
Hume's Science of Human Nature: Perspectives of Interpretation

International Conference "Hume's Science of Human Nature: Perspectives of Interpretation"

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Department for the Study of Modern Rationality, Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences are presenting a **conference** on *Hume's Science of Human Nature: Perspectives of Interpretation*

31.8. – 3.9. 2016

Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences
Jilská 1, Praha 1
Seminar room 124a.

The science of human nature is the centre-piece of Hume's philosophy and it is, he tells us, "the only solid foundation for the other sciences". This conference seeks to understand Hume's science of man from the perspective not only of his epistemology and philosophy of mind, but also of his ethics, political theory, history and his reflections on natural religion.

Keynote speakers: Christopher J. Berry (University of Glasgow), Tamás Demeter (Hungarian Academy of Sciences), Lorenzo Greco (University of Oxford), Cinzia Recca (University of Catania), Eric Schliesser (University of Amsterdam)

Speakers: James Hill (Charles University), Hynek Janoušek (Charles University), Tomáš Kunca (Charles University), Josef Mural (Prague), Zuzana Parusniková (Czech Academy of Sciences), Adéla Radková (Palacký University Olomouc), Filip Tvrдый (Palacký University Olomouc)

Keynote speakers and speakers are already registered. **Registration will be closed on Sunday 28 August 2016** and thanks to institutional supports **no conference fee is charged**. We would very much like to invite and register up to 25 scholars and/or students. It is essential to send a letter of interest to a conference organiser, Dr Tomas Kunca, tomas.kunca@fhs.cuni.cz, even if you are interested in coming to see just one particular lecture. Registration for social events will be held mainly on Wednesday 31st August as indicated in programme but you are encouraged to share your preferences in letter of interest.

Conference site address in the very gothic part of Prague is Jilská 1, Praha 1, 110 00, Czech Republic (the seat of Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences), Seminar room 124a (1st floor). You can download [conference poster](#).

Conference lunches might be served here <http://www.cafelouvre.cz/en/>, conference opening dinner on 31st August here <http://www.tristoleti.cz/index.php?lang=en>, and for a night in opera on Thursday 1st September (Mozart, Magic Flute) see here <http://www.narodni-divadlo.cz/en/show/7867?t=2016-09-01-19-00>. Tickets for conference speakers are already booked.

Web page will be regularly updated and feel free to send your enquiries to tomas.kunca@fhs.cuni.cz. We are very much looking forward to see you in Prague!

[Poster](#)
[Preliminary programme including social events](#)
[Abstracts](#)

Programme

Day 1 (Wednesday 31 August)

16:00 – 17:00 Registration and Coffee

17:00 – 17:10 Welcomes and conference agenda
17:10 – 18:30 Conference opening lecture and discussion
17:10 – 18:10 Eric Schliesser (Amsterdam): *Hume's anti-Mathematicism in Political Practice: the fall of De Witt*
18:10 – 18:30 Discussion
Opening lecture chair: Cinzia Recca (Catania)
19:00 – 21:00 *Dinner (optional)*

Day 2 (Thursday 1 September)

9:00 – 12:00 Morning session

9:00 – 10:00 Tamás Demeter (Budapest): Hume's Chemistry of Human Nature
10:00 – 10:20 Discussion
Chair: Filip Tvrđý (Olomouc)
10:20 – 10:40 *Coffee break*
10:40 – 11:10 James Hill (Prague): Hume on Animal Instinct and Human Reason: How his Thought Developed
10 – 11:20 Discussion
Chair: Eric Schliesser (Amsterdam)
11:20 – 11:50 Josef Moural (Prague): Newtonian Mechanics of the Mind and its Shortcomings
11:50 – 12:00 Discussion
Chair: Hynek Janoušek (Prague)

12:00 – 14:00 *Lunch*

14:00 – 17:00 Afternoon session

14:00 – 14:30 Hynek Janoušek (Prague): Once again on the Relation of the Second and the First Book of the Treatise
14:30 – 14:40 Discussion
Chair: Tamás Demeter (Budapest)
14:40 – 15:10 Filip Tvrđý (Olomouc): The Science of Man's Religion
15:10 – 15:20 Discussion
Chair: Tomáš Marvan (Prague)
15:20 – 15:40 *Coffee Break*
15:40 – 16:10 Zuzana Parusniková (Prague): David Hume: Scepticism and Life
16:10 – 16:20 Discussion
Chair: Lorenzo Greco (Oxford)
16:20 – 16:50 Tomáš Kunca (Prague): Hume, Horse Riding, and Prosperity of Civil Society
16:50 – 17:00 Discussion
Chair: James Hill (Prague)
17:15 – 18:30 *Dinner (optional)*
19:00 – 22:30 Mozart, Magic Flute, the Estates Theatre Prague (optional)

