

## DIALOGUE AND CONVERSATION Humean Way of Doing Philosophy

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**Abstract:** David Hume's philosophy has invited often a lot of criticism because of its abstruse style and therefore earned very strong criticism from all the corners. In spite of the fact that he is often accused of sophism, inconsistency and contradictions his arguments are demanding and provoking and philosophers like Immanuel Kant acknowledges that "I freely admit that the remembrance of David Hume was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy."<sup>1</sup> This paper argues that a rereading of Hume's philosophy is worth doing because the traditional understanding fails to explore the rich possibilities of Humean philosophy. It is argued that without analysing his concepts of philosophy, truth and method of doing philosophy we cannot do justice to Hume's philosophy. This paper tries to show that Hume's concept of dialogical and conversational style of truth seeking is something very relevant, unique and promising.

**Key words:** Concept of Philosophy, Dialectics, Dialogue, Conversation, Method of Doing Philosophy, Truth.

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<sup>1</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987, 8.

## 1. Introduction

Hume's work, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*,<sup>2</sup> which is published posthumously due to historical reasons stands out in style and approach differently from the rest of his works. The most notable difference obviously is its style of dialogue and conversation. The purpose of this paper is to show that this work is the result of the growth of his concept of philosophy, which was actually formed in his first work itself, *Treatise Concerning Human Nature*,<sup>3</sup> and later became very explicit.

Any serious reader of David Hume would agree that Hume's philosophy offers more problems than answers; but these problems are of three types. One is philosophical, second is methodological and the third stems from his concept of philosophy itself. If the reader fails to take into account all these three aspects of his philosophy, one may end up in concluding that either his philosophy is full of contradictions and inconsistencies or he is only a sophist. However, a study on his methodology and concept of philosophy will reveal a new understanding of his philosophy and it is worth doing. This is the modest claim or argument this paper makes. Once the methodological and conceptual problems are resolved the philosophical problems one confronts will be turned out to be the answers Hume offers to his reader.

## 2. Humean Conceptual and Methodological Perspective

"Dialogue and Conversation" together constitute the soul of Humean Philosophy. This is precisely the claim this paper makes and it emphasises that it is not only seen in his work *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* but developed right from the beginning of his philosophical enterprises but overlooked by

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<sup>2</sup> David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, ed. A. Wayne Colver, and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. John Vladimir Price, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1976.

<sup>3</sup>Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, L. A. Selby-Bigge edited, revised and notes by P. H. Nidditch, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, 455 Hereafter it will be cited as *Treatise* and the reference will be given along with the text in brackets.

the Humean scholars. This negligence lead to misinterpretations of Hume and most of the apparent contradictions arose from this misunderstanding. Though this study concentrates on *Treatise*, to make the point clear let us start with his *Dialogues*.

In the *Dialogues* we see three protagonists, Cleanthes (philosophical position), Philo (careless sceptic) and Demea (vulgar position), and Pamphilus the one who reports the dialogue. Commentators differ in their opinion as to who represents Hume. Some consider that it is Cleanthes and others consider Pamphilus himself is the one who represents Hume. Norman Kemp Smith says, "I shall contend that Philo, from start to finish, represents Hume."<sup>4</sup> He cites one early commentary of the *Dialogues*, which dates back to 1779, which agrees with his position.<sup>5</sup> However the present paper strongly believes that all three protagonists represent Hume or rather the dialectical tension of Hume's thought regarding religion and the existence of God. Philo's expressions such as "You in particular, Cleanthes, with whom I live in unreserv'd Intimacy"<sup>6</sup> must not be taken literally and we must be able to read between these lines. Pamphilus' introductory remarks clearly reveal the concept of Humean Philosophy:

Any Question of Philosophy, on the other hand, which is so obscure and uncertain, that human Reason can reach no fixt Determination with regard to it; if it should be treated at all; seems to lead us naturally into the Style of Dialogue and Conversations. Reasonable Men may be allow'd to differ, where no-one can reasonably be positive: Opposite Sentiments, even without any Decision, afford an agreeable Amusement: And if the subject be curious and interesting, the Book carries us, in a manner, into Company, and unites the two greatest and purest Pleasures of human Life, Study and Society (*Treatise*, 144 [my Italics]).

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<sup>4</sup>Norman Kemp Smith, "Introduction," *Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935, 59.

<sup>5</sup>Smith, *Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 58.

<sup>6</sup>Hume, *The Natural History of Religion and Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 244-245.

