties, not only on the "animal" level of trust which ordinary life requires but also in the "animal" and "rational" sense of trust re-

quired by the process of argumentation. Clearly, he says, if we do not take the reliability of our faculties as a first principle of *contingent* truth self-evidently required for the very *performance* of judgment, then we *must* be absolute sceptics.

The key word in Reid's argument here is the usually overlooked *contingent* status he ascribes to the principle concerning the reliability of our faculties in *unavoidable* performances. At this point, Reid meets Hume's thesis that thinking is as unavoidable as breathing and that there *is* a sceptical admission involved in recognizing this as a fact. However, a traditional remark here is to say that Hume has insisted that the unavoidability of a belief does not imply its truth, that the untenability of scepticism does not imply its falsity, and therefore that *blind* submission to instinct still is a form of scepticism. Yet, the point of Reid's *own* surrender to the insuperability of antecedent scepticism is precisely that, because it is unanswerable, one must look for an alternative—rather than an answer—to it. According to Reid, the trickiest problem to face at this point is that the "instinct to think" also includes an instinctive concern with truth conditions—that is, Reid's so often misconstrued "instinct of veracity"—as well as the fact that all men, including the vulgar, do feel a natural distrust concerning the reliability of their faculties. For Reid, indeed, the last point may be taken as the practical admission of the speculative insuperability of antecedent scepticism. It is quite wrong to identify the fact that Reid objects to this sort of scepticism with the view that he hopes to refute it. In giving the reasons for his negative stand on antecedent scepticism, Reid hopes to refute what he will hold to be inconsistent with a *surrender* to its insuperability. When he brings the facts of human belief into *this* issue, he does not argue—as is so often repeated—from the fact of belief to its truth; rather, he wants to provide evidence both for the kind of difficulties which face a sceptic who does *not* "sit down and wait" and for the kind of grounds one might have in the attempt to frame an *alternative* to antecedent scepticism or, as he puts it, "to make a virtue of necessity". The important point here is that the kind of knowledge implied in the facts of human belief to which Reid will refer as "natural beliefs" cannot be presented as the attainment of the knowledge which the antecedent sceptic argues we should have in order to say that we know. In this sense, Reid's philosophy differs widely from G.E. Moore's account of the validity of common sense knowledge.

Reid's critical stand on Hume's consequent scepticism

Hume has defined "consequent scepticism" as "universal doubt which may be a rational consequence of science and inquiry". The evidence we have for Reid's awareness of this sort of scepticism is overwhelming when we recognize the focus of his strictures on modern philosophy: the *consistency* of what he calls a "frightful progeny".

This appears in two ways. First, in Reid's criticism of modern philosophers (Descartes, Locke, Berkeley) who admit the principles of the "way of ideas", but who are not logical enough, or who are too religious to pursue them to their logical, especially sceptical, conclusions. Second, and more importantly, this appears in Reid's praise of Hume as, so to speak, the only consistent "Cartesian" philosopher of Modern Time, for his consistent use of both the common theory of ideas *and* a sceptical model of reasoning.

Hume, Reid says, derives consistent consequences from such premises concerning the ways to ascertain first principles and the existence of the external world. Hume's sceptical conclusions about reason are no less consistently derived from his premises. In point of fact, according to Reid, Hume's important contribution to the history of ideas is the presentation of a truly consistent system of scepticism, one which *as such* deserves a special treatment.

Against Hume's special form of scepticism, Reid's first line of argument is made in reference to Hume's admission of the existence of ideas and sensations. Reid remarks:

belief is of such a nature that if you leave any root it will spread; and you may more easily pull it up altogether than say, Hitherto shalt thou go and no further; the existence of impressions and ideas I give up to thee; but see thou pretend nothing more. A thorough and consistent sceptic will never therefore yield this point; and while he holds it, you can never oblige him to yield anything else.⁸

I shall call this argument the problem of the "line of demarcation" or, as Reid says, "where to stop doubting?", in order not to mistake it for the *ad hominem* argument raised against the "total" sceptic, or the argument which vindicates the admission of the testimony of memory, of other people, of the sensing powers in perception, etc., on the basis of the admission of the testimony of consciousness or of reason.

