THE RHETORIC OF DAVID HUME'S *ENQUIRY*: ENACTING MITIGATED SKEPTICISM IN THE SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT

by

ALEXANDER W. MORALES

(Under the Direction of Thomas Lessl)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation project examines how David Hume accommodated his mitigated skepticism to public audiences during the Scottish Enlightenment. It contends that Hume's rhetorical efficacy lay in his ability to translate complex ideas for lay readers, but also in his ability to refashion the public's relationship to scientific, religious, and political institutions. This close-textual analysis of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* thus explores Hume's enactments of skepticism through discourses that addressed issues of public concern such as professional hubris, Deistic reactions to religious fundamentalism, and Britain's declining oratorical standards and political censorship. Chapter Two conceptualizes skepticism by reviewing its two traditions of Sophism and Pyrrhonism. This chapter examines skepticism's historical bearing upon rhetoric, establishing a framework for understanding the rhetorical nature of Hume's mitigated skepticism in the *Enquiry*. Chapter Three then examines Hume's mitigated skepticism as enacted through an ethos that refashioned science's public identity by appealing to the virtues of England's emerging scientific community. This chapter also shows how Hume refashions moral philosophy through a series of argumentation patterns and stylistic choices that subverted the Enlightenment's obsession with certitude. Chapter Four interprets Hume's notable

essay “Of Miracles” as a response to the exigency of rational Christianity, a movement that used Enlightenment science to justify religious belief. In doing so, this chapter shows how Hume repurposes Baconianism to articulate a rationale for divorcing the concerns of science and religion while also attempting to liberate secular inquiry from clerical interference. Chapter Five argues that Hume needed to verbalize the transcendent dimension of classical eloquence, a rhetorical maneuver that I call *discursive transcendence* that sidesteps the rhetorical limitations of his own empiricist philosophy and avoids the political consequences of critiquing national governments. By comparing the *Enquiry* with the essay “Of Eloquence,” Chapter Five explains how Hume achieves the same kind of transcendent meaning as classical eloquence by using alternative rhetorical strategies. Finally, Chapter Six reviews the major findings of this dissertation and discusses the project’s implications.

INDEX WORDS: Epistemology, empiricism, public communication, Enlightenment philosophy, Scottish moral philosophy, rhetorical studies

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2023

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May 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Dr. Thomas Lessl for his unwavering support, unparalleled intellect, and masterful editorial advice. Without question, asking Dr. Lessl to be my advisor was one of the best decisions that I have made in my graduate career. His suggestions and feedback played a major role in the development of this project, and I am extremely grateful that he agreed to serve as my dissertation advisor. Working with Dr. Lessl has not only made me a better writer and scholar, but his humility and generosity has, dare I say, made me a better person. I can only hope that my dissertation will prove worthy of him.

I also want to thank Drs. Barbara Biesecker and Bjørn Stillion Southard for serving as members of my dissertation committee. I am especially grateful to Dr. Stillion Southard for his invaluable advice and constant encouragement, and to Dr. Biesecker for her guidance and for instilling in me the confidence to not shy away from difficult theoretical questions. Ultimately, this project has greatly benefitted from their probing questions and constructive criticism.

In addition, I want to express my gratitude to my graduate colleagues at the University of Georgia and the University of South Florida. Their support and friendship over the years has meant more to me than I could possibly express in this brief acknowledgement.

Finally, I want to thank my family for their continued support over these many years. To my parents, siblings, and grandparents—without your encouragement and generosity, I would not have been able to write this dissertation or even attend graduate school. You are all the reason that I have made it this far. To Kelsey, my partner in crime—not only have you supported me through every hardship that I have faced during graduate school, but your kindness and

compassion continues to inspire me. You have believed in me even in the moments when I doubted myself, and for that, I am forever grateful. I am unbelievably lucky to have you in my life. You are absolutely incredible, and I hope you know just how much I love and appreciate you. It is unclear what the future has planned, but I know that we will face the unknown together.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

David Hume's philosophical ideas clashed with the conventions and social forces of his time in ways that, by and large, made the Scottish Enlightenment part-and-parcel of modernity. But as Hume's biographer, Ernest Campbell Mossner, observed, "it was Hume's distinctive, if not his unique, feature that while seeking to revolutionize the study of human nature, he never lost sight of the understanding of the general public" (2001, 3). By nearly all accounts, Hume's distinction as a *literary man* came from his ability to weld philosophy and history together with literature (Hanvelt 2012; Harris 2015).[1] "Like his earlier counterpart of the Renaissance," Mossner adds, "the ideal [literary man] of the Enlightenment might still take all knowledge as his province; but, for the first time in the history of mankind, his circle of readers was enlarged to include the majority of the public" (2001, 3). Hume's attentiveness to the demands and expectations of his public audience made him, as his acquaintance James Boswell chronicled, "the greatest writer in Britain" (1928, 130). Hume's literary distinction was also the view of several anonymous admirers (Box 2014; Fieser 1996; Jessop 1938). Following Hume's death, one insisted that he "was considered as the greatest writer of the age," later adding that even Hume's "most insignificant performances were sought after with avidity" (Box 2014, 3). Hume's

[1] The "literary man" or "man of letters" distinction was given to literary scholars, which during Hume's time included philosophy and general learning. According to Mossner, "Hume implied his ability to think and to present his thoughts in writing on nearly all intellectual subjects. It is further to be remarked that Moral Philosophy as studied at the Scottish universities in the eighteenth century was devoted to man and his multifarious activities, including—to employ modern terminology—metaphysics, psychology, ethics, political theory and history, social institutions, rhetoric, literary criticism and history, and aesthetics." See Ernest Campbell Mossner. 1950. "Philosophy and biography: the case of David Hume." *The Philosophical Review* 59 (2): 190.

literary talent, coupled with his grasp of the public mind, demonstrates his proficiency and greatness as a rhetorician.

Hume cared deeply about the effectiveness of his communication and worked meticulously to perfect the quality of his prose (Potkay 1991, 1994). The insights gleaned from a rhetorical investigation of his philosophical treatises should, for this reason, prove just as enlightening as his provocative conclusions about politics, morality, and epistemology. It was common in the early modern period for philosophers and theologians to regard their methods of persuasion just as important as the content of their discourse. "If we compare different editions of [Hume's] work," Neil Mcarthur writes, "we can see that he obsessed endlessly about points of style, correcting and recorrecting the texts over the course of decades" (Mcarthur 2014, 508). Perturbed by his yearning for literary perfection, Hume even attributed the weak reception of his first book to stylistic negligence and its hasty publication: "I had always entertained a Notion, that my want of Success, in Publishing the Treatise of Human Nature, had proceeded more from the manner than the matter; and that I had been guilty of a very usual Indiscretion, in going to the Press too early" (Hume 1932, 3). It is well known that Hume publicly disowned his *Treatise* and even requested that, as John Nelson posits, "no one henceforth consult it as representing his thoughts" (1972, 333). Hume eventually rectified this professional shortcoming by refashioning his earlier ideas in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, a work that appeared in ten editions in his lifetime. Hume even affirmed, prior to the release of the tenth edition, that "it [*Enquiry*] is now brought to as great a degree of accuracy as I can attain; and [that it] is probably much more labor'd…than any other production in our language" (1977, x; see Steinberg 1977). A comparison of the *Enquiry* with his *Treatise* indicates that it was not only Hume's philosophy that was transformed over the course of his life, but also the creative ways in which he expressed

his ideas. Ultimately, then, the objective of Hume's writing was persuasion and in order to be successful, writes Michael Morrisroe, he needed to "combine subject and style in a manner befitting the prejudices of his audience" (1969, 121).

Public audiences are never homogeneous, however, and for Hume the case was no different; he needed to communicate controversial ideas in ways that persuaded his diverse readership during a period of significant social and intellectual change. Hume's rhetoric also formed within the polemical and mordacious landscape of the broader-European Enlightenment, an intellectual scene that pressured him to adapt his arguments to the language of his milieu. For instance, Hume repudiated church authority by pointing out the fallibility of the clergy, but his inclusion of religious language safeguarded him from appearing as an overt opponent of Christianity. And yet, Hume's attacks on the legitimacy of miracles and revelation made his skepticism conspicuous, thus enabling him to appeal to the French Enlightenment's anti-religious culture (Berman 1983; Colman 2014; Robertson 1997). Taken together, these opposing elements suggest an ingenious quality in Hume's writing, a rhetorical approach that enhanced the applicability of his ideas for individuals with variant discursive needs and expectations.

Despite his self-conscious preoccupation with persuasion (i.e., his commitment to accommodation and effective expression), studies of Hume's philosophical and political corpus have paid little attention to these rhetorical patterns. Likewise, they have failed to consider how Hume's argumentation and literary style influenced the reception of his ideas. This dissertation acknowledges the extensive interdisciplinary research conducted on Hume's writings about eloquence (Box 2014; Hanvelt 2012; Potkay 1991, 1994), but it also recognizes that Hume's distinction as a communicator remains understudied. As such, neither the philosophical literature

on Hume nor historical studies on his place in the Scottish Enlightenment sufficiently account for the rhetorics that sustain *Humean thought.*

This project thus examines the ways in which Hume adapted his philosophical ideas to a public with diverse and conflicting predispositions. It does so by undertaking a close textual analysis of Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* along with selected passages from his *Treatise* and notable essay, "Of Eloquence." Its aim is to understand the practical and symbolic dynamics of his scientific epistemology and mitigated skepticism. More specifically, this project analyzes how Hume enacts skepticism through discourses that reorient a public's attitude toward knowledge, a feat that mobilizes public doubt in ways that create opportunities for new ways of thinking. Given that *Enquiry* represents Hume's efforts to restate the failed arguments advanced in the earlier *Treatise,* analyzing its means of persuasion should enable us to understand how Hume's rhetorical craftsmanship evolved over the course of his life. In particular, I contend that *Enquiry* was fashioned to achieve a kind of creative ambiguity that allowed otherwise conflicting groups of readers to accept Hume's philosophy. That atheists and clergyman as well as scientistic thinkers and Protestant theologians all found utility in Hume's writing bespeaks the workings of a sophisticated rhetoric, a discursive form that reconciled conflicting views in ways that were praised for contrary reasons. In this regard, I maintain that a close textual analysis of *Enquiry* offers a way to illuminate how the fundamental operations of Hume's rhetoric accommodated his message for these diverse readers. I hold that *Enquiry's* polysemic capacity results from Hume's intentional efforts to put multiple meanings in play within the text. By focusing on the rhetorical construction of *Enquiry* this project explores two questions about Hume's persuasive communication:

First: How was Hume able to challenge the philosophical orthodoxy of his time in ways that were socially intelligible to his audience?

Second: How was Hume's *Enquiry* able to achieve a creative ambiguity leading some audiences to read it as a scientistic philosophy and others to read it as a religious one?

This introductory chapter develops a conceptual framework for answering these questions. Section One examines literature applicable to my focus on Hume's accommodation of his message (i.e., his empirical epistemology and mitigated skepticism) for public audiences. Section Two provides a brief explanation of Hume's empirical philosophy, particularly those ideas expressed in *Treatise* and *Enquiry*. Beyond simply providing this information, this account will elucidate a rationale for studying the rhetoric of Hume's *Enquiry*. I will explain and justify my methodology in Section Three and provide a description of each chapter in Section Four.