It must be observed that Pamphilus comments that the contrasting nature of the protagonists are in opposition provides a suitable atmosphere for dialectic to take place. He asks Hermippus to give attention to the "Contrast in their characters ... while you oppos'd the accurate philosophical Turn of Cleanthes to the *careless Scepticism* [my italics] of Philo, or compar'd either of their Dispositions with the rigid inflexible Orthodoxy of Demea." <sup>7</sup> In the *Dialogue* this so called orthodoxy of Demea seems to be taken as the vulgar position. Then, are these three positions, namely, the vulgar position, accurate philosophical position, and careless scepticism, not the same elements of the dialectic of human thought! The present paper argues that this is precisely what Hume tries to establish in his *Treatise*. In short the present paper considers that although the *Dialogues* is the master piece of Hume, the dialectician, we can observe the beginnings of his dialectical method in the *Treatise* itself. The achievement of *Treatise* is nothing else but it developed a dialogical (Dialectical) concept of philosophy in which a philosopher engages in a dialogue with himself. A philosopher in his life cannot remain philosophical always but he comes down (descends) to the common man's position, namely, vulgar but he ascends again to the philosophical position when he engages himself in philosophical contemplation and this tension opens up to new insights but he could not maintain it always. This struggle or philosophical agony is the impetus of an on-going philosophising process.

First we analyse Hume's concept of philosophy and then we move into his methodology. In all the three books of *The Treatise* Hume keeps this discussion of the concept of philosophy as the conclusion of each book and also as the conclusion of the discussion of the dialectical process of human thought and understanding, of passions, and of morals. The present paper considers that such an arrangement is far from accidental but conveys an important concept of philosophy. Now let us analyse the discussion in the first book.

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<sup>7</sup>Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 243 - 244.

**3. Humean Concept of Philosophy in the First Book of *Treatise***  
Book I of the *Treatise*, i.e., Section VII, entitled “Conclusion of this Book” gives us Hume’s reflection on his concept of philosophy and its nature, making use of the analogy of a voyage:

But before I launch out into those immense depths of philosophy, which lie before me, I find myself inclin’d to stop a moment in my present station, and to ponder that voyage, which I have undertaken, and which undoubtedly requires the utmost art and industry to be brought to a happy conclusion. Methinks I am like a man, who having struck on many shoals, and having narrowly escap’d ship-wreck in passing a small frith, has yet the temerity to put out to sea in the same leaky weather-beaten vessel, and even carries his ambition so far as to think of compassing the globe under these disadvantageous circumstances (*Treatise*, 263 - 264).

This analogy explains Hume’s experience of the philosophical enquiry. Behind the rhetoric of this analogy, we find the concept of dialectical tension. Hume begins his voyage into the immense depths of philosophy expecting as he says a “happy conclusion”. But he is “struck on many shoals” of scepticism but makes a “narrow escape” and at present he is lying on the “barren rock.” He is unable to start the voyage again in this “leaky weather-beaten vessel.” Why do we take these “shoals” as scepticism? Hume has already said this, when he speaks about the “external existence.” Book I, Part IV, Section II, entitled “Of Scepticism” with regard to the senses explains this voyage.

The voyage begins with some assurance. This is the first stage of the voyage. Hume says, “... but ‘tis in vain to ask, Whether there be a body or not? That is a point, which *we must take for granted* in all our reasonings” (*Treatise*, 187 [my italics]). As the voyage progresses this assurance vanishes. The voyager realises, “That our senses offer not their impressions as the images of something distinct, or independent, and external, is evident; because they convey to us nothing but a single perception, and never give us the least intimation of anything beyond” (*Treatise*, 189). This is the second stage of the voyage. These two opposite

tensions beat the vessel and situation of the voyager as he passes through uncertainty and peril. As the enquiry or the voyage progresses the voyager gradually releases his tensions and settles on the position that

... as long as we take our perceptions and objects to be the same, we can never infer the existence of the one from that of the other, nor form any argument from the relation of cause and effect; ... upon the whole our reason neither does, nor is it possible it ever shou'd, upon any supposition, give us an assurance of the conitnu'd and distinct existence of body" (*Treatise*, 193).

This is the third stage.

Hume sometimes calls the first stage "vulgar or unphilosophical" and the second stage the "philosophical" and the third, since it is a stage of uncertainty, sceptical. At another place Hume says, "Thus there is a direct and total opposition betwixt our reason and our senses" (*Treatise*, 231). If the reader fails to observe that these different philosophical positions are different stages of a dialectical journey he will misunderstand Hume as stating some contradictory propositions or as holding contradictory positions.

