HUME FORUM PRAGUE

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Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences

List of abstracts

Hume, Intellectual Virtue and Agency

Dan O'Brien, Oxford Brookes University

Virtues, for Hume, are character traits that are useful and/or agreeable. Virtue is thus a broad category, covering both moral virtues and 'intellectual...endowments', with traits such as 'facility of expression', 'courage of mind', and 'quickness of conception' examples of the latter. It would seem, though, that success for intellectual projects should not only be assessed in terms of utility and agreeableness, but in terms of *epistemic* criteria directly relevant to the acquisition of *true* or *justified* or *warranted* beliefs. I shall survey various responses to this tension and suggest a distinct response focused on a Humean notion of the intellectual agent, that is, an individual or self engaged in intellectual and practical projects. To see oneself as such, depends on feeling proud of the results of such projects. Without pride playing such a constructive role with respect to the self, there would merely be bundles of perceptions, and bundles of perceptions cannot be seen as reasoning, or as wise, or as engaging in intellectual pursuits at all. Such pursuits involve effort over time and thus an enduring practical self. Thus, before our cognitive achievements can be assessed in epistemic terms, we must see ourselves as possessing virtues, assessed as such *by others* and according to criteria of *utility and agreeableness.* Non-epistemic assessment is therefore more fundamental than epistemic—fundamental, that is, to the mental life of agents.

Hume, the Vice Epistemologist

Filip Tvrdý, Palacký University Olomouc

There have been proposals to employ Hume's argument against miracles for distinguishing between warranted and unwarranted conspiracy theories, but authors like Keeley (1999), Cohnitz (2018) and Harris (2018) do not consider Humean epistemology of conspiracy theories possible. I think otherwise and argue that "a priori" argumentation from the first part of the chapter "Of Miracles" might not be suitable for the task because conspiracies do not defy the laws of probability. The second part seems to be more promising. Hume introduces a posteriori reasons why there cannot be credible evidence for belief in miracles. In his analysis Hume heralds contemporary vice epistemology and it is possible to consider him a precursor of the approach. Hume's study of vices can be fruitfully used for the identification of character traits that are typical for believers in unjustified conspiracy theories and other flawed worldviews, e.g., pseudoscience and paranormal beliefs in general. This tactic was hinted in Millican (2011), but I expand on it with respect to the findings of experimental psychology. I also mention the main difficulty of any theory that accounts for vices, i.e., their alleged blameworthiness. The problem might be solved through Hume's doxastic involuntarism. According to it, undesirable character traits are defects that epistemic agents cannot be blamed for.

A Fragmented Unity: A Narrative Answer to the Problem of the Self in Hume

Lorenzo Greco, University of L'Aquila, University of Oxford, University of Hradec Králové

In this talk, I will show how it is possible to have a unitary self in Hume, despite what he says about the self as a 'bundle of perceptions' in T 1.4.6 and the Appendix. As I will argue, to do so, however, it will be necessary to leave aside Hume's doubts about the self as mind and to consider the self in the light of a narrative explanation of personal identity. To support my interpretation, I will proceed by discussing two different understandings of narrative identity. On the one hand, a robust conception of narrative in relation to personal identity can be advanced, such as the one promoted by the communitarian philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. On the other hand, the possibility of conceiving identity narratively can be wholly denied, as in the case of Galen Strawson. I will argue that a Humean approach makes it possible to occupy a middle ground between these two extremes and to affirm a 'fragmented unity' that is nevertheless capable of guaranteeing a form of unity of the self that is convincing, given Hume's philosophical presuppositions.

Of the Poems of Ossian: Hume's last essay

Adéla Rádková, ÚSTR, Praha

The so-called Ossian poems were written and published by James Macpherson in the early 1760s. Macpherson claimed these were ancient poems, allegedly composed by the legendary Scottish poet Ossian, that had survived in the oral tradition of the Scottish Highlanders. Hume had initially welcomed the publication of the poems with enthusiasm, but soon, along with others, began to doubt their authenticity. Finally, in 1775, Hume penned down several arguments against the genuineness of the Ossian poems. He argued it was highly improbable that an orally transferred text would be preserved in such integrity. According to Hume,

experience teaches that such stories get gradually distorted over time. Next, Hume remarked on the inconsistency of the poems with other works of ancient Celtic or Germanic literature. Finally, Hume pointed out that the poems completely lacked supernatural events and references to religion, which usually do appear in ancient literature. Hume's criticism was based on a careful application of his philosophical method, namely the emphasis on experience, knowledge of human nature, and the limits of the human mind. "Of the Poems of Ossian" provides yet another evidence of Hume's methodological consistency.

Hume's Abandonment of Subjectivist Necessity

Peter Millican, Hertford College, University of Oxford

Traditionally, Hume was most widely viewed as the standard-bearer for regularity accounts of causation. But in the 1980s, two rival interpretations arose – namely the *sceptical realism* of Wright, Craig and Strawson, and the *quasi-realist projectivism* of Blackburn – and since then the interpretative debate has been dominated by the contest between these three approaches. My claim in this talk is that the controversy has been largely based on a fundamental mistake, *the assumption that Hume is committed to the subjectivity of causal necessity*, a commitment apparently exhibited in a notorious stretch of *Treatise* 1.3.14. The talk will start by showing how that assumption indeed seems to lie behind the revisionary interpretations, both by generating apparent tensions within the regularity account, and explaining specific features of the sceptical realist and quasi-realist alternatives. Then I shall explain why the subjectivist assumption is to be rejected, with reference both to the *Treatise* and especially the first *Enquiry*, and go on to review how Hume's treatment of causation looks if we ignore the subjectivist statements that have so disproportionately influenced the interpretative tradition. We find that so far from exhibiting an unresolved tension between objective and subjective perspectives, Hume's writings can easily be understood as fairly unambiguously supporting an objectivist view, with both causation and causal necessity being understood in terms of regularity. The upshot is a far more straightforward reading of Hume on causation and causal necessity than those that have dominated the recent debate.

How did Hume inspire Kant's *sensus communis aestheticus*?

Petr Glombíček, Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences

Hume's influence on Kant is a common knowledge. It's not surprising that it extends beyond Kant's critique of metaphysics. The Humean inspiration is Kant's aesthetics has received its share of scholarly attention over the years. Nevertheless, the focus is limited mostly to Kant's antinomy of taste. However, the Humean background can help in understanding the central notion of Kant's aesthetics, namely *sensus communis aestheticus*. Kant's explanation of the term is notoriously opaque and interpretations traditionally waver between a communal aspect and a treatment focused on cognitive faculties. Looking into Hume's essay 'Of the Standard of Taste', with attention to its first German translation, uncovers a possibility to interpret Kant's *sensus communis* through Hume's use of expressions "common sense" and "good sense" as his variation on Hume's idea of the agreement among critics, based on their competences which go parallel to Kant's characteristics of the cognitive elements of his *sensus communis*.