In raising the question "where to stop doubting", Reid's argument indeed is that a consequent sceptic must realize that his concessions to dogmatism, however limited or hypothetical, raise difficulties for

his commitment to scepticism which consistency cannot hide. Either consequent scepticism is too much of an admission, from the point of view of antecedent scepticism, or it is too little, from the point of view of a search for an alternative. This is the point of Reid's remarks:

I beg therefore the honour of making an addition to the sceptical system without which I conceive it cannot hang together. I affirm that the belief of the existence of impressions and ideas is as little supported by reason as that of the existence of minds and bodies.⁹

What Reid suspects is that because of the problem of the "line of demarcation", two consequent sceptical systems cannot agree in the sequence of their reasoning, but can only agree in their sceptical conclusions.

The crux of Reid's attack against Hume's scepticism is indeed the *general nature* of the conclusions which he reaches. Reid's main argument is that the appearance of a *special* (or consequent) form of scepticism in Hume's system is *misleading*. This argument may be detailed as follows: (1) the conclusions reached by Hume are larger than the explicit premises on which they rest; (2) the sequence of reasoning which leads to the conclusions includes arguments which are disguised antecedent premises; (3) the conclusion is actually derived from such disguised premises only; (4) consequent scepticism cannot be held as an alternative to antecedent scepticism for the very simple reason that it is a consistent way of doing the same thing which is already granted to be without remedy.

The generality of Hume's conclusions and the sense in which his peculiar system is nonetheless one of "total" scepticism is mentioned in several places in Reid's chapter. The conclusion is that a man who would govern his belief by reason must believe nothing at all and will see his beliefs as acts of the sensitive part of his nature. In referring to Hume's conclusions, Reid wants to show that whatever the specificity of the premises (here the argument from probability), a consequent sceptic reaches, in the final analysis, the all or nothing dilemma of the antecedent sceptic.

What Reid finds more interesting is that Hume's "Achillean" argument against reason—the computing of probabilities that we err while judging—resembles the antecedent sceptic's argument in that it reaches general conclusions by means of a systematic commitment to look at the "nothing" side of the antecedent sceptic's dilemma. Such is Hume's addition of presumptions against reason and his lack of

concern for presumptions in favor of reason. Such is also Hume's unilateral distribution of epistemological validity to negative assertions taken from the unreliability of men's faculties and his lack of concern with what is acknowledged to be a positive side, assertions which are considered from the point of view of their object or of the impressions which objects make upon the mind. Such is, finally, Hume's unparalleled contradistinction between probability and infallibility, because it actually requires that one rests on the "nothing" side of the antecedent dilemma for lack of grounds to the "all" side of it.

Reid holds that when we grant the insuperability of antecedent scepticism *and* do not "sit down and wait", the alternative is to become *more specific*, either with regard to faculties, or with regard to the object of thought, and then compute *pros* and *contras*.

The main reason, therefore, why Reid concludes that there is no reason to require the application of Hume's "Achillean" argument to every particular judgment is that there is no point in proposing a hypothetico-deductive development of disguised antecedent premises.

We are now in a position to avoid an important misrepresentation of Reid's attacks. According to Hamilton, Reid supposedly failed to see that in using the premises of the dogmatist, Hume was consistent with *his* form of scepticism. Reid would have thus treated Hume as a dogmatist. What has gone unnoticed is that Reid does not bluntly identify Hume with the antecedent sceptic: he attacks Hume as a consequent sceptic but his critical stand aims to show that ultimately a consequent sceptic repeats the scenario of the antecedent sceptic. It is important to note that the points at which Reid finds dogmatism in the Humean system are quite specific: Reid directs all his attacks to Hume *the scientist*. He finds evidence of dogmatism in Hume's rash exclusion of possible exceptions to the claim that all ideas result from impressions; in his apparent refusal to consider any notion of evidence but his own; in his refusal to consider any notion of causation but that of physical causation. In brief, Reid objects to the reductionism which he finds in Hume's experimental account of human nature. But, clearly, Reid is aware that one need not be a consequent sceptic in order to proceed to one form or another of reductionism: Descartes reduced all principles to the *cogito*, Berkeley reduced all beings to spiritual beings, and their systems are not consistently sceptical. Besides, Reid acknowledges, one need not be a bad scientist in applying the rule of parsimony: Newton "cautiously" reduced everything to attraction.