However a synthesis will not remain stable for a long time. A descending voyage will start soon. For all these conclusions will "... vanish, like the phantoms of the night on the appearance of the morning; and 'tis difficult for us to retain even that conviction, which we had attain'd with difficulty" (*Treatise*, 455).

Hume says,

Thus [even] the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason; and *by the same rule he must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity* (*Treatise*, 187 [my italics]).

Thus the whole voyage has the "melancholy" (*Treatise*, 264) of scepticism because no stage of the voyage can be considered as secure and certain. But this is part of human nature because one has to continue this journey and "nature has not left this to his

choice” (*Treatise*, 187). For instance, it is part of one’s nature to believe in the necessary connection between cause and effect, but according to his reason and experience Hume cannot observe such a connection. He says, “... tho’ these two operations be equally natural and necessary in the human mind, yet in some circumstances they are directly contrary, nor is it possible for us to reason justly and regularly from causes and effects” (*Treatise*, 266). What remains is an all encompassing scepticism regarding knowledge. Therefore Hume says, “In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism. ... Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner” (*Treatise*, 270). Thus Hume’s philosophy contains the elements, on the one hand, of scepticism and on the other hand, of naturalism. This dialectical or dialogical relationship between different elements in his philosophy is the key to resolve the apparent contradictions in Hume’s philosophy.

#### **4. Humean Concept of Philosophy in the Second Book of *Treatise***

In the second book also Hume concludes the discussion of passions by again formulating his concept of philosophy. Interestingly, this section is entitled, “Of Curiosity or the Love of Truth.” In this section also Hume depends on analogy to explain his concept of philosophy.

##### **4.1. Analogy of Taking a Survey of the Fortification of the Enemy**

The last section of the second book of the *Treatise* gives three analogies that explain the same thing from three different viewpoints. This section deals with the purpose of philosophy or “the love of truth.” Hume raises a question: What is more important in seeking the truth? Is it the utility of the truth or is it the pleasure of this search as such?

... many philosophers have consum’d their time, have destroy’d their health, and neglected their fortune, in the search of such truths, as they esteem’d important and useful to the world, tho’ it appear’d from their whole conduct and behaviour, that they were not endow’d with any share of

public spirit, nor had any concern for the interests of mankind. Were they convinc'd, that their discoveries were of no consequence, they wou'd entirely lose all relish for their studies, and tho' the consequences be entirely indifferent to them; which seems to be a contradiction (*Treatise*, 450).

The points raised are: (1) A philosopher enjoys the pleasure of his enquiry in itself, (2) But he needs the utility aspect as a source of motivation (3) Yet sometimes this utility does not concern him personally. This means a philosopher needs the utility aspect to motivate him, but only as a motivation. The real pleasure of philosophy comes from the pursuit itself. This means the love of truth needs something to oppose it or to refer to in order to make progress possible. To illustrate this aspect Hume gives us the analogy:

Thus, suppose a man, who takes a survey of the fortifications of any city; considers their strength and advantages, natural or acquir'd; observes the disposition and contrivance of the bastion's, ramparts, mines, and other military works; 'tis plain, that in proportion as all these are fitted to attain their ends, he will receive a suitable pleasure and satisfaction. This pleasure, as it arises from the utility, not the form of the objects, can be no other than a sympathy with the inhabitants, for whose security all this art is employ'd; tho' 'tis possible, that this person, as a stranger or an enemy, may in his heart have no kindness for them, or may even entertain a hatred against them (*Treatise*, 450).

This analogy is very subtle and not very easy to interpret. First of all the surveyor enjoys his research and finding the ingenuity of the construction of the fortification. This ingenuity is relevant as long as it achieves its purpose, namely, the security of the inhabitants. The one who studies this enjoys this ingenuity because the construction of this fortification ingenuously serves its purpose. If the fortification is very weak and badly constructed it may not give such pleasure. Even if the one who studies this fortification is an enemy and studies it in order to destroy it, he may enjoy the ingenuity behind it, though he does not wish good to the inhabitants. This means that even what



constitutes the safety of the inhabitants can become the source of pleasure for the enemy who studies it. However, though the enemy loves the ingenuity of the fortification he does not bother with the wellbeing of the inhabitants. As a surveyor, he enjoys only the ingenuity of the fortification. In short the study of an object in itself gives pleasure but the purpose or the importance of the object is also needed and the enquirer may also love the purpose and importance of the object or the its utility but this is a dispassionate love because this love never reaches beyond the object itself. Hume says:

... the pleasure of study consists chiefly in the action of the mind, and the exercise of the genius and understanding in the discovery or comprehension of any truth. If the importance of the truth be requisite to complete the pleasure, 'tis not on account of any considerable addition, which of itself it brings to our enjoyment, but only because 'tis, in some measure, *requisite to fix our attention* (*Treatise*, 450 - 451 [my italics]).