Section One: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to cultivate an informed understanding that is at once critical and appreciative of the role rhetoric played in the production and circulation of Hume's scientific philosophy. Because of his present-day stature as a scientific philosopher, Hume's philosophical corpus is frequently recognized for its profound grasp of the foundations, methods, and implications of science. My contention that Hume used rhetoric to advance his scientific philosophy may, for this reason, trouble some scholars who, as Bruno Latour observed, consider "rhetoric [as] a fascinating albeit despised discipline," as something that obstructs science rather than promotes it (1987, 30). Emphasizing Hume's use of rhetoric, however, is not to diminish his scientific philosophy as such, but, as David Depew and John Lyne note, to "take seriously the role of rhetorical choices" for the advancement of scientific ideas (2013, 1). In the argot of

rhetorical studies, we might say that Hume employs a scientific rhetoric, although I suspect that restraining and delimiting Hume's persuasive communication with this label risks overlooking the complex, non-scientific strategies that he often utilizes to gain acceptance for his ideas. Nevertheless, rhetoricians of science since the 1970s have been concerned with science's public face and offer a myriad of approaches for understanding the rhetorical patterns that sustain scientific ideas in public life.

Most notably, rhetorical scholars over the last several decades have demonstrated that prototypical scientific texts that attempt to establish scientific truths are amenable to rhetorical scrutiny (Harris 2018, 2020). "On the whole," Leah Ceccarelli writes, rhetoricians of science "have done an excellent job of showing that rhetorical analysis *can* provide novel and intriguing commentary on the prototypical scientific text and its place in history" (2001, 3). Without adopting the totalizing view that science is "*merely* rhetoric," Ceccarelli argues that "most of those who read this literature recognize that scientists are indeed advocates for their own theories" and that successful scientists are often those individuals "who can couch their findings in terms that are most persuasive to their peers" (2001, 3). Though this understanding is today widely accepted by rhetorical scholars, too often Hume's scientific philosophy, and Enlightenment philosophy generally, is romanticized in ways that nullify its rhetorical significance (Millgram 1995; Capaldi 1992). The insights garnered from rhetoric of science literature challenge the shortsightedness of this view and provide the necessary tools for closely reading Hume's scientific philosophy to uncover its use of rhetoric.

For this reason, this review of literature draws heavily from rhetoric of science scholarship as well as historical and philosophical investigations of the Scottish Enlightenment. More specifically, it explores work pertaining to three areas pertinent to this dissertation: the

persuasion of scientific giants, cultural grammars used as rhetorical resources, and the polysemic function of texts. Though each theme is developed separately, I intend to synthesize them within the conceptual framework that will guide my analysis of Hume's work.

The Persuasion of Scientific Giants

In *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric of Science,* Randy Allen Harris traces the ways late-twentieth century rhetoricians have applied rhetorical criticism to scientific texts (Harris 2018, 2020).[2] "Giants of Science" is a phrase Harris uses to represent an early strain of this work; namely "investigations of the suasive (in)achievement of scientific giants, individuals whose accomplishments have stamped their respective sciences in epoch-defining ways" (2018, 23). This theme in rhetoric of science literature, Harris adds, was essential to the transition in rhetorical studies "from the agent-centered traditions of rhetorical criticism to more social, material, and genre-oriented approaches" (2018, 23). Such work—including research by John Angus Campbell, Alan Gross, and S. Michael Halloran—investigates the interplay between the rhetorical choices of scientific giants and their social milieus (Campbell 1987; Gross 1988; Halloran 1984).

John Angus Campbell, for instance, demonstrates the value of rhetoric for investigating science in his pioneering work on Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (Campbell 1970, 1975, 1986, 1987). More specifically, Campbell's work merges the speaker-centered, neo-Aristotelian perspective (i.e., rhetoric as effective expression) with a conception of rhetoric as a

[2] For more information on Harris's anthologies, see Morales, Alexander William. 2022. "Why Didn't I Pick a Fight About X?: An Inquisitive Response to Harris." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 11 (1): 1-6; Morales, Alexander William. 2021. "An X Too Far: A Review of Randy Alan Harris's Landmark Essays on Rhetoric of Science: Case Studies and Issues and Methods." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 10 (5): 20-24. For Harris's responses, see Harris, Randy Allen. 2022. "Everybody Stands Ready for eXcetera: Rhetoric of Science meets the Pickwick Papers; or A Humble Reply to Morales (and Gruber and Pietrucci)." Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective 11 (4): 26-50; Harris, Randy Allen. 2021. "X Marks the Spot: An Appreciative Response to Morales's Review of Landmark Essays on Rhetoric of Science: Case Studies and Issues and Methods." Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective 10 (9): 61-67.

social-level theory that, as Celeste Condit writes, "focuses on ideology, ethics, or various versions of place" (2019, 181). In other words, Campbell's analysis hinges on an understanding of Darwin's creative artistry as a response to the social forces acting upon him. For this reason, Campbell's work contrasts rhetoric and science, a choice that also contrasts artistic expression and social context. Indeed, Campbell's work has shown that Darwin's technical scientific language was only one of his means of persuasion. His *Origin of Species* also made the theory of evolution by natural selection palatable by satisfying the social expectations of his nineteenth-century audience. "To claim that Darwin was a rhetorician," Campbell argues, "is not to dismiss his science, but to draw attention to his accommodation of his message to the professional and lay audience whose support was necessary for its acceptance" (1987, 45). As Harris further states, Campbell interprets accommodation in Darwin's rhetoric as denoting how he "marshaled his evidence, managed his ethos, and molded his argument to the scientific and religious expectations of the day" (Harris 2018, 22).

Campbell's work also reveals Darwin's ability to mask his rhetorical artistry and downplay the purely speculative aspects of his scientific observations. "Commonly overlooked," Campbell writes, "is that [Darwin] persuaded his peers and the wider community by using plain English words and plain English thoughts" (1987, 45). The simplicity of Darwin's perspicuous style indicates one aspect of his accommodation, the ability to temper or rather conceal features of his theory under the guise of plain language. Darwin realized that detection of his artistry could serve as the reason for rejecting his ideas. To this point, Campbell writes: "Darwin minimized his literary gifts. He also minimized his formidable theoretical power. Darwin's dismissal of his own colorful language and deemphasizing of the hard, sustained theoretical work behind his theory are connected" (1987, 47). Darwin's suasive achievements can thus be

attributed to the sophisticated ways in which his rhetoric accommodated his revolutionary science by guising it under the social conventions and perspicuous style of Victorian culture.

Similarly, Alan Gross's examination of *Opticks* demonstrates the discursive ways in which Isaac Newton adapted his optical theory to satisfy the prevailing understandings of science and philosophy advanced in Rene Descartes's *Discourse on Method* (Gross 1988). Prior to Newton, scientific explanations of optics typically assumed, on Cartesian grounds, that reason, not experience, was epistemologically prior (Gaukroger 1980). Gross argues that Newton's earlier attempts to challenge Cartesian optics failed because he overtly gave "epistemological priority to experiment over rational intuition," upending a central presupposition of Cartesian science (Gross 1988, 60). In other words, Newton's earlier scientific papers failed to overturn the Cartesian view partly because he plainly emphasized the stark differences between his theory and Descartes's. Though Newton's scientific ideas were indeed revolutionary, his persuasive efforts were largely ineffective, as Gross later argues,

> Newton's explanation of light did not give a full account of its origin, an account that included the operation of its material cause. A startling claim, a new method, a different, more restrictive, style of explanation—seemingly, Newton needed to discharge a strong burden of proof. But in this early paper on light and color, in a rhetoric as transparent as that of Descartes, Newton did not discharge this burden; instead, he emphasized his conflict with traditional views and methods (Gross 1988, 60).

Gross concludes that *Opticks*, Newton's second persuasive attempt, was successful "solely by means of its rhetoric, by means of its strict Euclidean form, its striking experimental presence, its provocative speculations" (1988, 72). By replacing the rhetoric of discontinuity that emphasized Newton's epistemological differences with a rhetoric of continuity that built from traditional assumptions, Newton was able to mask his radical departure using language familiar to his audience.

More specifically, Gross links the persuasive success of *Opticks* to Newton's use of arrangement, presence, and rhetorical questions. First, Gross demonstrates that the use of Euclidian form allowed Newton to "display the present as a deductive consequence of the past" (1988, 69). This differs from Newton's earlier papers that use narrative to dramatize the clash between the Cartesian theory of optics with his own empirical explanation. Second, *Opticks's* use of meticulous and excessive detail created presence for Newton's experimental method, an observation that applies the argumentation theory of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, 67-70). And third, the dissociation between science and speculation made possible by his use of rhetorical questions gave Newton permission to "speculate about mechanism so long as those speculations are not confused with science" (1988, 71). Newton's rhetoric thus masks a radical departure from Cartesian science by inventing a sense of coherence and continuity that does not actually exist.

In his essay "The Birth of Molecular Biology" (1984), S. Michael Halloran, another pioneer in the rhetorical study of scientific giants, examines James Watson and Francis Crick's essay *The Double Helix* from 1953. Perhaps the most iconic twentieth-century scientific document, Watson and Crick's paper sketches the first double helical structure of the DNA molecule. Halloran argues that the suasive success of *The Double Helix* is due to its ability to establish an ethos, "a characteristic manner of holding and expressing ideas, rooted in a distinctive understanding of the scientific enterprise" (1984, 78). Halloran gives ethos a broader scope than that found in Aristotle's description as persuasion through character. Consciously echoing Edwin Black, Halloran means by ethos those specific beliefs that sustain a scientific community. He argues that such a communal identity may rest equally on what Black describes

as "stylistic proclivities and the qualities of mental life of which those proclivities are tokens" (1978, 85).

Halloran's insights bear upon the accommodation function of rhetoric. Specifically, Halloran demonstrates how Watson and Crick effectively utilize argumentation patterns like enthymeme to create a sense of novelty and confidence. For instance, their initial lack of experimental evidence was shrouded by their ability to create a sense of elegance when describing the structure of DNA—the mechanism by which the two helical chains are bound together—leaving the reader to assume the empirical soundness of their theory. Likewise, Halloran shows how Watson and Crick communicated a sense of supreme confidence by leaving implicit certain aspects of their argument. By "confidence" Halloran means an effect of enthymeme, the impression that certain things need not be discussed because they are overwhelmingly supported by scientific evidence. For instance, Halloran maintains that when Watson and Crick claim that the proposed model is of "considerable biological interest," they advance an enthymeme suggesting that the actual "arguments in support of the model are assumed to be so persuasive that they need no bolstering of emphasis" (1984, 81). A sense of confidence, then, is created when prominent scientists or scientific writers leave certain premises unstated or ambiguous.

Campbell, Gross, and Halloran effectively demonstrate how distinguished scientists gain acceptance of their ideas through accommodation, intentional efforts to tailor their messages to broader public audiences. However, each of these authors also recognize the significance of situational constraints and the importance of discursive resources that scientific writers exploit in order to successfully advance their ideas. Thus, I turn my attention in the next section to

scholarship that accounts for the utilization of cultural grammars that both constrain and enable rhetoric's accommodating function.

Cultural Grammars as Rhetorical Resources

The persuasive achievements of scientific rhetors are often due to their exploitation of cultural grammars. To make their arguments socially intelligible, in other words, they must exploit shared structures of meaning making. Persuasion involves a process of invention, as Robert Ivie puts it, whereby rhetors locate "culturally plausible premises for crafting …arguments," (2015, 50). The process by which scientific writers exploit and modify cultural grammars also requires consideration of what Donald Cushman and Gerard Hauser describe as the "determinate relations between historical situations, competing courses of action, and axiological systems capable of motivating [audiences]" (1973, 326). Sharon Kirsch likewise understands the importance of cultural grammars as inventive or generative resources that enable rhetors "to elucidate, to make our ideas clear…to get the right words to represent the ideas in an individual mind" (2008, 284). Even revolutionary scientific breakthroughs—such as Newton's *Opticks* or Darwin's *Origin of Species*—need to be socially intelligible in order to be paradigm shifting. It is for this reason that each of the aforementioned rhetoricians—Campbell, Gross, and Halloran—recognize that cultural grammars or rhetorical resources are important *available means* of persuasion for scientific rhetors.