Day 3 (Friday 2 September)

9:00 – 12:40 Morning session

9:00 – 10:00 Lorenzo Greco (Oxford): Preserving Practicality: A Defense of Hume's Sympathy-based Ethics
10:00 – 10:20 Discussion
Chair: Josef Moural (Prague)
10:20 – 10:40 *Coffee Break*
10:40 – 11:40 Cinzia Recca (Catania): David Hume, Philosopher and Historian: Religion and Political Theory in the VI Volume of his History of England
11:40 – 12:00 Discussion
Chair: Christopher J. Berry (Glasgow)
12:00 – 12:30 Adéla Radková (Olomouc): David Hume on the Origin of Human Society
12:30 – 12:40 Discussion
Chair: Zuzana Parusniková (Prague)

12.40 – 14.30 *Lunch*

14:30 – 16:00 Conference closing lecture and discussion

14:30 – 15:30 Christopher J. Berry (Glasgow): Hume on the Science of Man and Politics
15:30 – 16:00 Discussion
Closing lecture chair: Eric Schliesser (Amsterdam)
16:00 – 19:00 *Prague walk (optional)*
19:00 – 21:00 *Dinner (optional)*

Day 4 (Saturday 3 September)

10:00 – 12:00 Research and/or academic links meetings (optional)
12:00 – 14:00 Lunch (optional)
14:00 – 19:00 Prague History Guided Tour (Dept. of History) (optional)
19:00 – 21:00 Dinner (optional)

Abstracts

Preserving Practicality: a Defense of Hume's Sympathy-based Ethics

Lorenzo Greco (Oxford)

Hume's ethics is generally considered to be one of the best examples of an ethics that hinges on the notion of sympathy. However, one can legitimately ask if it is really possible to have anything like a sympathy-based ethics at all. As many have observed, sympathy appears to be inevitably partial; how can it produce an ethics that is really objective? Notwithstanding the doubts that have been raised in this regard, I believe that Hume's principle of sympathy provides the ground for an ethics in which the dimension of objectivity finds both explanation and justification. Sympathy can indeed be partial, but it has in itself the means to overcome its partiality, securing what for Hume represents the central aspect of ethics: its practical force. On the one hand, I shall hold that Hume's sympathy-based ethics takes into account the dimension of motivation by establishing a link between the first-personal point of view of the agent and the third-personal point of view of morality. On the other hand, I shall contend that Hume can guarantee a kind of objectivity understood as a convergence in judgement, in which the fundamental practicality of ethics is preserved. So my aim is twofold: I want both to prove that Hume's sympathy-based ethics does represent a powerful theoretical platform to build a convincing moral perspective, and to show that, this being so, Hume's ethics can be presented as an effective internalist approach in today's moral debate.

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Hume on Animal Instinct and Human Reason: How his Thought Developed

James Hill (Prague)

Hume's views on the relation between reason and animal instinct were particularly controversial at the time they were written. Later, however, they were noted by Charles Darwin and became mainstream in the light of evolutionary theory. The aim of this paper is to examine how Hume's own thinking on this question developed between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*. We will see that Hume's bald claim in the *Treatise* that reason is an instinct brings with it paradox, and is potentially self-defeating. In the *Enquiry*, however, Hume has carefully reworked the section to relieve its paradoxical nature and to present a more self-consistent and persuasive view of the relation of man's cognitive faculties to those of animals.

Newtonian Mechanics of the Mind and its Shortcomings

Josef Mural (Prague)

The early Hume appears to employ a minimalist theory of mind, according to which the full description of a perception consists in its content and its intensity. Hume's early project of the naturalistic study of mind involved an attempt to explain all mental events in terms of interaction of such units, understood largely analogically to the interaction of physical particles in the Newtonian physics: Hume speaks of attraction between perceptions, and of distribution of the initial force among interacting units. Now this early theory is shown as mistaken by Henry Home and by mature Hume. In my paper, I shall discuss in some detail both the early theory and its shortcomings leading to its abandonment or modification by mature Hume.