In short, it seems, according to Hume, that the importance or utility of the truth is only subservient to the pleasure of the search itself.

#### **4. 2. Analogy of Hunting**

The analogy of hunting is also used to explain the above point from another perspective. Hume holds that the pursuit of truth and its progress depend on the interaction of two passions. One is the passion for truth or the love of truth itself, which is the ruling passion. The other is the passion derived from the end. The latter is necessary but subservient to the former. Hume explains:

... beside *the action of the mind, which is the principal foundation of the pleasure*, there is likewise requir'd a degree of success in the attainment of the end, or the discovery of that truth we examine. ... Where the mind pursues any end with passion; *tho' that passion be not deriv'd originally from the end, but merely from the action and pursuit*; yet by the natural course of the affections, we acquire a concern for the end itself, and are uneasy under any disappointment we meet with in the pursuit of it (*Treatise*, 451 my italics).

So there are two elements involved in this pursuit of truth. One is the principal foundation and the other is the requirement. The principal foundation is the passion derived from the pursuit itself and the requirement is the passion derived from the end. To illustrate this point Hume gives us the analogy of hunting. He says:

To illustrate all this by a similar instance, I shall observe, that there cannot be two passions more nearly resembling each other, than those of hunting and philosophy, whatever disproportion may at first sight appear betwixt them. 'Tis evident, that the pleasure of hunting consists in the action of the mind and body; the motion, the attention, the difficulty, and the uncertainty. 'Tis evident likewise, that these actions must be attended with an idea of utility, in order to their having any effect upon us. ... Here 'tis certain, that the utility or importance of itself causes no real passion, but is only requisite to support the imagination; ... To make the parallel betwixt hunting and philosophy more complete, we may observe, that tho' in both cases the end of our action may in itself be despis'd, yet in the heat of the action we acquire such an attention to this end, that we are very uneasy under any disappointments, and are sorry when we either miss our game, or fall into any error in our reasoning (*Treatise*, 451-452).

This analogy very clearly brings out the point that the concern for the end and utility of the whole pursuit is subservient to the pleasure of the pursuit itself. Hume thinks that this analogy can be substituted by another, that of a game. The passion for a game arises from the pleasure of the game itself, but nobody can obtain pleasure from a game without a goal to be achieved.

It is very interesting that Plato uses the same analogy, i.e., of a hunter (angler) to compare a sophist (Sophist 218 - 223c, see especially 222 and 223c).<sup>8</sup> "It's [sophism] the hunting of the rich, prominent young men. And according to the way our account

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<sup>8</sup>Plato, *Sophist*, trans. Nicholas P. White in *Plato Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, 238 - 243

has turned out, it’s what should be called the expertise of the sophist” (Sophist 223 b). If we combine this passage with Plato’s opinion in the *Republic* regarding sophists, we will understand how close is Hume’s analogy of philosophy with Plato’s analogy of sophist. Plato says that sophists engage in arguments for the sake of sport or fun and not for the sake of truth.<sup>9</sup> Hume’s analogy agrees that the fun part of hunting (philosophy) is the ruling passion and the passion of utility is subservient to the pleasure we get from doing philosophy. Why does Hume use the same analogy to explain his concept of philosophy? If he uses this in the same sense of Plato, it means that he claims that he is a sophist. But no sensible philosopher will do it. Does he use it sarcastically? This paper claims that Hume argues since truth as a finished product is not attainable and therefore what matters is only the activity of philosophising which is something belongs to the nature of humans and unavoidable. The moment one argues what Hume claims is that once the philosopher believes that he is a custodian of the whole truth, the truth itself becomes a stagnant, rigid reality, which offers a dead end. This leads often to fundamentalism and kills the soul of philosophising.

Hume offers some insights, which are related to his dialectic or dialogical concept of philosophy. We will discuss this in detail after we see all his analogies that explain his concept of philosophy. The pleasure of doing philosophy, according to Hume, results from the dialectical interaction of two passions, namely, the pleasure of utility and the pleasure of engaging in the activity itself. Hume reveals this aspect or the dialectical or dialogical nature of philosophy through another analogy.

