

Why Cannot Hume Be a Realist?

Dr Jani Hakkarainen

Post-doctoral Researcher, Academy of Finland

School of Social Sciences and Humanities

University of Tampere, Finland

jani.hakkarainen[at]uta.fi

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In *Conclusion of A Treatise of Huma Nature*, Book 1, Hume wrote that causal reasoning contradicts to the belief in what is nowadays called Metaphysical Realism (there are distinct and continu'd objects) (1.4.7.4). He makes the similar claim in *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* 12.16. In T 1.4.7.4, Hume refers back to 1.4.4 (*Of the modern philosophy*). “The second objection” that he mentions in EHU 12.16 is the second “profound” argument against the senses in the *Enquiry* that corresponds to the argument of T 1.4.4.

The extensive literature on Hume's scepticism and his attitude to Metaphysical Realism has too much neglected these sceptical arguments (e.g. the New Hume debate). The debate has primarily focused on T 1.4.2 (*Of scepticism with regard to the senses*) and the first “profound” argument in EHU 12.7-14. In the paper, I will supply this deficiency. First I will reconstruct the argument of T 1.4.4/EHU 12.15-6 and then I will show that it really is Hume's own argument. This provides a compelling reason why Metaphysical Realism ought not to be attributed to Hume as his philosophical position. The basic point is that it is Hume's view indeed that believing in Metaphysical Realism and consistent causal reasoning are contradictory. He thinks that philosophers must not embrace contradictions. As Hume cannot give up causal reasoning, on which his entire method is founded, Metaphysical Realism must go. I will also show that the standard strategies to avoid this problem for the Realist readings of Hume – such as naturalism (involuntariness of the belief in Realism), inconceivable suppositions, relative ideas – do not and cannot work.

I will conclude the paper by observing that this problem and Hume's view that in everyday life we cannot help but be, philosophically speaking, Metaphysical Realists suggest a no-single-Hume interpretation of his final attitude to scepticism against the senses (developing Robert J. Fogelin's and Donald L.M. Baxter's accounts). Hume the philosopher suspends his judgment on Metaphysical Realism, whereas Hume the man on the street firmly believes in it. Philosophy and everyday life constitute two distinct domains of belief-formation with different epistemic standards.