

Analytical Contents

Preface

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I WAS HUME A CARTESIAN?

Hume is thought to have chosen La Flèche, in France, for the writing of the *Treatise* because, among other reasons, the Jesuit College there had become a stronghold of Cartesianism and hence the ideal place for an anti-Cartesian like Hume.

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Yet Hume's enthusiasm for the Doctrine of Ideas which he sometimes calls the famous discovery or the most profound philosophy, clearly indicates that he has adopted the basic principle of Cartesianism.

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He wanted to apply the famous discovery, responsible for the most revolutionary progress in physics, to moral philosophy. The doctrine could not be assimilated to a principle of subjectivism in epistemology or to emotivism in ethics. Hume is as dogmatic in moral philosophy as Descartes is in physics.

4

Hume is a positivist in moral philosophy. He wants to explain all social, moral and intellectual achievements in terms of cause and effect.

7

The doctrine of ideas and the experimental method are closely connected. To suppose that qualities are not in the objects is nothing but the principle that we must not go beyond experience and attribute to objects "qualities" we cannot experience.

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- The assumption that Hume could have formulated his famous distinction between demonstrative and matter of fact reasoning without having recourse to the doctrine of ideas is unfounded. 10
- The advantage of the analytic approach to the history of philosophy is that it considers the doctrine as an integral part of Hume's philosophy. 12
- According to analytic philosophers, the doctrine of ideas is a philosophical confusion arising from our misunderstanding of the nature of language: all Cartesians are accused of having adopted the ontology of occult mental entities. 15
- But Hume is also accused of something over and above what is generally attributed to Cartesians: he held the view that philosophy itself should be experimental. 16
- The analytic approach to the history of philosophy enlivens historical texts and yet the obsession with argument leads analytic historians to overlook the study of philosophical innovations. Hume, like Descartes before him, was not only interested in examining the nature of our intellect: he was also an innovator, a creator. 19
- Conceptual analysis systematically overlooks the historical context. Besides, it is incapable of studying conceptual revolutions. The history of philosophy is not only the history of conceptual continuity. 20
- Thomas Reid was almost Hume's contemporary, yet he also did not understand how far the doctrine of ideas was instrumental in defeating elements of animism and anthropomorphism which prevailed in pre-Cartesian philosophy. 24
- Hume's initial project was to defend Descartes' theory of a "transparent" mind against strange beliefs and superstitions. 25

II METHODIC DOUBT AND MITIGATED SCEPTICISM

- If Cartesianism is equated with the ontology of substance and its modification then Cartesianism was dead by the end of the 17th century. But if Cartesianism is regarded as the philosophy proclaiming the dualism of mind and body then it is, according to many modern commentators, still today the dominant doctrine among non-philosophers. 27
- Nevertheless, Hume seems nearer to us than Descartes. 28
- Some historians think that the Cartesian metaphysical system was not needed in order to defend the new physics against scholastic philosophy. 29
- And yet all agree that Descartes is responsible for the drastic change in Western philosophy. 30
- Cartesian ideas are taken to be concepts, while empiricist ideas are taken to be images, impressions, in short occurrences in the mind. Hence the difficulty in articulating Hume's Cartesianism. 31
- A study of the radical doubt of the First Meditation and the chapter on Academical or sceptical philosophy in Hume's *First Enquiry* may help us overcome the confusion created by conflicting interpretations. 35
- Hume's historical account of sceptical philosophy can be understood better if we compare its various historical stages with the various steps Descartes makes in the methodic doubt in the First Meditation. 37
- In both Descartes' methodic doubt and in Hume's radical scepticism a distinction is made between the realm of speculative thinking, where doubt is necessary because indispensable for reaching the truth, and the realm of action where doubt has no place. 43

Consequent scepticism is parasitical on any new development in the speculative sciences. Hume is not a consequent sceptic: on the contrary, he deplures the consequent scepticism of those who are against his theory of causality. 47