### **4.3. Analogy of the Mixture of Two Liquids**

We have seen that according to Hume two passions are at work in the pursuit of the truth. One is the passion that is derived from the pursuit itself and the other is the passion that is derived from the end. Philosophy is the result of these two passions.

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<sup>9</sup>Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve, in *Plato Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, 539b-d.

Hume says: "Tis here, as in certain chymical preparations, where the mixture of two clear and transparent liquids produces a third, which is opaque and colour'd" (*Treatise*, 452). This analogy reveals that, according to Hume, philosophy itself is an outcome of a dialectical process or dialogue in which contradictions are reconciled.

### **5. Humean Concept of Philosophy in the Third Book of *Treatise***

The concluding section of the third book of the *Treatise* also tells us something important regarding Hume's concept of philosophy. He uses an analogy of the relation between an anatomist and a painter, which reveals the undercurrent of his conception of philosophy.

The anatomist ought never to emulate the painter: nor in his accurate dissections and portraitures of the smaller parts of the human body, pretend to give his figures any graceful and engaging attitude or expression. There is even something hideous, or at least minute in the views of things, which he presents; and 'tis necessary the objects shou'd be set more at a distance, and be more cover'd up from sight, to make them engaging to the eye and imagination. An anatomist, however, is admirably fitted to give advice to a painter; and 'tis even impracticable to excel in the latter art, without the assistance of the former. We must have an exact knowledge of the parts, their situation and connexion, before we can design with any elegance or correctness. And thus the most abstract speculations concerning human nature, however cold and unentertaining, become subservient to practical morality; and may render this latter science more correct in its precepts, and more persuasive in its exhortations (*Treatise*, 620 -621).

This passage clearly brings out the relation between 'Hume the Newtonian' who adopts Newton's method of analysis, which demands the isolation of atomic parts of the object of study, and 'Hume the dialectician' whose philosophy reconciles these separate and distinct atomic parts into a whole, just as in the case of painting. In other words, this analogy reveals both Hume's atomism, which he inherited from Newton, and his dialectics,

which is his reconciling project, employed to solve the undesirable effects of atomism. The anatomist’s skill is necessary and makes the painter more efficient but it is subservient to the purpose. If the artist or the painter wants to excel in his profession he must have both the knowledge of an anatomist and the skill of an artist. The knowledge of the anatomist helps the painter to give correctness to his painting, while skill brings in elegance. Anatomy provides the knowledge of the parts and their proportions, relation between these parts and the way each part functions and how the parts influence the whole in general. The artist has the knowledge of the beauty of the whole, its different perspectives, its relation and function to the situations and context and in short its appearance and beauty. Hume’s concept of a philosopher is a combination of anatomist and a painter. True philosophy must have a scientific method of analysis, which he calls the experimental method that is analogous to the knowledge of an anatomist. The philosopher has also the ability of intuition that makes the philosopher a dialectician, which is analogous to the reconciling ability of the painter, who makes the different parts of the picture into an elegant whole. The true philosopher is both a man of science and a man of intuition. And Hume makes it clear that this philosophy as a whole is “subservient to practical morality.”

In one of his letters to Francis Hutcheson, who read the manuscripts of Hume’s *Treatise* and commented that “there wants a certain warmth in the cause of virtue,”<sup>10</sup> Hume again makes use of this analogy. He says:

There are different ways of examining the mind as well as the body. One may consider it either as an anatomist or as a painter; either to discover its most secret springs and principles or to describe the grace and beauty of its actions. I imagine it is impossible to conjoin these two views. Where you pull off the skin, and display all the minute parts, there appears something trivial, even in the noblest attitudes and

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<sup>10</sup>Hume, *The Letters Of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, Vol. I, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, 32

most vigorous actions: nor can you ever render the object graceful or engaging but by clothing the parts again with skin and flesh, and presenting only the bare outside. An anatomist, however, can give very good advice to a painter or statuary: and in like manner, I am persuaded that a metaphysician may be very helpful to a moralist, though I cannot easily conceive these two characters united in the same work.<sup>11</sup>

Hume's concept of a moral philosopher is a combination of a scientist like Newton and a metaphysician. The contrary approaches of the two people are mutually beneficent in building up a good moral philosophy. Newton advised the observation and experiments of the object from the atomic parts themselves and the metaphysician helps to reconcile them into a whole by concentrating on the subject as whole. These two contrary methods are in dialectical opposition as in the case of a painter who conjoins the talents of an anatomist and an artist.