David Hume: Scepticism and Life

Zuzana Parusniková (Prague)

Hume was strongly influenced by Pyrrhonian scepticism, much discussed by philosophers at the time. The Pyrrhonian legacy is especially noticeable in his acceptance of the weakness of reason in epistemology and in his emphasis on the practical role of philosophy that should guide us to a happy life. In the context of profound reflection scrutinizing the rational foundations of knowledge Hume was totally sceptical; the positive role of nature in forming knowledge was for him a matter of instinct, not of reason. For Hume, who developed the radical sceptical line leading from Montaigne to Bayle, epistemological scepticism remained wholly unmitigated. He came to the truly Pyrrhonian conclusion that the epistemological problem cannot be solved on philosophical level and that this leaves us forever perplexed. However, excessive scepticism – though irrefutable by argument – is unliveable and as such brings no benefit to life or society. Hume's proposed alternative – the mitigated scepticism – has no relevance to epistemology but signals Hume's move to common life and moral science. It captures the approach of true philosophy combining modesty, tolerance and a degree of doubt, well fitted for both the inquiry to moral and social issues and an active involvement in public matters (as promoted by Cicero). True philosophy practising mitigated scepticism helps us to achieve a state of happiness not only by freeing us from the obscurity of metaphysical speculation but also from the emotional suffering involved in reflection. Unlike the ideal of *ataraxia*, accompanied by a detachment from life, Hume placed men in the bustle of life and encouraged them to enjoy its pleasures. However, some questions remain. Hume placed true philosophy nearer

to the vulgar and tied the goal of philosophy to making us feel agreeable. But did this priority not somewhat devalue sceptical reflection as a unique act of critical reason whose role is always that of a merciless assailant, leading to a continuous and disturbing state of perplexity?

David Hume, philosopher and historian: religion and political theory in the VI volume of his History of England

Cinzia Recca (Catania)

The paper discusses the Humean conception of history as cultural phenomenon, which finds its highest expression in the work *The History of England*. It will be in two parts: The first part will offer a synthetic, relevant and up-to-date overview of the academic works on the relation between the Scottish philosopher and history.

The second part will examine the sixth volume of the *History of England*, with particular attention to the religious aspect and the institutional role of the Church during the Cromwellian period.

Through the Humean judgments on Oliver Cromwell, which analyze the temperament and the character of the man, the domestic and foreign policy of the period, the epochal moments such as the Battle of Dunbar and the Great Victory, my paper intends to show how the opinion of Hume on that time it is, in reality, all focused on the theme of "religious belief", true the litmus paper of a society in deep and dramatic transformation. So it finally reveals that, behind the biographical pretext and a related analysis of the social dynamics that allow the birth of a new kind of political charisma, Hume rather seeks to reconstruct the exact contours of change and of the phenomena of cultural and religious innovation which permeated the whole British society, providing key elements for a more accurate understanding of the economic, political and institutional scene.

David Hume on the Origin of Human Society

Adéla Radková (Olomouc)

Hume's political theory may be viewed as either continuation or empirical confirmation of his philosophy. His work opposes the common view of modern philosophers who tend to separate moral and political philosophy; Hume makes them part of single coherent account. He argued that people are selfish creatures with limited generosity. However, we know from experience that people create groups that go far beyond interactions among a few members. The main question for his political theory therefore is how people create states. Hobbes and Locke tried to answer this question by using the theory of social contract. Hume refused contractarianism since there is no historical evidence for the state of nature or the original contract. His explanation of the origin of government is therefore only probabilistic and based on the empirical observations of human behavior. According to Hume, the first units were families and their increasing size gave rise to larger groups and states. Hume's main contribution to political philosophy is not an accurate description of the establishment of state, it is rather his account of political philosophy as an empirical science.

The Science of Man's Religion

Filip Tvrđý (Olomouc)

There is no other topic – except the history of England – that David Hume paid more attention to than religion. As it is usual in Hume's studies, his theory of religion was interpreted in many ways and he was considered a theist, fideist, deist, agnostic, atheist or proponent of moral atheism. The problem of these interpretations is that they cannot be completely justified, because Hume's style of writing is not very transparent. Every reader must deal with many terminological difficulties, interpretative obstacles, factual inconsistencies and argumentative fallacies. The question of whether Hume was a religious or irreligious person in his private life is not much of an interest. I believe that more important is to identify in what ways his theory precedes findings of contemporary religious studies and atheology. In the paper I want to point out similarities between Hume's theory of the origin of religion, presented mainly in the essays "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" (1742) and "The Natural History of Religion" (1757), and later works by William James, Sigmund Freud and B. F. Skinner. The seminal analogies can also be found with the evolutionary account that uses adaptive mental traits and maladaptive cognitive biases as an explanation for psychological mechanisms underlying religious thought.