Modern science is, so far as commonsense is concerned, a complete negation of our naive beliefs. The doctrine of ideas as the basic method of the new physics rejects all commonsense beliefs which are animistic and anthropomorphic. 49

Mitigated scepticism is not a mild, moderate scepticism. It is based on the impossibility of reconciling with the help of reason the belief in matter of fact reasoning with the belief in the data of our senses. 51

Whether because of the method of analysis which Descartes thought he was using, or because of the doctrine of ideas, it is a fact that the concept of knowledge after Descartes is no longer what it was before him. 54

Descartes made us familiar with our mind, a "transparent" mind, in order to familiarise us with the new picture of a neutral, indifferent reality. 56

III PHILOSOPHY AND RHETORIC

It is difficult to reconcile the possibility of a Cartesian rhetoric with Descartes' adverse views of rhetoric 59

In his Answer to the Sixth Objections, Descartes admits that he is convinced but not persuaded by the logical and metaphysical argument concerning the distinction between mind and body. 63

Descartes is persuaded when he re-enacts the path followed while constructing his physics. In his scientific works he implicitly distinguished between the sentiment of heat and the cause of heat in the fire, between our perception of the movement of the falling stone and the actual movement of the stone: he refrained systematically from attributing to the stone the conscious seeking of the centre of the earth. 64

In spite of Descartes' preference for the method of analysis, it is difficult to understand how he could persuade himself, let alone his readers, by this method alone. 68

Rhetoric can mean either the actual power of language to influence us or the theory which explains the nature of this power. It may also mean the invention of new terms or of a new use of terms which could effectuate a change in our way of thinking. 69

In his new use of the term "idea" Descartes borrows from the algebraic notion of the variable used in the solution of equations, and also from the notion of "simple natures" in terms of which scientific explanations are formulated. 74

The new concept of an idea in the mind was not meant as a prolegomena to a science of mind but as a means to prevent human sentiments from interfering with the new concept of scientific objectivity. 77

IV DESCARTES' USE OF THE TERM "IDEA"

Descartes' metaphysical mode of presenting the principles of his new physics was dictated by the need to formulate in a traditional language a new philosophy as an alternative to the old scholastic philosophy. 81

In contrast to the metaphysical proof starting from first principles, the language of the *Regulae* and of *Le Monde* assumed the distinction between mind and body. 82

Nevertheless, Descartes shelved the manuscript of the *Regulae* and did not publish *Le Monde*. He must have felt that his philosophy of science in the *Regulae* was unconvincing and his physics in *Le Monde* was provoking. 85

In the *Regulae* "simple natures" are posited as theoretical entities in terms of which corporeal, mental and logical matters are explained. In the *Meditations* all explanations are ultimately in terms of mental simple natures. 90

When the simple natures in terms of which the mind is explained become "ideas" *tout court* Descartes has already incorporated in them: a) the property of being the criterion of what is and what is not accessible to the understanding, and b) the property of simple natures of being known *per se*. 97

Further, in order to familiarise the reader with the notion that the idea is the criterion of accessibility to the understanding, Descartes will fuse in the new use of the term "idea" both the notion of a theoretical entity needed for scientific explanations, and the notion of human sentiment of which we could not but be aware and which is distinct from the corporeal phenomenon causing it. 101

In sum, the path from the *Regulae* to the *Meditations* (and the *Principles* of course) is the path Descartes took in order to formulate his philosophy of science--a kind of scientific realism--through a conceptual reform which was needed to remove the scholastic unscientific mode of thinking. 107

Descartes asserted that ideas do exist. The existence of ideas is the ontological commitment presupposed by the distinction between thought and object. 112

The language of ideas was not conceived as a language which deals with a specific subject matter: ideas. It was a rhetorical invention --like the imaginary circles invented by astronomers--made to exclude the old notion of knowledge which assumed that "beings" in the object passed into the mind. 113

It is, however, important to distinguish between the language of ideas in its function of familiarising the readers with the speculative foundations of the new physics and its function in describing human behaviour. 115.