What must be emphasized here is that Reid's critical stand on Hume's scepticism explains his different treatment of Hume the scientist and Hume the sceptic, in order, as he says, to "comprehend the whole art of the maker". Hume, it may be recalled, has argued that his "Achillean" argument was a way to show the plausibility of his *hypothesis*, that belief originates in the sensitive part of human nature. Reid's critical stand on Hume's argument is not—as recently argued by T. Penelhum—that Hume's inductive scepticism is wholly dogmatic. Rather, Reid's stand amounts to saying: either this hypothesis is an ingenious version of the antecedent scenario, in which case, we already know and grant the conclusion: and Reid insists that the no-remedy conclusion is no hypothesis. Or Hume's hypothesis is not predetermined by the antecedent scenario, in which case we consider it from the point of view of inductive verification, and this is the aim of Reid's own reflections on the intellectual powers. In other words, Reid does not fail to see the conditional nature of Hume's conclusion to the Achillean argument. What he argues is that our use of hypothesis must be consistent with a total surrender to the insuperability of antecedent scepticism.

The aptness of Reid's challenge here may be illustrated by considering the lines used by commentators in order to defend Hume on this point. Many have argued—Hamilton, to begin with, and recently, Barry Stroud—that in order to understand Hume's scepticism, one must acknowledge the distinction between Hume's *own* views and his philosophical programme.¹⁰ The latter is shaped by Hume's logico-empiricist atomistic model of impressions and ideas, a model Hume was able to use in order to lead to his plight that our ideas would outstrip what is available in experience (Stroud, p. 11) and that what produces beliefs has no "perceivable connection" with its truth (Stroud, p. 6). But the distinction between Hume's views and his philosophical programme is precisely the point of Reid's different treatment of Hume, the (consequent) sceptic, and Hume the scientist. Again, in order to defend Hume's special form of scepticism, Hamilton has argued that Hume did not refer (sic) and in any case did not need the hypothesis of impressions and ideas in order for his (consequent form of) scepticism to stand. But this is precisely the point of Reid's challenge that Hume's use of the doctrine of ideas is pre-determined by the antecedent scenario. For that matter, Reid thinks, any hypothesis or any statement of fact would do, and they all will be doomed to the no-remedy conclusion which is already granted. Another line of defence concerning Hume's scepticism, taken by

Barry Stroud in his recent book, is to argue that Hume's aim is not fundamentally sceptical, but rather that Hume tried to develop a radically naturalistic account of human nature, as a Newtonian scientist. Stroud argues that in order for anyone to meet the gist of Hume's sceptical plight, one would have to show that Hume's negative verdicts about the power of reason can be avoided by carefully exposing the spurious sources of their apparent plausibility (p. 12). But again, this is precisely the point of Reid's introduction of the issue of the way of ideas into Hume's sceptical programme, because it amounts to saying not merely that Hume's way of ideas is a hypothesis unsupported by facts but more incisively that it is not compatible with the "never-go-beyond-experience" requirement of both Hume's professed experimentalism and his defence of mitigated scepticism.

In other words, for Reid, not only did Hume fail to relate his hypothesis concerning impressions and ideas to his claim that philosophy must be "common sense methodised and corrected", but more importantly, Hume failed to redefine the experimental use of hypothesis in the very context of a surrender to the insuperability of antecedent scepticism. As it stands, Hume's hypothesis is an illustration of, but not an alternative to, the antecedent scenario, which is to say, for Reid, that Hume's form of scepticism adds nothing *specific* to the understanding of the experimental method in philosophy.