As previously stated, my investigation of Hume draws upon the foundational explorations of how individual efforts of rhetoric worked to establish scientific claims. Thomas Lessl's (2012) *Rhetorical Darwinism: Religion, Evolution, and the Scientific Identity* is concerned with a broader challenge, ongoing efforts to build science's public identity that have appropriated available cultural frameworks. Lessl, for example, examines how Francis Bacon successfully

worked science into the millenarian narrative brought into play by the Protestant Reformation. The scientistic movement he helped to launch closely identified science with these church reforms and thus creatively entangled science with an emerging Protestant social order. Bacon recognized that the new experimental science needed to accord within the normative frameworks of this society. This required a rhetoric capable of harmonizing science with an emerging Protestant view of history, one that endured even as science became secularized in later centuries so that, as Lisa Keränen writes, "these religious forms may be obscured in contemporary public memory" (2014, 493).

As a rhetorician, Bacon needed to address tacit religious objections to science. But for the most part he adopted an offensive strategy for treating the science-religion relationship by exploiting the preexisting tendency "of the more powerful religious culture to turn science to its own ends" (Lessl 1996, 380). Lessl further maintains that "science could not have universal meaning except by being fashioned as acting within a narrative that encompassed the whole of history" (2012, 51). This meant that Bacon needed to refashion natural philosophy as an extension of clerical study, the investigation of God's creation, thus relating science to a millenarian narrative that gave it purpose as part of salvation history. It is not surprising then that "modern science first gained a firm professional foothold in the largely Protestant societies of Northern Europe where religious authority, being less centralized, was less able to influence the course of scientific work" (1996, 384). The scientific enterprise that emerged during this period resulted, not from any separation from religion, but from "the ideological allegiance that the scientific culture formed with the Protestant movement" (1996, 384). A significant feature of this development was an emerging identification between the Protestant ideal of biblical hermeneutics and the scientific ideal of empirically based inquiry.

Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* attempted such identification by upending the tacit assumption that science had little intrinsic religious value. "What was thought to be a fundamental tension between science and religion," Lessl writes, "was in fact a distortion that could be put down to moral failing" (2012, 51). Religionists believed that scripture discouraged natural inquiry, but Bacon rejected this view as a facile judgment reflecting the "zeal and jealousy of divines," and argued instead that science and Christian theology were two branches of the same cultural and intellectual heritage (Bacon 1968, 264). By depicting an allegiance between religion and science as the more orthodox view, Bacon managed to set the stage for science's reintegration into the broader Protestant rewriting of religious history. As Catholic thinkers had done since the time of the Church Fathers, Bacon allied science and religion by appealing to a "two books" trope, the idea that clerics read the "book of God's Word" (i.e., the Bible) and scientists the "book of God's works" (i.e., nature). However, he interpreted this, now in light of the reformers' doctrine of *sola scriptura*, to support the notion that experimental science was the natural philosophical counterpart to this back-to-the-Bible movement. But while this made the new science an ally of the Reformation, it also established science's independence from divinity and philosophy. Insofar as empiricism brought the same perspicuity to the "book of God's works" that Protestant hermeneutics brought to the Bible, science no longer needed to take its marching orders from either philosophers or theologians. Empiricism thus ensured "that science would not be overly preoccupied with the conditions of its own epistemological vitality" (Lessl 1996, 385). God spoke directly through nature, ultimately nullifying the need for philosophical introspection. In this way, Lessl maintains, Bacon "confuses the identities of religion and philosophy in a selective way that preserves the autonomy of science while also veiling it in religious authority" (1996, 385).

Bacon's rhetoric put in motion a discursive pattern that merged the conventions of science and religion while also setting the stage for science's independence from faith. This rhetoric created a sense of continuity between the past and present, tempered the radical philosophical implications of Bacon's empirical epistemology, and shifted the basis for comprehension from natural theology to natural science. Bacon accommodated his revolutionary science, in other words, to a rising Protestant culture by appropriating that culture's rhetorical grammar.

Lessl's interpretation is consistent with Campbell's finding that "popular science gains its moral authority from its suppressed religious grammar" shaped by Bacon (Campbell 1986, 369). This Baconian grammar, however, endured long after Bacon fell out of fashion by being repurposed, as both Lessl and Campbell argue, in the nineteenth-century—now by scientists who were "exploiting Baconian categories to show the intelligibility of a worldview everyone thought the rules of the cultural grammar had excluded" (1986, 352). When we examine from a rhetorical perspective the naturalistic shift launched by Darwinian evolution, we find evidence for Campbell's argument that "epochal transformations in human self-understanding always subsume earlier patterns as the ground of their intelligibility" (1986, 364). Thus, Baconianism endured as "the *lingua franca* of mid-Victorian science," not only for "professional philosophers of science but among the religious public as well" (1986, 352).

This has enabled religious patterns of thought to persist even in discourse that is patently hostile to faith. For example, Lessl's analysis of the anti-clerical Marquis de Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un Tableau historique des Progrès de l'esprit humain* demonstrates his application of Baconian categories to social theory (2012, 105-119; see Condorcet 1955). By highlighting Condorcet's employment of narrative structures similar to those found in Bacon's works, Lessl

argues that Condorcet "applied to society at large a displaced version of a religious narrative that already featured scientific actors as history's protagonists. "This Enlightenment transposition," Lessl adds, "while designed to craft a vision for the renewal of European civilization, imitated the millenarian features of the Baconian model" (2012, 40). Lessl goes on to trace Baconian influences in the era of classical positivism. For instance, following Condorcet's claim that the historical plan of progress matured through science was Henri de Saint-Simon's proclamation "that he had discovered a scientific explanation of history's scientific progression" (2012, 40). Shortly thereafter came Auguste Comte, who not only popularized the pronouncements of his mentor, Saint-Simon, but also "proposed to substitute positive science for the Catholic worldview that the revolution had torn down" (2012, 40). These scientistic aspirations found a more nuanced expression in the efforts of Thomas Huxley to professionalize science. On this point, Lessl writes:

> One of the lesser-known hallmarks of Huxley's rhetorical career was his perennial jousting with English positivists, a group of prominent intellectuals who coveted his endorsement. The positivists had good reason to regard Huxley as one of their own. His scientific oratory rang with similar ideals of scientism and naturalism, and he was a close friend and intellectual ally of Herbert Spencer—who came as close as any British writer to inventing an indigenous version of French positivism. But what drove Huxley as a public actor was his keen sensitivity to science's deficient patronage, and while positivism had drawn much of its ideological inspiration from the natural sciences, it also threatened to replace England's older clerical hierarchy with a new one governed by sociological priests (Lessl 2012, 41).

Lessl's tracing of the Baconian grammar in the emergence of French positivism extends Campbell's initial observation that Bacon's inductivist empiricism aligned science with the Reformers' ideal of sola scriptura. Specifically, Lessl argues that it is from Bacon's new millenarian vision of history that Condorcet, Comte, and Spencer got the notion that science is the engine of civilized progress. This dissertation seeks to build upon this research by showing how Hume exploits the epistemological side of the Baconian grammar.

While English scientists found rhetorical success in adopting a Baconian grammar, it was indeed Scottish philosophers who, by popularizing Bacon and Newton, strengthened the alliance between empirical science and piety (Bozeman 1977; Hull 1973). Thomas Reid and James Beattie, for example, were among the most active contributors to Scottish Common-Sense philosophy, a movement heavily influenced by Bacon and Newton. "While the general verdict of history has not been friendly to the Philosophy of Common Sense as philosophy," Campbell writes, "as a cultural rhetoric its importance for understanding the philosophical and scientific universe of discourse in England and America…is difficult to exaggerate" (1986, 355). Reid, in particular, developed a Scottish grammar that established the meaning of chief scientific concepts and delimited the relationship between the spheres of religion and science (Reid, 1863). Accomplishing this required a modification of the dominant cultural grammars, which for Reid was the Baconian grammar and the Scottish philosophical tradition previously established by David Hume. Though Reid's resolution in his own *Inquiry* was to criticize and reformulate Hume's skepticism, Campbell describes Reid's rhetoric as a "neo-Baconian grammar" that enabled him "to combine a dynamic view of science with a conservative view of religion" (1986, 355). This detail informs Campbell's main argument that "Darwin relied on the dominant Baconian grammar as filtered through Scottish realism to guarantee the correctness of his evolutionary interpretation" (1986, 366). Campbell concludes from this that Scottish philosophy significantly influenced science's rhetoric, writing that,

> Deploying a blend of Hume's phenomenalism with a sample of the fiercest sounding anti-hypothetical language he could cull from Bacon, Reid explained how true science was concerned solely with the description of phenomena—science, he held, could never penetrate beneath phenomena to the ultimate reality. Religion thus was safe, for science could only butt its inquisitive head against the wall of common sense consciousness but never penetrate to any reality more fundamental (Campbell 1986, 355).

Campbell's analysis makes evident that the Scottish Enlightenment played a substantial role in the reshaping of Baconian categories. However, Campbell's assessment of the Scottish philosophical tradition recognizes Hume only for his philosophical contributions, leaving Reid as the primary inventor of the Scottish cultural grammar. This informs Campbell's proposition that "when the memory of Hume began to fade and pressure was placed on the Scottish thinkers to account for the development of scientific knowledge, the essential, but polemically concealed, flexibility of Reid's position came to the fore" (1986, 357). My project challenges this view by maintaining that the flexibility Campbell recognizes in the Scottish cultural grammar came fundamentally from Hume. The lack of scholarly attention given to Hume's persuasive communication fuels this type of assessment, an error that this project, in part, seeks to address.

Strategic Ambiguity as Polysemic Textual Construction

In this final section of my literature review, I discuss rhetoric of science scholarship pertaining to the rhetorical concept polysemy. As previously stated, I postulate that *Enquiry* was fashioned in order to achieve a kind of creative ambiguity, a form of polysemy that allowed otherwise conflicting groups of readers to converge in approval over Hume's philosophy. The applicability of the term *polysemy* to this study bears upon the broad range of interpretations that Hume's ideas have been subject to since the eighteenth-century. For instance, the foremost analytic philosopher of the last century, A. J. Ayer, was a devout Humean. His promotion of logical positivism extended Hume's induction model of inquiry and empirical account of causation (Ayer 1946, 1-3). More specifically, Ayer extended his interpretation of Hume's philosophy by promoting the verification principle, the epistemological position that only statements verifiable through direct observation or logical proof have epistemic worth (1946, 5-11). Scholars who approach Hume through Ayer are inclined to suppose that Hume's philosophy

can be conflated with an influential neo-positivism that first appeared in Western philosophy in the 1920s (Kraal 2014; Tolman 2012).

That Hume is open to alternative interpretations is borne out by the work of Friedrich A. Hayek, a Humean whose interpretation starkly contrasts with Ayer's. Instead of viewing Hume's empirical epistemology as offering support for the neo-positivist belief that the limits of epistemology are coequal with the limits of science, Hayek situated Hume in the humanistic tradition as an advocate of epistemological prudence, the recognition that some things simply exceed the epistemic reach of human beings (Hayek 2007, 2010). Just as Ayer saw Hume as a naturalist bent on scientific imperialism, Hayek regarded Hume's empiricism as humanistic reserve, as a philosophy that tempered the overconfidence of the inquirer.