It is also important to highlight another prominent features of Hume's method of philosophy. This is closely connected with his conception of philosophy itself.

## **6. Philosophy in this Careless Manner (The Dispassionate Love for Truth - The Lesson of Dialectics)**

The last pages of the first Book of *Treatise* holds a big surprise or rather a shock for the reader. Hume advocates "an easy disposition" (*Treatise*, 273) in doing philosophy and this philosophy itself must be taken in a "careless manner" (*Treatise*, 273). The reader will be shocked because he may ask, is this the same Hume who suggests "an experimental method" (*Treatise*, xvi) based on "cautious observation" (*Treatise*, xix)? In fact this is not the first time Hume suggests carelessness as an essential part of methodology. In Part IV, Section II of the First Book of *Treatise*, where Hume exposes his dialectical conception of human understanding, the discussion ends up with the same advice. Hume says, "Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy" (*Treatise*, 218 [my italics]). Before we

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<sup>11</sup>Hume, *Letters* Vol. I, 32

explain what he means by this carelessness, let us clarify, precisely for what Hume suggests carelessness as a remedy.

Hume claims that there is ascending – descending process going on in philosophising. Human thought cannot claim that it has the whole truth or truth as a finished product in its custody at any particular moment of its history. Hume shows that this because of the ascending descending nature of dialectics. What does he mean by it?

### **6.1. The Ongoing History of the Ascending and Descending Dialectic of Human Understanding**

The ascending and descending feature of the dialectic of human understanding is part of human nature. Hume says, “As long as our attention is bent upon the subject, the philosophical and study’d principle may prevail; but the moment we relax our thoughts, nature will display herself, and draw us back to our former opinion” (*Treatise* 214 [my italics]). Thus the former opinion again assumes the role of a new position, that our perceptions are distinct and separate existences and again a situation of contradiction or opposition emerges. Hume says, “This philosophical system ... is the monstrous offspring of two principles, which are contrary to each other, which are both at once embraced by the mind, and which are unable to mutually destroy each other” (*Treatise* 215). The result is a new hypothesis or a “new fiction” which is the new resulting synthesis. He says:

... we contrive a new hypothesis, which seems to comprehend both these principles of reason and imagination. This hypothesis is the philosophical one of the double existence of perceptions and objects; which pleases our reason, in allowing, that our dependent perceptions are interrupted and different; and at the same time is agreeable to the imagination, in attributing a continu’d existence to something else, which we call Objects (*Treatise* 215).

Hume calls this synthesis, a “new fiction” within whose heart itself the seed of new contradiction lies.

The contradiction betwixt these opinions we elude by a new fiction which is conformable to the hypotheses both of reflection and fancy by ascribing these contrary qualities to

different existences; the interruption to perceptions, and the continuance to objects (*Treatise* 215).

In short this synthesis is an attempt to grant to both reason and imagination what both of them want. Therefore a synthesis of double existence is evolved to satisfy both reason and imagination. Since this concept of double existence itself is an arbitrarily imposed one, the new synthesis is really only a kind of compromise.

Not being able to reconcile these two enemies [reason and imagination], we endeavour to set ourselves at ease as much as possible, by successively granting to each whatever it demands, and by feigning a double existence, where each may find something, that has all the conditions it desires (*Treatise* 215).

But the moment we fail to keep our attention on this arbitrary concept, we again return to our natural or vulgar (unphilosophical) situations and thus again begin the descending movement of dialectics. Hume points out, "... yet upon its least negligence or inattention, can easily return to our vulgar and natural notions" (*Treatise* 216), but only to begin the ascending journey of dialectic once again. One of the passages from the first book of the *Treatise* where Hume speaks of the three opinions which rise above each other and "acquire new degrees of reason and knowledge," makes this very clear and evident. Hume says,

These opinions are that of the vulgar, that of a false philosophy, and that of the true; where we shall find upon enquiry, that the true philosophy approaches nearer to the sentiment of the vulgar, than to those of a mistaken knowledge (*Treatise* 222 - 223).

The use of the terms true and true philosophy is misleading and we should not take it as true in the sense of being stable and complete. For Hume adds immediately that this true philosophy is "nearer to the sentiment of the vulgar, than to those of a mistaken knowledge." This means this true philosophy contains the imperfections of the thesis in itself which will again make the dialectic an ongoing process. Hume thinks of the ancient



philosophers or rather any philosopher who would claim to have the custody of the true knowledge: “Had they fallen upon the just conclusion, they wou’d have return’d back to the situation of the vulgar, and wou’d have regarded all these disquisitions with indolence and indifference” (*Treatise* 223 [my italics]). In short, Humean understanding of the dialectic of the history of human thought is a concept of an ongoing process. This process does not mean a continuous progress but rather one of an ascending-descending nature.