I now turn to Reid's constructive stand on scepticism as it relates to Hume's definition of mitigated scepticism. Reid does not consider Hume's consequent scepticism only from the point of view of his own surrender to the insuperability of antecedent scepticism. In the chapter we have just analysed, we have two hints in favor of my suggestion, that he also considers Hume's scepticism from the point of view of mitigated scepticism, or, in Hume's terms, from the point of view of the correction of excessive scepticism by common sense and reflection. Talking of the fallibility of human faculties, Reid says that it is a "manifest truth". He readily grants that "If this be called a degree of scepticism, I cannot help approving of it". Indeed, "reason directs us as fallible creatures to carry along with us in *all* our judgments a sense of our fallibility".¹¹ This statement, I argue, may be taken as a Reidian *initial caveat* for any claim to the effect that we know. The other hint we have is the fact that Reid also criticizes Hume's "Achillean" argument from the point of view of an alternative way of understanding probable reasoning. Reid clearly presents this alternative way as "reasonable" and "commonsensical". One feature of this account of probable reasoning is impor-

tant here because it gives Reid's own answer to the issue of the "line of demarcation". Reid argues that when the vulgar says "certain" he means a *degree* of evidence which is more than probable. Reid's suggestion "to speak with the vulgar" amounts to saying that we should consider the notion of evidence as a question of degree and that we can *stop talking* of doubts when we reach the highest degree, namely, a degree of evidence where "all doubts vanish" in the sense that there is an extinction of all *reasonable* doubts. As he says, *because* we admit *with* the vulgar that our faculties are fallible, we have a "scale in our mind" by which we proportion our assent "as far as appears reasonable". In other words, having admitted that antecedent scepticism is untenable because *nature* does not let us "sit down and wait", it is consistent to define the highest evidence as the level where *nature* forces us to say "it cannot be otherwise". This, Reid admits, expresses *only* a strong belief. But it is the "voice of nature" and therefore it is vain to resist.

I now turn to Reid's own sceptical admissions, for, while correcting *excessive* doubts by common sense, Reid admits that the "mixture of beliefs and doubts" includes many cases where the mixture works in favor of doubts. These cases, it is interesting to notice, center around the notion of causation and Reid's language at this point often echoes Locke's witty definition of substance as "something I know not what". Already, Reid's notion of *physical* cause excludes necessary connections and Reid often says, on this account, that we do not know physical causes but only the laws according to which the effects (the consequent event) always follow. Reid further insists that we do not know the efficient cause of any natural phenomena whatsoever: we only know its effects, and on this account Reid often says that we do not know the nature of cause or power. Concerning both efficient and physical causes, Reid further admits that we do not know how they produce their effects or why the elements of the connection are connected together. In all these arguments, Reid follows the sceptical message of Newton himself in the sense that Newton has shown the impossibility of a Baconian knowledge of "latens processus".

In any case, the consequences of the above admissions are numerous in Reid's works because inductive procedures carry limitations affecting our knowledge of physical and efficient causes. Thus, to mention but a few examples, Reid says that we do not know the nature of matter, the first origin of things, the origin of our notion of existence, the origin of judgment, the origin of universal conceptions, the origin of first principles. We do not know the nature of substance,

the essence of body and mind, the essence of individual objects and we have no knowledge of the future, strictly speaking. Even though Reid insists that we have a direct knowledge of primary qualities and an indirect, obscure knowledge of secondary qualities, we must realize that when they are correlated with the subject, primary qualities become, for Reid, indirect notions. Let me add that Reid recognizes the validity of Locke's distinction between nominal and real essences, and that he explicitly approves Locke's denial that we know the real essences. The system of substance, Reid says, is not a system of truth.

Because Reid has admitted that the "all or nothing" dilemma of the antecedent sceptic was untenable *and* insuperable, his own alternative is characterized by the search for a balanced middle position in the attempt to answer the question "where to stop doubting". Reid's answer is that we must stop doubting where we find beliefs which are as unshakable as the law of attraction. This is so far from saying that we then reach absolute knowledge, that Reid's alternative has many of the features of what Hume has called mitigated scepticism. It might be difficult to reconcile the seriousness of Reid's sceptical admissions with the tenor of his other statements. But what must be granted, at least, is that Reid is quite serious when he says that in "attempting to throw some light upon those abstruse subjects, I wish to preserve a due mean betwixt confidence and despair".

Indeed, when one goes through Reid's negative, critical and constructive stands on scepticism, one is impressed by the variety of forms of scepticism which Reid has been able to elicit from Hume's *Treatise* alone, while Reid's way of appealing to Hume the mitigated sceptic, against Hume the consequent sceptic, truly shows that Reid's challenge stands on the Humean basis which Hume made clearer in his *Enquiry*. More importantly, Reid had clearly seen the problem of reconciling the negative and positive phases of the development of Hume's causal account of human nature (B. Stroud), as well as the problem of reconciling Hume's scepticism and his professed experimentalism.