From a rhetorical perspective, I suggest that these different readings of Hume are best explained by the concept of *strategic ambiguity*, a rhetor-induced form of polysemy used to negotiate competing situational demands and audience expectations (Asen 2010; Hayden 2017; Joseph 2018). According to Ceccarelli, "strategic ambiguity…is likely to be planned by the author and results in two or more otherwise conflicting groups of readers converging in praise of the text" (1998, 404). "When used effectively by an author," Ceccarelli argues, "a polysemous passage can bring different audiences, for different reasons, to accept a message" (2001, 5). There are indeed several conceptual approaches for understanding how polysemous texts render multiple meanings (Condit 1989; Gaonkar 1989; Hall 1980; McKerrow 1989), but, as Ceccarelli further argues, it remains imperative to first analyze individual texts to "show exactly how they were designed to persuade specific audiences at particular moments in history to acknowledge the truth of their authors' theories" (2001, 3). For this reason, strategic ambiguity contingently places "the power over textual signification…with the author, who inserts [multiple] meanings

into the text and who benefits economically from the polysemic interpretation" (1998, 404). Examining Hume's accommodation of *Enquiry,* the ways he reconciles contrasting views and subverts aspects of his argument to please certain audiences, can reveal how he achieved a kind of ambiguity paramount to its success as a scientific and philosophical text. Without this understanding, the differences between the contrary readings of Hayek and Ayer, for example, are reduced to the error of miscommunication or simply misreading the text.

Interestingly, Ceccarelli argues that strategic ambiguity is a type of polysemy that is commonly used in the rhetoric of science. Specifically, her essay *Polysemy: Multiple Meanings in Rhetorical Criticism* uses Campbell's work on Darwin to demonstrate that strategic ambiguity is one of the means by which *Origins* achieves its persuasive success. Campbell, in fact, directly accounts for the polysemic rhetoric that allowed Darwin to

> accommodate two opposite intellectual and theological currents…One may come away from it and in perfect candor say with Huxley that natural selection is the 'death blow' to conventional theology, or one may in equal sincerity say with Kingsley that natural selection teaches us that God is so wise, He makes all things to make themselves (Campbell 1986, 22-3).

By creating a text that allowed for multiple positive assessments, Darwin was better able to promote his new evolutionary theory. Therefore, the study of message accommodation for public audiences reveals an essential source of *Origins'* polysemous possibilities.

Though Campbell recognizes that strategic ambiguity originates with the rhetor, there is still a need to account for polysemy that originates within the audience and social context. Ceccarelli's work effectively addresses this by taking into account the various ways in which a text is received. For instance, Ceccarelli's work on Theodosius Dobzhansky's promotion of a new evolutionary synthesis in *Genetics and the Origin of Species* shows how the text was both designed for and interpreted by target audiences. As an exemplar of rhetorical artistry,

Dobzhansky's *Genetics* represents "an integration of research in genetics and natural history that resulted in the modern interdisciplinary domain of evolutionary biology" (2001, 1). For Dobzhansky to synthesize these scholarly domains, Ceccarelli writes that,

> [Genetics] had to clearly and convincingly lay out the theory that supported the possibility of collaboration, it had to gather what was already known in different camps and weave those threads into a new and coherent pattern, it had to break down the conceptual barriers to unity between the biological camps, and it had to inspire each side to believe that cooperative action was in its own best interest (2001, 31).

Ceccarelli then demonstrates how the text was read differently by geneticists and natural historians by tracing in detail both the context and reception of the work by scientists. Ceccarelli's analysis accounts for the disciplinary differences that shaped these alternate readings, but her stance on polysemy nevertheless makes Dobzhansky the main architect of these polysemic possibilities. For this reason, she concludes that understanding the outcomes of strategic ambiguity as a form of polysemy must *start* by calculating how a rhetor brings "different audiences, through different paths, to a point of convergence in the acceptance of a text" (Ceccarelli 1998, 396).

Section Two: Hume's Philosophy

The previous section reviewed three themes that guide my analysis of Hume's *Enquiry* in the subsequent case study chapters—namely, his message accommodation, exploitation of the Baconian grammar, and strategic employment of ambiguity. This section provides a brief explanation of Hume's empirical philosophy, particularly the ideas first expressed in *Treatise* and amended in *Enquiry*. Beyond simply providing this information, this account will elucidate a rationale for studying the rhetoric of Hume's *Enquiry*. As previously stated, this section only offers a glimpse into Hume's philosophical ideas, and because of my limited scope, I will prioritize those ideas expressed in the essays analyzed later in this project.

Scientific Epistemology and Mitigated Skepticism

Hume is often regarded as a skeptic, a "destroyer of traditional beliefs rather than the founder of a new system" as Mary Calkins puts it (1925, 50). Hume's rejection of church authority and belief as well as his aggressive campaign against metaphysics make these accusations seem sensible (Hume 1977, 2000). Even during his lifetime, as David Fate Norton writes, many of Hume's contemporaries "were motivated to denounce him as a dangerous infidel and to characterize all his philosophy as essentially destructive" (2000, 13). Some critics even accused Hume of harboring a totalizing skepticism that denied the possibility of real or certain knowledge (Meeker 2014).

Hume was certainly a skeptic, but his skepticism was neither fundamental nor extreme. It would be more appropriate to describe Hume's doubtfulness as moderate and reasonable compared to other English contemporaries (Bennett, 1971). As a moderate skeptic, Hume refused all forms of supernatural speculation and instead claimed that knowledge came only from the study of history (i.e., social customs) and by observing human behavior. This was Hume's philosophical empiricism, a system grounded in the messiness of human experience and developed as an alternative to an *a priori* metaphysics.[3] Moreover, Hume's moral philosophy purported to directly challenge "popular superstitions" and resisted the confusing jargon and abstruseness of traditional philosophy (Hume 1977, 1-9). By refashioning what he called "the science of moral subjects," Hume attempted to "reject every system… however subtle or

[3] Though it is commonly claimed that first principles (i.e., metaphysics) are derived from *a priori* speculations that are independent of experience, this was not Aristotle's claim. He suggested in his *Physics* that first principles are known from subjective experiences (i.e., experience of the mind). However, Hume uses the term "metaphysics" to denote "abstract theory without any basis in reality." Throughout his *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, Hume even uses the terms "metaphysical" and "*a priori*" to represent opposing ideas as well as any "argument which is anyway abstruse" (See Treatise, xviii). I suggest that this is a rhetorical choice, a maneuver that will be examined later in this dissertation.

ingenious, which is not founded on fact or observation" (1977, 11). Hume's empirical worldview thus challenged the epistemic legitimacy of speculation and its accompanied rhetorics.

By and large, Hume's philosophical skepticism attempted to show that any attempt to compartmentalize and reduce human nature—to divide and overemphasize one mental faculty or aspect of social life above others—would inevitably fail to provide an accurate understanding of experience. Hume's "science of man," in other words, attempted to build a conception of human nature from the necessities of personal experiences. For example, both *Treatise* and *Enquiry* stressed the fact that humans were reasonable, social, and active beings. More precisely, Hume writes in *Enquiry* that

> *Man is a reasonable being*: and as such, receives from science his proper food and nourishment: But so narrow are the bounds of human understanding, that little satisfaction can be hoped for in this particular... *Man is a social being, no less than a reasonable being*: But neither can he always enjoy company agreeable and amusing, or preserve the proper relish for them. *Man is also an active being*: and from that disposition, as well as from the various necessities of human life, must submit to business and occupation: But the mind requires some relaxation, and cannot always support its bent to care and industry (Hume 1977, 3; Emphasis added).

Hume's skeptical empiricism advanced this holistic view of human beings in order to temper the excessive weight placed on reason by many of his contemporaries, a feature that is visible in all of Hume's writings about epistemology, morality, politics, and even about philosophy as a profession. Furthermore, Hume concludes from these observations that humans are meant to have a "mixed kind of life," an existence that is mediated through our rational capacity, our social encounters, and our vocations. But we should be careful, he warns, not to allow any of these "biases to *draw* too much so as to incapacitate them for other occupations and entertainments" (1977, 3). Put differently, Hume believed that we should refrain from indulging too much in any singular activity and strive for a balanced life. The same is true of our mental faculties (e.g., imagination, passion, reason, etc.), which collectively guide human understanding

and conduct. And the same must be true, Hume maintains, of philosophical inquiry, which should always strive for a holistic depiction of human existence. In this way, Hume encourages scholars to "indulge your science," but above all "let your science be human," which he claims is the only "direct reference to action and society." "Be a philosopher," he adds, "but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man" (1977, 3-4). These humanistic concerns are mentioned because they operate under the mode of ethos that I will examine later in this dissertation.

Generally speaking, Hume's ideas mark a significant transformation in the history of thought in that he abandoned many of the philosophical conceptions of the previous century. According to John Werner, "Hume was an empirical philosopher in the tradition of Locke and Berkeley, but, unhampered by theological scruples, Hume was able to draw empiricism out to its logical conclusion—skepticism" (1972, 440). What Hume's skepticism endeavored to show was that "the structure of reality could not be entered merely by rational insight" (1972, 440). Instead, Hume argued that human knowledge rested on *impressions* (i.e., knowledge received from sensory experience) and the reflections corresponding to impressions that he called *ideas.* In this regard, the Humean approach is empirical and inductive, meaning that it moves from specific observations of human behavior to broader generalizations about the limits of human knowledge. Hume's method—like that of Francis Bacon—begins with description of the requirements for making careful, systematic observations that are necessary to produce facts. Such facts are then discovered through our sensory experiences. And since impressions are for Hume the effects of sensory experience, they are thus irreducible and beyond the scope of rational introspection.

Experience was foundational for Hume's empirical epistemology, leading him to maintain that all knowledge should directly be grounded in observable human events. Any theory or belief that could not be verified in this way was judged to be abstruse and illegitimate.

Accordingly, this meant that in order to verify empirical knowledge, Hume needed to demonstrate, often through analogy and narrative, how a concept correlated to recognizable events in human history. He accomplishes this by utilizing the principle of "custom," which denotes "the great guide of human life," the propensity that allows all human beings to learn and make inferences from experience (1977, 29). As Werner further explains, "custom" is a word denoting "a psychological or social force" that binds together the "continuously changing aggregate of feelings [i.e., impressions]" (1972, 440). Custom is thus the great teacher because it is rooted in repeated experiences from which judgments about the world can be sensibly formed. As Hume writes in *Enquiry*, "it is that principle alone, which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom," he adds, "we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact, beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses" (1977, 29). Ultimately, Hume's empiricism led to a form of skepticism that relied solely on experience as the exclusive criteria for truth.

This form of skepticism created a rhetorical problem for Hume. According to D. G. C. MacNabb, Hume's dilemma was how "to use skepticism as to undermine theology and metaphysics, but safeguard science and secular morality" (1962, 5-6). In other words, Hume needed to temper his denunciation of speculation in order to avoid falling prey to his own argument. Similarly, Werner concludes that "[Hume] realized that such absolute skepticism was not practical since he had used reasoning to come to the conclusion that all reasoning is absurd" (1972, 440). In this regard, Hume needed to formulate a strategy that allowed him to express his skepticism without being accused of making it a totalizing epistemological position.