When modern "Cartesians" use the language of ideas (or anything standing for ideas) they drop the notion of a theoretical entity needed in an objective scientific picture of reality and remain with private subjective entities out of which the world--not knowledge--is constructed. 116

V THE CARTESIAN HUME

What was for Descartes the result of a protracted conceptual reform, the doctrine of ideas, became after him for all the partisans of the new physics the very definition of the scientific method. Cartesianism was, however, still in danger on account of the difficulties it encountered in dealing with the notion of power. 117

Descartes' reduction of the four causes to one, the efficient cause, and his rejection of the distinction between power and the exercise of power left the notion of cause as either mere sequence or as an occult power. 122

- Hume's innovation will consist in applying to the notion of power the analysis which Descartes applied to the notion of quality. The doctrine of ideas became: not only qualities but also powers are not in the body but are perceptions in the mind. 126
- To assume that causation is more than concomitancy is to commit the error of assuming something in the object *over and above* what is present and accessible to the understanding. 128
- The sceptical solution of the doubts concerning the logical validity of reasoning from experience is to stop the systematic scepticism caused by assuming a mysterious power, unknowable on principle. 129
- The difference between Russell's doubts about induction and Hume's doubts about matter of fact reasoning is as follows: Russell's doubts impugn the objective validity of scientific knowledge, while Hume's doubts, by chasing anthropomorphism out of its last hiding place, guarantee the objective validity of science. 131
- "Impression" is a new use of an old term in the philosophy of Hume. It is introduced in order to stress the difference between the speculative level of the understanding and the practical level of action and belief. 136
- Our use of the expression "matter of fact" is different from Hume's: Hume reserves the expression matter of fact knowledge only to conclusions of what he calls matter of fact reasoning. Direct perception and memory do not end in matter of fact knowledge. 138
- When the mystery is taken out of the notion of causal necessity the difficulties inherent in the notion of substance and in the relation between mind and body are removed. 141

VI HUMEAN ETHICS

Hume's treatment of ethics is conceived within the scope of the experimental method for two reasons: 1) in order to avoid the illusion of projecting moral distinctions on the action, and 2) more positively, in order to find the foundation of the idea of justice in a universal tendency of mankind. 143

Hume is aware that the application of the speculative principle--the doctrine of ideas--already so successful in physics to moral matters is fraught with difficulties: morality is more a matter of practice than of speculation. 145

Even before he starts dealing with ethics directly, Hume settles the problem of the nature of social cohesion in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries*. Rejecting the doctrine of liberty, he concludes that natural and moral evidence cement together to form one chain of arguments. 146

Thus the doctrine of ideas and the doctrine of necessity are two facets of the same method: the experimental method. 147

The doctrine of ideas leads him to consider moral distinctions as a matter of feeling. The doctrine of necessity leads him to view moral standards as founded in the general inclinations of mankind. 148

Rules of justice as well as superstitious customs are similar in not being grounded in the nature of the forbidden act. They are however dissimilar in their consequences: the first are useless to society while the second are useful and even indispensable to society. 149

So far as the understanding is concerned, explanation must end in something known *per se* (simple natures, ideas). Similarly, so far as moral distinctions or taste is concerned, something must be commended for its own sake. 152

There is a fundamental difference between emotivist theories of ethics and Hume's insistence that moral distinctions are a matter of feeling. While the first end in admitting the lack of objectivity of moral standards, Hume's theory implies the quasi permanence of moral standards.	155
The rules of justice derive their objectivity from human nature and from matter of fact reasoning based on the observation of a great number of men.	157
It is obvious that both morality and literature have a great influence in preserving our anthropomorphic habits of transforming the objective and indifferent world of objects into a world of familiar, not indifferent objects.	161
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