As things turn out, one must say against S.A. Grave, for example, that there *was* a debate between Hume and Reid, that this debate touched the very nature of scepticism, and that it centered around the still open question of the exact nature of Hume's mitigated scepticism.¹² As a matter of fact, this debate between Hume and Reid on scepticism was serious enough to become the reason why Reid's philosophy—together with Hume's—sank into oblivion and even con-

tempt during the XIXth Century. The weakness of Reid's philosophy, it was then said, is not due to its dogmatism, but rather to the fact that Reid had taken Hume's scepticism so seriously—both as a problem and as a well-grounded view—that, in many respects, he had *unawaringly* espoused Hume's thesis. And Hume's scepticism is a topic which most XIX-Century philosophers perceived as a philosophically superfluous intermezzo in the history of ideas.

Be that as it may, my analysis of Reid's challenge to Hume's scepticism would seem to imply, so far, that Thomas Brown was right in his suggestion that the difference between Hume and Reid on the issue of scepticism is one of emphasis only. Brown has compared the two philosophers as follows: Reid, he says, bawled out "We must believe in an external world" but added in a whisper, "we can give no reason for our belief"; Hume, on the other hand, cried out "we can give no reason for such a notion", but whispered, "I own we cannot get rid of it".¹³ The plausibility of this still unsettled claim may be attributed to the fact that both Hume and Reid emphatically agreed with Pascal's saying that "la raison confond le dogmatiste et la nature confond le pyrrhonien". Furthermore, both Hume and Reid claimed to find a solution to this dilemma by appealing to the experimental method, emphasizing Newton's achievements as the paradigm to emulate in philosophy. Both inferred from then on that a non-excessive scepticism would result in a limitation of our inquiries to the subject best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding. Finally, Hume's own description of mitigated scepticism as excessive scepticism "in some measure" corrected by common sense and reflection would seem to suggest that only a question of degree is at stake here.

Yet, for all its plausibility, the account of the debate between Hume and Reid in terms of emphasis alone would seem not merely to underestimate the important differences which, intuitively or after analysis, we perceive between the two systems, but perhaps more importantly to trivialize the debate on scepticism as outlined here.

I shall therefore conclude my study with a tentative outline of the main areas of systematic differences between Hume and Reid on the issue of mitigated scepticism. A first area of basic difference is that Hume presents mitigated scepticism *only* as an alternative to excessive scepticism, either in an antecedent or a consequent form. In other words, Hume, at least implicitly, admits that consequent scepticism is a *form* of antecedent scepticism and not an alternative to it (see No. 117, first sentence). Where he disagrees with Reid, however,

is that consequent scepticism is for him a further *specification* of the antecedent scenario, and as such a necessary strategy for any speculative philosophy. As he says about the way in which consequent scepticism specifies philosophical doubts on the notion of matter: "Bereave matter of all its intelligible qualities . . . you have only an unknown, inexplicable something, as the cause of our perceptions, a notion so imperfect that no sceptic will think it worth while to contend against it."¹⁴ Incidentally, this is the kind of "retreat" which Reid argues Hume should have used on the issue of necessity *versus* liberty. In other words, for Hume, surrender to antecedent scepticism should not be, as Reid claims, *total*, because otherwise one will be at a loss to distinguish between a sceptic and a dogmatist. As Hume writes in his *Dialogues on Natural Religion*:

It seems evident that the dispute between the sceptics and dogmatists is entirely verbal, or at least regards only the degrees of doubt and assurance, which we ought to indulge with regard to all reasoning. And such disputes . . . admit not of any precise determination. No philosophical dogmatist denies that there are difficulties both with regard to the senses or all science; and that these difficulties are in a regular logical method, absolutely insolveable. No sceptic denies that we lie under an absolute necessity, notwithstanding these difficulties, of thinking, believing, reasoning with regard to all kinds of subjects and even of frequently assenting with confidence and security.¹⁵

In other words, mitigated scepticism, in as much as, in one of its forms, it is, according to Hume, a set of *undistinguished* doubts is not enough. One also needs the "detour" of consequent scepticism specifically to understand the whimsical condition of mankind.