Hume's simultaneous denunciation of rationalism and his cautions about excessive skepticism are prominent in both *Enquiry* and *Treatise.* On the one hand, Hume's philosophy exhibits a wariness of dogmatic rationalism, the philosophical view that reason is the arbiter of truth. Unlike many of his predecessors, Hume understood that rationalistic theories provided inadequate answers for our most difficult philosophical questions, as he famously declared, "Reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals" (2000, 3.1.1.11). Hume found supreme faith in rationalism to be dangerously misguided and grew frustrated with the blind optimism of philosophers who alleged that, if carefully cultivated, reason could establish the existence of God, explain the origin of the universe, and discern the true source of morality. Such beliefs revealed an unwarranted faith in the human intellect, a predilection that Hume recognized in both religion and philosophy.

On the other hand, Hume's attack on dogmatic rationalism required restraint, lest he unleash an excessive skepticism that could jeopardize the credibility of all beliefs. As Hume writes in *Treatise*, "Shall we, then, establish it for a general maxim, that no refined or elaborate reasoning is ever received? Consider well the consequences of such a principle. By this means you cut off entirely all science and philosophy" (2000, xiv). This statement takes note of Hume's efforts to temper the scope of his argument, which is to say, that he was not against individual reason, the general capacity for rational thought, but Reason, with a capital R, the belief characterized by Hayek as dogmatic faith in deliberate creation by one's cogitative capacity alone (1965, 3). If readers took Hume as nullifying all processes of reason, he could then be accused of ushering in a different kind of dogmatism that could otherwise be called radical suspicion, of harboring a skepticism that denied the possibility of real or certain knowledge.

Though the philosophy of *Treatise* carries over into his *Enquiry*, the different rhetorical bent of the latter book is especially significant and accounts for why Hume disowned his *Treatise*, urging readers to disregard the "juvenile" work and henceforth take *Enquiry* as "containing his philosophical sentiments and principles" (1987, 2). The rhetorical strategies employed in *Enquiry* thus offer something not found in Hume's earlier writings. For this reason, each chapter of this dissertation seeks to understand the distinctive argumentation patterns and stylistic choices exhibited in *Enquiry* while also cultivating an appreciation for why Hume disavowed his earlier and more extensive philosophical work.

Section Three: Textual Criticism or "Close Reading"

To consider how Hume achieved his persuasive influence, I will conduct a close textual analysis of his *Enquiry* among other selected passages from his *Treatise* and one notable essay that more directly reflects his views on rhetoric, his "Of Eloquence."[4] Close textual analysis typically emphasizes the creative artistry that resides in discursive products that are bound by situational constraints and constituted by exigence (Gaonkar 1990; Jasinski 2001; Rosteck 1998). "The motive for textual criticism," as Michael Leff conceives it, "is to divert attention away from theoretical constructions and to focus on the rhetorical action embodied in particular discourses" (2016, 378). This means that textual criticism begins with an empirical orientation, examining the internal elements of a text (i.e., such as argumentation patterns and stylistic choices). The critic then moves beyond the internal features in order to account for the text's implicit rhetorical dynamics, an act that "requires an exercise of judgment at some level of abstraction" (2016,

[4] I will analyze passages from Hume's *Treatise* throughout this dissertation to show how Hume's rhetorical practice transformed over the course of his life. I have also included an analysis of Hume's essay "Of Eloquence" because it is one of his only works that specifically examines the subject of British and ancient rhetoric. And since most of Hume's views about rhetoric are attributed to this essay, I have included my interpretation in this dissertation.

243). This is because a text's empirical contents "are in no way equivalent to the symbolic action that marks a work as a rhetorical discourse" (2016, 378). In this way, textual criticism represents an interpretive attitude that is both inductive and critical, moving from specific observations of internal textual features to broader evaluative judgments about their rhetorical significance. Textual critics thus tend to focus on what Leff calls the "intentional dimension" of particular texts, "the purpose of the rhetor as [they] compose a discourse designed to persuade an audience" (2016, 292). This understanding is shared by Ceccarelli who maintains that "the close textual critic…scrutinizes a work in order to determine how its form was designed to achieve its function" (2001, 6). My research questions, therefore, necessitate a textual criticism approach since they seek to understand how Hume fashioned *Enquiry* to persuade diverse publics.

Textual criticism may be a traditional approach within rhetorical studies, but it has the potential to yield insight into features of Hume's work that have not yet been explored. For instance, contemporary critical scholarship on Hume often attends to its outward social and cultural impact (Jones 2005). Though I draw upon longitudinal studies that demonstrate the broad historical significance of *Enquiry*, these often fail to closely scrutinize the intricacies of rhetoric as artistic expression. Similarly, reception studies of philosophy often fail to provide what Stephen Browne describes as that "degree of intimacy and association" that comes only from close textual analysis (2005, 164). Though textual criticism takes a narrower focus than other approaches, Leff reminds us that "it does so in order to concentrate on the fundamental operations of rhetorical language" (2016, 302). For this reason, I will undertake a microscopic examination of Hume's *Enquiry* to reveal its rhetorical potency, an ingress toward a fuller understanding of Hume's rhetorical craftmanship.

That this project concerns Hume's philosophy should not curtail nor hinder my primary commitment to rhetoric. In other words, adopting a textual criticism approach means that I will read Hume's philosophy not to appraise its epistemic legitimacy but to discern its persuasive power. For this reason, I employ textual criticism in order to investigate the *rhetoric of philosophy*, an area of inquiry that, as Emilie Kutash maintains, allows critics to account for those rhetorical gestures that make ideas socially intelligible and, in so doing, endorses an interpretation of philosophy as a particular kind of discourse (1993, 135-6). On this point, Barry Brummett argues that philosophy as discourse represents "a kind of language game" that constitutes a "set of rules and strategies for making [philosophical] texts" (1995, 236). *Enquiry* is thus interpreted as an attempt to not only communicate Hume's ideas, but, as Umberto Eco argues, is an attempt to question "previous signifying systems" by emptying, destroying, or reconstructing "preexisting sign-functions" (1986, 24-5). Close textual analysis, then, is an approach that changes the way Hume's philosophy is read, which is to say, as a means of persuasion rather than as merely an investigation of human understanding.

Of course, as Ceccarelli contends, one problem with this approach is that it can lead to a myopic interpretation whereby "the critic who focuses too much attention on the internal characteristics of a particular work often neglects to fully explore the external influences that the text had on its context, or the external influences its context had over it" (2001, 6-7). Leff, albeit cautiously, also acknowledges that textual criticism could unwittingly sponsor "a local formalism that isolates the text from larger discursive formations and restricts interpretation within the orbit of the text's own construction" (2016, 288). In other words, the scope of textual criticism alone limits the critic's ability to draw any conclusions about the persuasive influence a text actually makes on audiences. Alan Gross likewise shares this concern as it relates to the study of

scientific texts, warning that "the careful unraveling of the verbal micro-structure of scientific texts, whatever it tells us about the intent of authors, can say little about its effect on readers" (1990, xvii). To make things worse, textual criticism gets even more problematic when a text has multiple audiences. On this point, Ceccarelli writes:

> It may be the case that an ideal reader identified by the author was invited to interpret a text in a particular way, but the text was received very differently by other groups of readers with different interests and backgrounds…The influence of a text on the world (and the influence of the world on a text) is often more complicated than the close textual critic imagines when closely scrutinizing the inner patterns of a text (2001, 7).

These limitations, however, do not nullify the importance of close textual criticism, but instead temper the kinds of claims a close textual critic can make. Though I fully intend to explore the extensional dimensions of Hume's discourse through critical approaches (i.e., such as ideological criticism) in future work, I agree with Leff that textual criticism, if done well, "offers a theoretically sound and practically useful base for the one activity shared in common by all other interpretative projects—the rhetorical reading of texts" (2016, 302). In this regard, this close textual reading of Hume's *Enquiry* will lay the foundations for subsequent work.

Section Four: Chapter Précis

Chapter Two of this dissertation explores the relationship between skepticism and rhetoric by reviewing two skeptical traditions (i.e., Sophism and Pyrrhonism) with an eye toward how these views are likely to shape rhetorical practice. To understand what makes Hume's skepticism unique—as something that led him to an ethical view of doubt and thus a favorable view of the persuasive arts—this chapter first explains how Sophism's productive view of the limits of knowledge led to a positive view of rhetoric while the more nihilistic views of the Pyrrhonists did not. And since Hume's skepticism emerged in response to similar skeptical

trends in the Enlightenment, this historical account will foreshadow the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter Three examines Hume's mitigated skepticism as it is enacted through a series of argumentation patterns and stylistic choices that encouraged his contemporaries to embrace an ethic of doubt. This is significant because it reveals how he was able to refashion science's public identity by constructing an ethos that appeals to the virtues of England's transforming scientific community. More specifically, this chapter advances two arguments: first, that the features of Hume's argumentation and style—antithesis and the message effect known as presence—reveal the rhetorical utility of his mitigated skepticism and, second, that Hume's rhetorical practice sustains an optimistic and intellectually productive attitude toward inquiry. This close textual analysis focuses on Hume's treatments of epistemology in "Section IV: Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding" and "Section V: Sceptical Solutions to these Doubts of the Enquiry" to apprehend how he steers clear of the dangers of excessive skepticism and dogmatism by fashioning a new understanding of human fallibility. Moreover, this chapter also contributes to contemporary studies of ethos by forging linkages between Hume's unique rhetorical practices and their Enlightenment context to explain how his enactment of a collective philosophical identity or philosophical persona undermines the Enlightenment's preoccupation with certain knowledge.

Chapter Four interprets Hume's notable essay "Of Miracles" as a response to scientific Christianity, a movement that used Enlightenment empiricism to justify religious belief. More specifically, this chapter shows how Hume draws upon Baconianism in order to sustain a stable separation between science and religion. What I call *skeptical Baconianism* denotes Hume's reworking of Bacon's cultural grammar to parse the incommensurability between science and

religion. In this process, I argue that Hume's essay draws upon the metaphor of separation implicit in Bacon's cultural grammar (i.e., the two books doctrine of divine revelation) to sustain his epistemological critique of biblical miracles. He also exploits the strong anti-Catholic feelings of his culture by exhibiting a pattern of equivocation that targets the miraculous claims made by Catholic apologists, which shows his willingness to use skeptical reasoning to adjudicate religious doctrines. In this way, *skeptical Baconianism* does well to divorce religion from science, or more correctly natural philosophy, by appealing to the theological differences between Catholics and Protestants.

Chapter Five compares Hume's 1742 essay "Of Eloquence" with his essay "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State"—section XI of the *Enquiry*—to explain his efforts to rationalize rhetorical practices that enabled his writings to exceed both the epistemological limitations of his empiricism and avoid the political consequences of criticizing national governments. I argue that both essays skirt the discursive limitations of empiricism when comparing the classical eloquence of Cicero and Demosthenes in "Of Eloquence" and the imagined eloquence of Epicurus in the *Enquiry* with the polite English style. Since classical eloquence aims to achieve a spiritual transcendence, Hume's empirical worldview is inadequate for reckoning with this assumption. For this reason, Hume needed to verbalize the transcendent dimension of classical eloquence in ways commensurate with modern rhetorical styles, a rhetorical maneuver that I call *discursive transcendence*.