So, the philosopher is in constant dialogue with himself. The dialogue is taking place between different aspects of his own personalities. This dynamism within him is the possibility and at the same time the challenge he faces. The reconciling moments too are not to be taken as permanent because the journey or the dialogue will progress. This is happening in a human society too. This is clearly shown in the third book of *Treatise* when he discusses the concept of Justice. The moment one starts claiming any of the moment as culminating point or finishing line of the process, philosophy ceases to exist because the thought process is arrested and comes to a halt.

## **6.2. In this Careless Manner**

So this careless manner is not mere *carelessness*. It is a profound insight a philosopher reaches through a dialogue in which he engages with himself. It is an attitude of an openness or readiness to obey the guiding of one’s own thought process. It is openness to his own reason without prejudices and hypothesis which is according to Hume the basic quality of a genuine philosopher. Truth cannot be postulated it must be arrived at during the journey. But since this journey happens on its own one cannot employ the carefulness of the one who controls the journey but only can enjoy the journey or in other terms can have the careless manner of a traveller who is ready to take it as it comes without dictating. Truth is just like the experience of the journey which presents itself before the traveller.

Since this dialectic or dialogue is an ongoing process, the one who searches for the truth as a finished product or as something

certain or absolute will end up with scepticism. This scepticism, in fact, is not only a result but also lies in the very heart of the dialectical process, which initiates the doubting of thesis and antithesis and even synthesis. Hume believes that even sceptical doubts only come from profound reflection. Hume accepts that:

This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady, which can never be radically cur'd, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chace it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it. 'Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding of senses; and we but expose them farther when we endeavour to justify them in that manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always encreases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it (*Treatise*, 218 [my italics]).

One way to escape this malady of not being on secure footing in the search of truth is "carelessness and in-attention." This carelessness is not negligence. Annette C. Baier writes about this peculiar expression and approach of Hume:

The new approach is to be careless in the older sense, carefree rather than negligent. (The O. E. D. gives us the biblical reference of Judges 18. 7, "They dwell careless after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure.") The new Philosopher is to dwell careless after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure after casting off the anxieties and tyranny of obsessive theorizing. Hume and his followers are to be carefree and liberated from compulsions, including the compulsion to pursue the theoretical details of their own philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of Book I, of the *Treatise*, Hume invites his readers to follow him in his further pursuit, with this carefree attitude. He says, "If the reader finds himself in the same easy disposition, let him follow me in my future speculations" (*Treatise*, 273). This

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<sup>12</sup>Annette C. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1994, 1-2

“easy disposition” sometimes makes us light hearted in the midst of the dialectical tension of our thoughts and understanding. Hume says, “Another advantage of this philosophical system is its similarity to the vulgar one; by which means we can humour our reason for a moment, when it becomes troublesome and solicitous” (*Treatise*, 216). Thus his follower cannot become dogmatic and never a fanatic in his journey.

Some of the expressions of Umberto Eco make us think that Hume finds some fellow travellers even in this century. Eco writes, “Perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth, to make truth laugh, because the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from insane passion for the truth.”<sup>13</sup> The reason for such a mission is, according to Eco, that a blind, passionate love for truth can often become destructive. He says,

The antichrist can be born from piety itself, from excessive love of God or of the truth, as the heretic is born from the saint and the possessed from the seer. Fear prophets, ... and those prepared to die for the truth, for as a rule they make many others die with them, often before them, at times instead of them.<sup>14</sup>

## 7. Openness to Truth and Intellectual Humility

Hume warns us to be cautious in using the terms “as these, ‘tis evident, ‘tis certain, ‘tis undeniable” (*Treatise*, 274) and by using such expressions we “are apt not only to forget our scepticism, but even our modesty” (*Treatise*, 274) as well. Therefore, according to Hume, in our philosophical enquiry there is no stable or static stage that could be considered as an absolute state. For Hume believes, “Human nature is too inconstant to admit of any such regularity. *Changeableness is essential to it*” (*Treatise*, 283 my italics). In short, what Hume tries to say is to love the truth but this love must be dispassionate and should not

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<sup>13</sup>Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver, London: Mandarin Paperback, Reed International Books Ltd. 1994, 491