As one might say, Hume argues that the Cartesian strategy, illustrated by Descartes' hyperbolic doubt, is still necessary as a philosophical "detour", provided that it does not claim (as Descartes' strategy did) to put aside altogether common opinions.

It would thus seem that in his *Enquiry*, though Hume is willing to admit the practical and theoretical difficulties of excessive scepticism, he does think that a *total* surrender to antecedent scepticism is not heuristically illuminating, though it should be recommended above dogmatical reasoning. The point is, however, that a total surrender is not sceptical enough because it leaves the distinction between a sceptical and a dogmatic philosopher vague and unphilosophical. My suggestion is that Hume's *Enquiry* is an answer to Reid's challenge to the extent that Hume is trying to provide categories by which an ac-

count of scepticism would not reduce his debate with Reid to a merely verbal debate.

For Hume, indeed, as Don Livingston's recent paper suggests,¹⁶ the unavoidability of natural beliefs is such that when attempting to do away with common opinions, philosophers at best reproduce such beliefs philosophically. It is at this point, I think significantly, that Hume grants Reid's point that doubt is not the monopoly of philosophers. What he further argues, however, is that such popular objections to reasonings concerning matters of fact are but weak.

One also needs to see those philosophical objections which arise from a more profound research and which, *at times*, show the philosopher *not* to be the "same, in every point of action and speculation, with the philosophers of every other sect". When such a philosopher will awake from his dream, Hume says, he will laugh and say that his philosophical "amusements" can have no other tendency than to show the whimsical condition of mankind who must act, reason and believe though they are unable to satisfy themselves concerning the foundations of those operations. Consequent scepticism, therefore, though still Cartesian in form, is necessary to put metaphysics upside-down: in-depth and specific research tends to show that philosophical beliefs are not better grounded than common sense beliefs and that indeed both are groundless.

Reid, let me add, does not deny that the "detour" of consequent scepticism is speculatively useful. As he says, the sceptic is a philosopher whose business is "to pick up holes in the fabric of knowledge whenever it is weak and faulty". Nor is his main objection to Hume's account of the necessity of the "detour" of a Cartesian type of scepticism a denial of the philosophical relevance of specific, rather than vague, doubts. His main argument is that the bringing about of specification must be programmed into the experimental method itself, as specified by Newton's rules. Reid's point here is two-fold: when properly understood, the experimental method *does* integrate the kind of specific doubts to which Hume refers. Besides, this method presupposes the computing of *pros* and *contras* of a philosophical and of a "popular" sort. Both points exhibit the fact that to think or to act rest on the same (instinctive) ground as to breathe, a point which challenges the very distinction between speculative and practical philosophy upon which Hume's account of the necessity of "excessive doubts" rests. In this context, Hume's consequent scepticism would illustrate a variety of the double existence thesis which Hume has rejected as a "monstrous hypothesis" in the *Treatise*.

The second important difference between Hume and Reid on mitigated scepticism may be summed up by noting that while, for Hume, "a small tincture of Pyrrhonism might abate the pride" of a dogmatical reasoner, for Reid a "tincture of induction" will do the same. The dispute here is not merely verbal, for it hinges upon the important question of the nature of the connection between scepticism, on the one hand, and experimental philosophy, on the other. The problem here, however, is that Hume does not discuss this issue in his account of mitigated scepticism. What he does is to distinguish two forms of mitigated scepticism; the first one, of which we have talked mostly, is the "undistinguished" set of doubts which are in some measure corrected by common sense and reflection. The other one—whose specific difference from the former seems to have been lost in recent interpretations—is mitigated scepticism as "the limitation of our enquiries to the subjects best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding", the proper subjects of science and inquiry. And it is in arguing for *this* sub-class of mitigated scepticism that Hume makes his famous "commit it to the flames" recommendation, that is, all that is not either abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number, or experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.