This chapter also argues that Hume achieves a similar transcendent meaning by using alternative rhetorical strategies. For instance, Hume substitutes imagined dialogue for the classical device prosopopoeia, a move that defies what his philosophy of knowledge proposes and thus might be said to be latently metaphysical. An audience that engages in what this device

imagines must violate the confines of empirical experience and must imagine the plausibility of transcendence. I maintain that this qualifies Hume's writing as a kind of transcendent rhetoric since it adds a spiritual dimension to an otherwise secular discourse, an observation largely informed by the contributions of Hispanist scholars studying the Enlightenments in Ibero-America (Castro-Gómez 2005; Fernández Sebastián 2009, 2012; Safier 2008; Soto Arango and Puig-Samper 1995, 2003). This complicates understandings of Hume's rhetoric, employing both secular and transcendent patterns of meaning even while simultaneously possessing the capability of masking the tension between sacred and profane meanings within Enlightenment thought. This chapter thus considers how Hume overcame the limitations of his empirical epistemology by trying, instinctively at least, to salvage some kind of transcendence that is embedded in the rhetorical devices of classical eloquence.

Finally, Chapter Six will serve as a review of the major findings of this dissertation and discuss the project's implications. It also considers the role context plays in the historical study of Enlightenment thought and explains how my approach to reading the interplay between invention and context synthesizes aspects of modernist historiographies and the post-modernist critique of intellectual history—two approaches that are often seen as antithetical (Baweja 2016; Ferguson 1990). In doing so, I emphasize the largely overlooked rhetorical situations that shaped Hume's enactment of skepticism—namely, professional hubris, Deistic reactions to religious fundamentalism, and Britain's declining oratorical standards and political censorship. Focusing on these overlapping yet distinct social contexts enables readers of this dissertation to further understand how Hume's rhetoric was conditioned by conflicting contextual forces while also recognizing how his *Enquiry* rebels against the social norms of an *enlightened* European society.

Lastly, this concluding chapter discusses future directions of this work and the broader advantages that Hume's ideas bring to the discipline of rhetorical studies.

CHAPTER 2

BETWEEN SUSPICION AND BELIEF: A BRIEF HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE SKEPTICAL TRADITION

Voicing skepticism about civic issues can shape citizens' attitudes toward democracy and influence their willingness to engage in public deliberation (Roberts 2004). In some cases, gratuitous or excessive skepticism can erode public trust and generate ambivalence toward democratic processes (Jacques 2006; Wang and Kim 2018). Moderate or mitigated skepticism, on the other hand, can stimulate political involvement by encouraging citizens to critically examine and openly discuss matters of public importance (Wilkinson et al., 2019). Skepticism, this is to say, can either facilitate or thwart social change depending on how it shapes general outlooks on public life.

Those who espouse skepticism typically agree that it is both necessary and dangerous. For example, Enlightenment thinkers recognized skepticism's utility for denouncing dogmatic thinking, but, as Wayne Booth argues, they also maintained "that utter skepticism is itself a dogma that logically requires doubt concerning its own assertions" (2005, 384). Anthony Fauci, when addressing vaccine hesitancy amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, promoted skepticism toward the misinformation produced by conservative politicians, but he also chided the excessive suspicion toward healthcare professionals and medical research that was fueling low vaccination levels in rural US-America (Belluck 2021). Only by theorizing skepticism's role in productive practice can we begin to understand the broader relationship between a rhetor's suspicions about knowledge and how such suspicions might be productively enacted in discourse.

Historically speaking, skepticism's relativistic and nihilistic bent has had a pronounced influence upon rhetoric's reception and development. Some skeptical traditions fostered the view that, since knowledge is impossible, rhetoric is necessary to inspire action, while others condemned rhetoric as fundamentally deceptive. As Paul Falzer argues, both positions assume that "rhetorical practice occupies a region between the reflective pursuit of immutable knowledge and the impulsive desire for consummation" (1991, 238). In other words, rhetoric is often regarded as a generative source of knowledge and as constitutive of communal identities. This has led many skeptics to denounce rhetoric "as an impotent substitute for action" and as a "manner of subjecting knowledge to emotion and the whims of community sentiment" (1991, 238). Hume's mitigated skepticism, however, recognizes rhetoric's utility for mobilizing social cooperation by empowering individuals to be suspicious of the knowledge produced by public institutions. His mitigated skepticism also promotes a positive outlook on the limitations of knowledge, an attitude that combats cynical or pessimistic attitudes regarding social progress. By questioning skepticism's relationship to rhetoric, we can begin to understand how its various enactments generate contrary attitudes toward civic and intellectual issues.

This brief historical chapter thus reviews how two ancient skeptical traditions shaped understandings of rhetoric. The first section examines the Sophists (i.e., primarily Protagoras and Gorgias) to assess why their skeptical philosophies fostered a positive and pragmatic view of rhetoric, and the second section examines the Pyrrhonian tradition of radical skepticism that devalued rhetoric as devious. Indeed, the Sophists and Pyrrhonists enacted skepticism in similar ways, but their differing attitudes toward knowledge gave way to fundamentally different public perceptions of skepticism. And since Hume's skepticism emerged in response to similar

tendencies within the Enlightenment, this historical account will provide a historical *and* conceptual framework for this project's four subsequent analysis chapters.

Sophistic Skepticism

In the rhetorical tradition, we typically think of the Sophists as our most reputable skeptics. As is well-known, the Sophists were professional educators who traveled across ancient Greece and offered instruction in a wide range of subjects, with particular emphasis in public speaking and how to conduct oneself public life (Guthrie 1971; Kerford 1981). Though they belonged to no formal group and shared no formal body of beliefs, the Sophists are commonly represented as espousing skeptical attitudes toward knowledge and human cognition (Jarratt 1998; Poulakos 2012). Sophistic skepticism thus served as an orientation that was intellectually productive, enabling individuals to recognize human ignorance and the limitations of knowledge in ways that encouraged curiosity and inspired action (Crowley 1989).

Plato disapproved of the Sophists' skeptical proclivities, both in their philosophical outlook and in their practices as professional educators (Bizzell and Herzberg 2001, 55-56). More specifically, he condemned sophistic rhetoric as *tribē* or knackery, persuasion as an instrument of deceit, and the oratorical arts as a danger to Athenian society (Corey 2015). Plato's dialogues also portray sophistic rhetoric as inferior to other intellectual and civil pursuits (Kaklamanou et al. 2021). Plato's *Phaedrus*, for example, is widely thought to have promoted dialectic (i.e., the art of discussing the truth of opinions) as universally prior to artistic expression since rhetoric cannot generate truth without dialectical reasoning (Plato and Hackforth 1972; Ryan 2012). Additionally, his *Gorgias* treats sophistic rhetoric as subservient to what Eric Voegelin (1975) calls "political science," which is to say, upholding the *facts* over the *values* that individuals derive from political culture. Ultimately, Plato viewed the Sophists—Protagoras,

Gorgias, Hippias, and Prodicus—as moral relativists concerned only with probabilities "who therefore had no reason not to be manipulative, deceitful, or downright corrupting in their use of discourse" (Bizzell and Herzberg 2001, 81).

Moreover, as commonly read, Plato denounced sophistic rhetoric as an obstruction to the search for *epistêmê* or absolute knowledge (Fowler 2014; McComiskey 2002). This is partially because the Sophists were thorough skeptics, intellectuals who found utility in undermining traditional forms of knowledge (Bett 2020; Reames 2021). Since the Sophists often failed to provide rational justifications for their propositions, Plato held, as George Pullman argues, that sophistic rhetoric "had no philosophical foundations from which its principles could be logically derived" (1994, 50). "This being the case," Dana Miller writes, "it follows in Plato's view that [rhetoric] cannot be formally taught, and its effects are indeterminate and potentially bad" (1996, 110). In the Platonic case, then, sophistic rhetoric was considered unstable because it was epistemologically ungrounded, a mask for falsehoods.

While Aristotle also viewed the Sophists unfavorably, he attempted to reclaim the oratorical arts by developing a more theoretically focused rhetoric, one based, as John Randall, Jr. puts it, on "the wisdom of experience, the acceptance of encountered facts, [and] the investigation of what is given to us" (1960, 246). Aristotle's distrust of the Sophists' skeptical tendencies did not come at the expense of rhetoric. Rather, his *Rhetoric* faulted these teachers for neglecting certain topics of rhetorical importance and thus attempted to correct this negligence.

But rhetoric still required an explicit epistemological foundation in order to gain philosophical legitimacy, and Aristotle endeavored to achieve this by granting the world an objective status based upon the primacy of empirical experience. "In Aristotle's hands," John Poulakos argues, "the practical art of rhetoric turned into a theoretical matter and was afforded a

place within the parameters of the philosophical system of development" (1984, 216). Poulakos adds that, as a legitimate philosophical concern, rhetoric became "immune to post-Platonic attacks seeking to discredit it entirely" (1984, 216). Aristotle thus moved beyond Plato by grounding rhetoric in the first principles of persuasion and by committing it to the *actual*, which is to say, "the world as it is, in its positive structure and tendencies" (1984, 218).

The great sophistic revival that the late-twentieth century sparked renewed interest in the doctrines of two notable skeptics, Protagoras and Gorgias (Scott 1967; Leff 1978; Moss 1986; Royer 1991). These attempts to establish a historically grounded and philosophically coherent understanding of sophistic rhetoric celebrated three common features of sophistic skepticism. The first feature is anti-foundationalism, the belief that there is no ultimate ground or foundation from which all knowledge derives (McComiskey 1994). For instance, Scott Consigny's *Gorgias: Sophist and Artist* (2001) argues that the most persuasive reading of Gorgias is as an anti-foundationalist who repudiated all epistemological foundations (i.e., rational and empirical alike). More specifically, Consigny argues that Gorgias was thoroughly a social constructivist who understood knowledge and morality as representing the social agreements of communities rather than objective truths. Unbeholden to any epistemological position, then, the Sophists—and Gorgias in particular—embraced a skepticism that undercut any attempt to establish evaluative or objective truth standards by which knowledge claims could be adjudicated.

Second, attempts to build a coherent interpretation of sophistic rhetoric have also recognized what Nathan Crick (2010) describes as the Sophists' experimentalism, the view that human beings can control their fortunes by mastering the productive arts. While Aristotle is the classical thinker most often associated with experimentalism, Crick argues that the Sophists were the first experimentalists because their attitude was borne from an emancipated intellectual

imagination, an orientation that valued both the practical and speculative commitments of early Greek philosophy. According to John Dewey, the Sophists believed that "through instrumental arts, arts of control based on the study of nature, objects which are fulfilling and good, may be multiplied and rendered secure" (1958, 126). In this way, the Sophists were experimentalists in the sense that they espoused the ancient idea that *technê* could lead to *epistêmê* by rendering nature amenable to human manipulation. However, since the Sophists were not bound either to the strictly pragmatic concerns of early Greek philosophy or to the purely speculative imagination of the pre-Socratics, Crick argues that they "reunited" ideas and actions "without collapsing them, thereby preserving intellectual autonomy while nonetheless recognizing that the long-term value of speculation was measured by its ability to enrich political and cultural life" (2010, 31). Crick thus maintains that this experimental attitude offered a middle path between pragmatism and speculative philosophy that, like anti-foundationalism, sustained an inventive approach to knowledge in which theory could generate novel perspectives on human existence. Sophistic skepticism was thus intellectually productive, enabling individuals to recognize human limitations in ways that also fostered rich philosophical inquiry.