<sup>14</sup>Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, 491

make us dogmatic. He says that his philosophy implies “no dogmatical spirit, nor conceited idea of my own judgment, which are sentiments that I am sensible can become no body, and a sceptic still less than any other” (*Treatise*, 274). Then Hume extends his invitation to his reader: “If the reader finds himself in the same easy disposition, let him follow me in my future speculations. If not, let him follow his inclination and wait the returns of application and good humour” (*Treatise*, 273). This is what Hume means when he says that he wishes to “give a different turn” (*Treatise*, 273) to philosophy. This easy disposition without becoming dogmatic in spirit helps one to love the truth, but this love for truth must be dispassionate. And this easy disposition is the attitude that Hume expects from one who makes a moral judgement when he speaks about an impartial spectator (Cf. *Treatise*, 472).

However, this paper does not claim that the *Treatise* reveals or contains a fully-fledged dialectical system of thought. The reader has to wait until Hume's final work, the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, to see such a developed or mature dialectical approach.

## 8. Conclusion

The growth of technology especially of Information Technology (IT) promised a lot for the humanity. A *Global Village* was the promise where people will be well connected. This promise helped us to look into the future where differences will be reconciled and the human beings will be closer to each other and the world will be a better place to live in. However, today this dream is shattered and extremist ideologies are on a rise and the divisions in the name of religion, philosophy, nation, ethnic group and language are wider than ever. Humanity is in need of a new world view. A philosophy which can reconcile the differences where dialogue and conversations can play a major role is the need of the time. The very claim and concept of Truth which become more and more exclusive and rigid add to the fuel of extremist ideologies must be reconstructed. In this context David Hume's concept of philosophy which is still to be

explored further invites and demands our attention and deserves a revisiting. This paper believes and claims that Humean way of doing philosophy can brighten the horizons of present day's philosophy which is in need of a new approach, method and a new definition of truth.

Hume's philosophy needs a re-reading. His philosophy is to be understood along with its methodology and his concept of philosophy. Without this approach Hume's philosophy seems to be a bunch of contradictions and inconsistencies. Hume, the Newtonian philosopher whom we see at the beginning of his *Treatise*, is transformed into a dialectician as his journey progressed and a philosopher who was in search of certitude and who wanted to put philosophy on equal footing with any other science turned out to be a dialectician. To put it more precisely Hume is a philosopher who is in a dialogue just like a traveller who engages in a dialogue with the experiences offered by the journey. His philosophy is a journey and whoever could not be co-traveller with the same *careless manner* could never be part of this journey. The most remarkable point is that the journey itself becomes important and not the destination. The experience one gathers during the journey makes one a Humean who is marked with an intellectual humility to accept that there is always room for improvement and there is always distance to be travelled. This open-ended position can also be taken as a mitigated skepticism or else one can abandon the journey at any place thinking that one has reached the destination but for Hume this is mere dogmatism. The spirit of dogmatism is unknown to Hume and he rejects it altogether. Moreover, the very concept of Truth is reconstructed. In Humean philosophy the concept of truth as something ultimate and absolutely objective adopts a more relational concept without falling into relativism. The traditional epistemological approach that *the truth cannot be changed but only our knowledge of it can grow* needs a rethinking. Can we really make, epistemologically, a distinction between *truth* and *knowledge about it*? Hume makes an attempt to show that even a philosopher is unable to be a philosopher at all the moments of his life. He too is a vulgar at

times and engages in ordinary life activities forgetting the sceptical notions his philosophy. This human nature itself is analysed at length in his philosophy and he shows that this is the way one lives. There are moments of philosopher, moments of sceptic and of vulgar in the same person's life. A dialogue is going on within the same person and this creates a dialectical tension within him. The same is true with the society as well. Even a scientist is not an exception. Hume argues that inductive reasoning is the foundation of all experimental sciences but one can very well question the validity of induction. So even the scientific theories have these dialectical tensions but the scientists continue their journey in spite of the fact that they are aware of the problem of induction. So the philosophy must have an open mind even towards the opposing philosophies so that they together can engage in a journey towards the truth because the journey itself matters a lot. The opposing ideologies and philosophies are not engaged in destroying each other because the other is a co-traveller not an enemy.

Today in a world, which becomes more and more dogmatic, fundamentalist and vulnerable to the attacks of extremist groups Humean philosophy becomes more relevant and important. The traditional reading of Humean philosophy actually fails to explore this insight Hume offers which is nothing other than the very concept and method of philosophising and this method is more of a conversation and dialogue in a *careless manner* but not with carelessness or negligence.