The ambiguity of Hume's position as to the connection between experimental philosophy and mitigated scepticism is evidenced by Hume's correction to the *Treatise* on the very chapter which Reid has challenged. In the Appendix (p. 639), Hume identifies the Newtonian philosophy with the *undistinguished* "degree of doubt, and caution, and modesty, which in all kinds of scrutiny and decision, ought for ever to accompany a just reasoner". Thus, Newtonian philosophy is a modest scepticism to a certain degree and a fair confession of ignorance in subjects that exceed all human capacity. Newtonian or experimental philosophy would thus seem, for Hume, to be both the general (and unspecified) form of mitigated scepticism *and* the method to use in the second species of mitigated scepticism. But whether or not consequent scepticism should serve as the basic programme to specify a legitimate use of the experimental method—which was the gist of Reid's challenge—was left unanswered by Hume.

I think that it is, indeed, Hume's failure to account for the very connections which scepticism and experimentalism must have in a science of man that explains the still current debates as to whether

Hume was, or not, a sceptic and as to the appropriate way to reconcile the negative and constructive phases of his thinking. Reid saw this clearly. And better than many contemporary thinkers, Reid did not attempt to reconcile these moments by denying Hume's scepticism. Scepticism and experimentalism seem to be merely externally related in Hume's system; for example, by the addition of a general final *caveat* to any proposition of Hume's constructive philosophy. But when compared to Reid's own initial *caveat* as well as to Reid's own sceptical admissions, it would seem that on the issue of mitigated scepticism, Hume's constructive philosophy is indistinguishable from Reid's own. I do think, however, that the problem here does not arise from a lack of systematic differences, but rather from Hume's failure to answer Reid's challenge on the precise connection between scepticism and experimentalism *when* one has rejected both antecedent *and* consequent scepticism. And though my conclusion is a new one, an unawareness of the exact nature of Reid's challenge to Hume's special form of scepticism would seem to be the major source of the impression that it is merely a bold one.

NOTES

1. Thomas Reid, *Philosophical Works*, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968, p. 91b. Hereafter *Works*.
2. See David F. Norton, "Presupposti religiosi del realismo scozzese", in *Scienza e filosofia scozzese nell'età di Hume*, Bologna: Società editrice Il Mulino, 1976, pp. 111-128.
3. See my "Historicité du savoir philosophique" in *The American Catholic Philosophical Association—Proceedings 1978*, Vol. LII, 1978, pp. 204-213.
4. See, for example, S.F. Barker & T.L. Beauchamp (Eds.) *Thomas Reid: Critical Interpretations*, Philosophical Monographs, Philadelphia, 1976, *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid*, *The Monist*, April 1978, and E. Griffin-Collart, "Les croyances naturelles de Hume et les principes de sens commun de Reid", *Revue Internationale de philosophie*, *David Hume 1776-1976*, 115-116, 1976, pp. 126-142.
5. See Hume's letter to W. Strahan, 26 Oct. 1775, in J.Y.T. Greig (Ed.), *The Letters of David Hume*, Vol II, Clarendon Press, 1932, p. 301. For Stewart, see his popular *Dissertation* for the 1815 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, reproduced several times later.
6. Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Selby-Bigge's edition of Hume's *Enquiries*, Section XII, esp. nos. 116, 117, 129.
7. The next three sections are a new presentation of some of the ideas developed in a former paper entitled "The seriousness of Reid's sceptical admissions", *The Monist*, April 1978, Vol 61, no. 2, pp. 311-325. For numerous and detailed references to Reid's *Works*, see this article.
8. *Works*, 130a
9. *Works*, 129a
10. See Hamilton's notes in Reid's *Works*, esp. pp. 79, 129, 442-447, 457; Barry Stroud, *Hume*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977; see also his paper (given at the Pisa International Congress of the Enlightenment, August 1979) entitled "Natural Instincts and Philosophical Reflection", Terence Penelhum, *Hume*, Macmillan 1975.

11. *Works*, 485b
12. S.A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, Clarendon Press, 1960.
13. Brown's saying is quoted in Jessop's *Bibliography*, p. 164.
14. *Enquiry*, no. 123, *Works*, 86a.
15. Quoted in J.C.A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, Macmillan Press, 1978, p. 164; see also his chapter on Hume, the dispassionate sceptic.
16. See his paper (given at the Eighth Hume Conference, Rutgers University, No. 1979) on "Hume's attack on Religion"; see also his *Hume: A re-evaluation*, co-edited with J.T. King, Fordham Univ. Press, 1979. See also N. Capaldi, *David Hume: The Newtonian Philosopher*, Twayne Publ., 1975.