Third, the Sophists viewed rhetorical style as an integral part of both philosophical inquiry and public deliberation. Though the Sophists were famously denounced in the ancient period for concerning themselves with rhetorical style, even Plato and Aristotle later recognized that "the way a thing is said does affect its intelligibility" (Poulakos 1983, 37). As Crick further explains, Gorgias perceived style as something deeper than the shape of discourse as "the culminating expression of thoughtful feeling that penetrates deep into an audience and transforms their attitudes toward things and ideas in the world" (Crick 2010, 40). Gorgias also understood the importance of giving form to collective human experience in ways that brought

forth the shared experiences of people in public life by "narrating possibilities by which emotional tensions can be brought to consummation" (Crick 2010, 40). Put differently, the Sophists understood that style could validate human emotions through discourses that had serious intellectual and social consequences. In this regard, rhetorical style was perceived as a way to reveal new perspectives, glimpses that reach beyond the familiar to offer what Kenneth Burke (1950) calls novel "points of view."

By and large, these features of Sophism (i.e., anti-foundationalism, experimentalism, and an artistic commitment to style) seem to have endorsed a positive assessment of rhetoric as an art form to be utilized in the face of uncertainty. The Sophists' healthy skepticism shaped their attitude toward rhetoric as that which convinces us to make judgments in the absence of certainty. Consider the agnostic pragmatism that underlies Protagoras' skepticism about the gods: "Concerning the gods, I cannot know either that they exist or that they do not exist; for there is much to prevent one's knowing; the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of man's life" (O'Brien 1972, 4). The neutrality of this statement, by neither affirming nor denying the existence of the gods, only implies that an absolute answer is impossible. Protagoras's famous dictum, "Man is the measure of all things" similarly suggests that human knowledge is limited (Freeman 1949, 348). According to David Payne, "this [dictum] has been taken to mean that reality does not exist outside of man's perception of it, and that therefore only subjective knowledge is possible and objective knowledge impossible," but he challenges this reading by offering a different interpretation of this dictum as "more fundamentally a statement about the nature of man and his relationship to reality" (1986, 189). Protagoras' skepticism concerning the gods thus fostered a healthy suspicion about epistemology without supposing that knowledge was altogether impossible to obtain.

Protagoras's agnosticism turned attention to the power of rhetoric by first recognizing it as a force that fashions reality in an intelligible manner (i.e., by giving subjective experiences an intelligible form) and second, by demystifying putative instances of knowledge as mere belief or speculation. In this way, Protagoras upheld a pragmatic view of rhetoric as the exploitation of language to further one's goals (Benitez 1992; Donovan 1993). Though this pragmatic, self-interested view of rhetoric could lead to problems equivalent to dogmatism, it reveals Protagoras' willingness to embrace skepticism as productive rather than debilitating. To effectively enact his agnostic pragmatism, then, Protagoras' expressed an ethos by appealing to the virtues embedded within Athenian culture that reinforced his reputation as "an educator capable of imparting teachings suited to the new world of the *polis*" (Bonazzi 2020). Protagoras is widely known for using antithesis to undermine traditional wisdom and self-promote his distinction as an educator of the oratorical arts (Payne 1986). By arguing that there are always two sides to an issue, Protagoras seems to argue against the possibility of objective truth, a skepticism that could undermine faith in certain knowledge. But as a skeptical orientation, Protagoras's antithetical approach to rhetoric can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, as Pullman argues, "Protagoras could easily be accused of promoting *aboulia*, a psychological state in which it is impossible to make decisions" (1994, 55). On the other hand, Protagoras's conception of antithesis could lead to *euboulia* or excellence in council which, as Pullman further explains, is the "very key to the art of making good decisions" (1994, 55). Since Protagoras asserts that no criterion can guarantee that truth will prevail under the scrutiny of antithetical reasoning (Schiappa 2013), his pragmatic view thus underscores rhetoric's ability to promote decision making in the absence of certain knowledge.

Gorgias likewise rejected absolute criteria for *epistêmê*, though his skepticism was much more thoroughgoing than that of Protagoras. For instance, his nihilism attempts to make speculation impossible once rhetoric is exempted from the necessity of conforming to reality. As Sextus Empiricus reported, Gorgias not only argued that nothing exits in *On the Nonexistent or on Nature*, but that even if things did exist, human beings were too inadequate to access or converse about them. It is understandable, Sharon Crowley writes, that Gorgias "might be taken as nihilistic or amoral by those subscribing to the assumptions of the metaphysics of presence," which is to say, the desire for immediate access to meaning (1979, 281).[5] Unsurprisingly, Gorgias's skepticism has also been used to support a nihilistic attitude toward sensory experience. For example, consider how Richard Enos describes Gorgias's views in the following passage:

> For a thing to be comprehended it must be understood through the human media of understanding (i.e., sense perceptions) …Man's finite sense limitations, however, restrict him to perceptions based upon the optimum capacity of his senses, and in this respect thoughts beyond positivistic experience have no referential existence beyond the imaginative extrapolations of the thinker (Enos 1976, 47).

Because of his rejection of empiricism, scholars often associate Gorgias with a complete linguistic skepticism. As Pullman argues, Gorgias' skepticism toward sensory experiences has fostered the idea that language is not simply the way human beings make sense of reality, but that "language…creates an illusion that we may take or mistake for reality. We can sense reality, but we can only talk about what we sense" (1994, 56). In this regard, Gorgias's skepticism for many interpreters leads to nihilism by "collapsing one into a subjectivity and relativity which for

[5] For additional research on the metaphysics of presence, see Bernet, Rudolf, and Wilson Brown. 1982. "Is the present ever present? Phenomenology and the metaphysics of presence." *Research in Phenomenology* 12 (1): 85-112; White, Carol J. 1996. "The time of being and the metaphysics of presence." *Man and World* 29 (2): 147-166.

many of us seems futile" since it suspends judgment so aggressively that it leaves little room to express concerns about the external world (Payne 1986, 189).

Gorgias embraces the view that all language is symbolic representation, leading him to promote an amoral view of deception (*apatemata*). Put differently, Gorgias' embraces the idea that language is superficial in the sense that it only represents knowledge. Gorgias overcomes this epistemic limitation by describing rhetoric as pragmatically deceitful, a force that convinces us to embrace representations as if they were empirical truths (Falzer 1991). Bruce Gronbeck also recognizes that Gorgias views deception as a necessary effect of language rather than an intention to be manipulative or corrupting. In fact, Gronbeck argues that Gorgias' attitude toward the deceptive nature of language developed across his extant works "with *Encomium of Helen* raising perceptual and thus epistemological questions, with *Defense of Palamedes* discoursing on the fallibility of all language (*logos*), and finally with *On Not-Being* furnishing the ultimate propositional defense of the tragedy of knowledge" (1972, 29). As Gronbeck further points out, Gorgias concludes that since "true knowledge" is unattainable, human beings "must deal with deceptive (*apatemata*) and violent (*siasmata*) representations of reality" (1972, 30).[6] Such representations are "deceptive" in the sense that they produce conviction despite their illusionary nature. In this way, persuasion is inherently *deceptive* because it convinces us of realities that we are unable to truly know. "If anything exists," as Gronbeck further states, "it cannot be communicated because of *deceptive realities* in which man is forced to traffic and because of the idiosyncratic bases of language itself" (1972, 30). It seems, therefore, that Plato's condemnation

[6] Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen* also characterizes rhetoric as *apate* or deception in a practical and artistic sense meaning "that a person has willingly entered the universe of the artist in order to absorb the universal meanings encompassed in its work" (Crick 2010, 40).

of the Sophists for refusing to engage in epistemological inquiry accurately recognizes that their skepticism abandons philosophy as a necessary counterpart to rhetorical practice.

In conclusion, my understanding of the Sophists is twofold: first, that the Sophists professed a kind of nonjudgmental skepticism in recognition of our epistemological limitations, and second, that they valued the persuasive role of the rhetorical arts in public life despite rhetoric's deceptive nature. The fact that we depend upon persuasion does not necessarily mean that we have abandoned the desire to pursue certain knowledge. It only means, says the Sophist, that we must operate upon a healthy understanding of the limits of inquiry. Even though their skeptical orientation created controversy by contributing to a rhetorical situation in which all knowledge claims were subject to doubt, sophistical skepticism seems to have led to a positive assessment of rhetoric as an art form to be utilized in the face of uncertainty.

Pyrrhonian Skepticism

Despite the Sophist's admiration for rhetoric, ancient skepticism did not always lead to such favorable views. In fact, the skeptical tradition that began with Pyrrho of Elis, an avid painter turned philosopher, often inspired a negative appraisal of the oratorical arts. Since Pyrrho left no writings, his legacy must be pieced together from the fragmentary comments of his followers. From the testimony of Diogenes Laërtius, scholars have discerned three of Pyrrho's propositions regarding skepticism: that nothing exists in itself (i.e., nothing has a definite nature), that it is impossible to determine how to judge knowledge based on preestablished criterion, and that sense perception is not trustworthy (Laertius and Hicks 1979; Popkin and van der Zande 1998). Based on George Pullman's historical account, tradition has it that these beliefs caused Pyrrho "to doubt everything so thoroughly that he wandered the streets indifferent to physical harm, his followers having literally to follow him around, pulling him out of harm's way" (1994,

59). Pyrrhonism is typically seen in this way as a philosophical outlook of steady indifference that leads to inaction and the suspension of judgment.

Sextus Empiricus offers a more practical interpretation of Pyrrhonism by viewing doubt as something productive, an orientation that can aid social actors in civic and intellectual endeavors. Empiricus viewed Pyrrhonian skepticism as "an ability or mental attitude" that promotes the practical nature of doubting as a "process of thinking designed to lead to a particular way of living" (Pullman 1994, 59). Doubt is useful when it spurs curiosity, prompts reflection on our biases and assumptions, and cautions our confidence when making decisions. Someone who adopts a skeptical attitude is aware of their cognitive limitations, embodies a restrained disposition, and is more open to opposing points of view. As Pullman further states, "it is important to keep in mind the fact that Empiricus is outlining an ability rather than a theory because if one interprets what Empiricus wrote from a philosophical perspective, according to the rules of noncontradiction and careful categorization, practical skepticism, like sophism, appears foolish at worst, bizarre at best" (1994, 59). As an attitude, then, Pyrrhonism is a form of skepticism that endeavors to discourage blind acceptance of epistemological judgments, discouraging any vain search for essences, and instead promotes a pluralistic worldview that values the different ways individuals perceive the world. But unlike sophistic skepticism, Pyrrhonism is today regarded as a debilitating form of doubt, which calls into question the ways in which philosophers have utilized skepticism to achieve certain purposes.

The goal of Pyrrhonism is twofold: first, to achieve *epoché* (i.e., the suspension of judgment) and second, to induce a state of tranquility called *ataraxia* (i.e., freedom from stress and anxiety). As Empiricus maintains, skeptics achieve *ataraxia* through the realization that "no one of the conflicting judgments takes precedence of any other as being more probable" (Bury

1996, 2). The skeptic resists the urge to regard one opinion as superior to another. The pyrrhonists' indifference was not malicious or apathetic but was instead a reflection of their indifferent attitude toward knowledge. However, this indifference toward knowledge does not mean that pyrrhonists never make positive assertions about the world. In fact, we should recall that Empiricus was a physician concerned with improving the poor health of his patients. "If [Empiricus] was paralyzed by doubts," Pullman argues, "he would not likely have risen to this rank, just as Pyrrho himself would not likely have been a high priest" (1994, 64). By abandoning the desire to discover truth, the pyrrhonist is free to act in the absence of certain knowledge without the fear or stress of being wrong, thus achieving *ataraxia*. Empiricus's espousal of uncertainty was thus empowering rather than immobilizing, which encouraged individuals to act wisely and prudently despite their fallibility.

Pyrrhonism offers several techniques for achieving *epoché* and *ataraxia*. Like the Sophists, Pyrrhonian skeptics employ antithesis as a strategy for undermining opposing epistemological views that dogmatically espoused a degree of certainty that is beyond reasonable suspicion. For Empiricus, antithesis was the practice of "opposing to every proposition an equal proposition" (Pullman 1994, 60). In this regard, Pullman argues that,

> Relativism and a persistent refutation of positive assertions, nihilism, are used to destroy philosophy, but having promoted relativism and denied the possibility of any criterion of truth, Empiricus does not offer to build anything in philosophy's now vacant space. Nor does he construct a rhetoric or offer advice about how to argue (1994, 59-60).

Indeed, Empiricus offers no explicit guidance about how to argue like a skeptic, though the skeptical attitude seems to foster a common rhetorical style that continually (and by design) leads all conversations to an aporia.[7] While a Derridean might deconstruct arguments by intentionally

[7] For more information on aporia and pyrrhonism, see Murray, Stuart J. 2009. "Aporia: Towards an ethic of critique." *Aporia* 1 (1): 8-14; Rickert, Thomas. 2007. "Toward the chōra: Kristeva, Derrida, and Ulmer

creating an aporia to redirect a conversation in their favor (Bernstein 2006; Horwitz 2002; Raffoul 2008), Empiricus would undermine an argument so thoroughly that it is eventually put to rest without the possibly of redirection. As a form of argumentation, then, Pyrrhonism becomes irrefutable in the sense that it is always possible to frame propositions as epistemologically suspicious or to make ideas seem so complex that it becomes impossible to judge them.

As Richard Popkin (1952) argues, Pyrrhonism becomes contentious primarily because of its irrefutability and because of the incredulity it generates. On the one hand, Pyrrhonism's irrefutability is the result of the analytical power of skeptical reasoning, its ability to undermine the legitimacy of all propositions. On the other hand, Pyrrhonism, if interpreted as a philosophical doctrine, is impossible to believe since it undermines the possibility of knowledge altogether. On this point, Thomas Olshewsky argues that, were pyrrhonists to pursue their principles in life, they "would conclude in an end to discourse, to action, and to life itself" (1991, 275). Although Pyrrhonism may flourish in purely speculative conversations, Olshewsky argues that "the passions and sentiments of our nature make it impossible for even the most committed skeptic to sustain such principles in the practicalities of the common life" (275). For this reason, the practical benefits of Pyrrhonian skepticism were praised in secret and utilized with extreme caution.[8]

It is evident from this brief historical account that Pyrrhonism and Sophism espouse similar forms of skepticism, but their skeptical orientations give rise to different conceptions of rhetoric. As further developed by Diogenes Laërtius, Pyrrhonism led to a general distain for

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on emplaced invention." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 40 (3): 251-273; Kirkby, Joan. 2006. "'Remembrance of the future:" Derrida on mourning." *Social Semiotics* 16 (3): 461-472.

[8] Malebranche, for example, discussed the merits of Pyrrhonism as a way to answer the dogmatic claims of Cartesians, but he avoided publicly adopting an overt Pyrrhonian position because of its sinister reputation (See van der Zande and Popkin 1998).

rhetoric because it deluded people into accepting mere appearances as undeniable truths: "We must not assume that what convinces us is actually true. For the same thing does not convince everyone, nor even the same people always. Persuasiveness sometimes depends on external circumstances, on the reputation of the speaker, on his ability as a thinker, or his artfulness, on the familiarity or the pleasantness of the topic" (Hicks 1979, 2). Empiricus also distrusted rhetoric and even professed in his *Against the Rhetorician* that it was harmful and socially useless (Bury 2015). In this regard, what's known as Pyrrhonism is typically seen in these ways, as a philosophical outlook of steady indifference that leads to inaction and the suspension of judgment. Those who espoused Pyrrhonism were indeed suspicious about knowledge, but they differed from the Sophists in their attitude toward ignorance and uncertainty. They viewed it as a weakness, as proof of our fallibility, which led them to distrust anything that convinced us otherwise. And as a result, the Pyrrhonists' tendency to doubt the legitimacy of their own thoughts and actions seems to have fostered an anti-rhetoric position, a view that often weakens the sense of urgency that is necessary to mobilize civil participation.

Was Hume a Pyrrhonist or a Sophist?

This dissertation, as stated in Chapter One, describes the problem of Hume's mitigated skepticism as one that concerned how he accommodated his skeptical views to the diverse and conflicting predispositions of public audiences, a subject that philosophy itself has been little equipped to investigate. Because skepticism represents a general attitude toward knowledge, it must always be theorized in relation to practice—that is, the ways in which it is enacted through discourses that generate suspicions toward knowledge. Scholarly disputes over whether Hume was a pyrrhonist are extensive, to be sure. Rather than contribute to such discussions, however, I

pose this question simply to provoke consideration regarding the broader relationship between Hume's skepticism and his use of rhetoric.

In his *Enquiry,* Hume expressed admiration toward Pyrrhonism for its analytical implications and espoused a deep appreciation for the rhetorical arts. Hume's unique relationship to both traditions prompts exploration of how he communicated his pro-rhetorical view of Pyrrhonian skepticism. What made Hume unique among his contemporaries was indeed his public affinity for Pyrrhonism despite its anti-scientific implications in the eighteenth century. As I will discuss in the next chapter, Pyrrhonism was unleashed by both Catholic polemicists and Protestant apologists as a "machine of war" against opposing religious traditions (Stunkel 1998). While many other scientific philosophers were abandoning skepticism because of its uptake by religious figures, Hume quickly became "the only major figure on the intellectual scene" who remained concerned with the epistemological challenges raised by ancient pyrrhonists (Popkin 1997, 1). In this regard, Hume's (sophistic) concern for effectively communicating his (Pyrrhonian) attitude toward the impossibility of certain knowledge can only be understood by attending to the discursive ways in which he enacted his skepticism through public rhetorics.

Each of the subsequent case study chapters thus builds from this historical review by theorizing the rhetorical value of Hume's mitigated skepticism through rhetorics that are shaped by the exigencies of his immediate situation. Chapter Three, for instance, shows how Hume tempered his attack on Cartesianism by expressing his skepticism as an ethos that appealed to the virtues embedded within eighteenth-century English culture. This Sophistic technique—previously associated with Protagoras—enabled Hume to undermine Cartesian rationalism and self-promote his distinction as a truly *enlightened* skeptic. Chapter Four links Hume's denouncement of scientific Christianity with the public skepticism of English Deists. In doing so,

this chapter shows how Hume exploits his audience's religious concerns to further his own skeptical attitude toward religion writ large. Lastly, Chapter Five explains how Hume modified classical eloquence in order to compensate for the rhetorical limitations of a strict empirical epistemology, a maneuver that challenges the emphasis on perspicuity emerging in his culture. By verbalizing the transcendent dimension of classical eloquence in ways commensurate with modern rhetorical styles, I argue in this chapter that Hume avoids the political consequences of criticizing the discursive habits of political figures. Ultimately, then, these case study chapters show how Hume undermines dogmatic thinking about three overlapping subjects (i.e., science, religion, and politics) in ways that promote a positive outlook on the limitations of knowledge and an optimistic attitude toward inquiry. In this regard, Hume's *Enquiry* exemplifies the benefits and dangers of persuading people to be skeptical about matters of public importance.

CHAPTER 3

SKEPTICISM AS ETHOS: HUME'S RESPONSE TO THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

> When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number*? No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence*? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.
>
> –David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748

David Hume contributed to the Enlightenment's repudiation of scholasticism, the medieval synthesis of classical philosophy and Catholic theology, by rejecting the casuistry and dogma taught in European universities (Buckle 2004; Millican 2007).[9] During the eighteenth century, scholasticism or "school philosophy" represented the old system of thought that was slow to acknowledge the new ideas of Enlightenment thinkers (Gascoigne 1988; Hudson 2009). Early modern scholastics were largely unresponsive to the influence of experimental science and instead promoted a curriculum that taught students to reconcile Christian theology with Aristotelianism (Hawkins 2007). Hume, among others, expressed frustration with modern universities for adhering to Catholic interpretations of scripture and for fostering unproductive approaches to scholarly debate. In his *History of Britain*, for example, Hume wrote that "scholastic learning and polemical divinity retarded the growth of all true knowledge" and that the "dreaming and captious philosophy of the schools" did nothing but force students "to learn

[9] For research on the perceived relationship between casuistry and scholasticism, see Schuessler, Rudolf. 2021. "Chapter 12: Casuistry and Probabilism." In *A Companion to the Spanish Scholastics*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill: 334-360; Keenan, James F. 1993. "The Casuistry of John Major: Nominalist Professor of Paris (1506-1531)." In *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 13: 205-221.

very bad Latin, and still worse logic" (1983, 5:155, 3:229, 2:283). Above all, Hume regarded universities as a hinderance to a good education and criticized their teachings as mostly perverse and morally corrupt.

With universities largely unresponsive to Enlightenment science, it appeared advantageous for Hume to circumvent this unappreciative audience and lay his new philosophy directly before the literate public (Box 2014). To do this, Hume needed to accommodate his ideas to the concerns of the common bourgeois citizen, "a modern non-aristocratic subject" who openly expressed interest in "matters of public importance" (Longaker 2015, 6). Put differently, Hume needed to entice an audience who emphasized different cultural values than the typical aristocratic university elite—namely, bourgeois virtues such as prudence, temperance, and moderation (McCloskey 1994, 2010). In this way, Hume's new readership was the condition of possibility that transformed modern philosophy in both style and content. In one sense, this newfound audience pushed English prose in the direction of simplicity and clarity (Potkay 1991, 1994; Sambrook 1994). In another sense, philosophers were incentivized to select topics that appealed to educated laymen living in bourgeois society (Broman 1998; Melton 2001). As Hume himself writes, philosophers should glean information "from a cautious observation of human life, and take [people] as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behavior in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures" (Hume 2000, xix). Hume's rhetorical genius thus came from his ability to communicate his philosophical ideas in ways that resonated with the moral virtues and appealed to the common tastes of his new public audience.

While accommodating his ideas with bourgeois virtues and the public distain for the established university curricula, Hume's skeptical philosophy also endeavored to temper the

enthusiasm of his contemporaries who were equally frustrated with scholastic theology.[10] To be sure, it was commonplace during this period for philosophers and theologians to offer alternative systems to medieval philosophy (Becker 2003; Ferreira 1986). Hume, however, was suspicious of all philosophical inquiry, upholding a general disposition to incredulity that challenged much putative knowledge as mere belief or dogma. For this reason, he endeavored to temper the overconfidence of the *Enlightenment spirit* broadly defined, which is to say, its dogmatic faith in our mental capacities to achieve certain knowledge. As Ronald Arnett explains, "Hume embraced skepticism out of pragmatic conviction" since it was a "thoughtful form of pragmatism that tempers undue confidence with the necessity of caution" (2022, 148). In this regard, *Enquiry* was a cautionary treatise that advised readers against adhering to the pretenses of both medieval and contemporary philosophy. Hume's stylistic choices and argumentation patterns thus reflect a skepticism aimed at disrupting all philosophical inquiry in favor of a pragmatic uncertainty that might steer clear of intellectual and social paralysis.

Though Hume's *Enquiry* may be read as an exposition of his philosophical ideas, when read in the context of eighteenth-century Europe and in the shadow of the skeptical philosophical tradition, it becomes clear that it was also a unique rhetorical response to the problems of Enlightenment epistemology. For instance, Hume was caught on the horns of a dilemma between two competing efforts to escape rationalistic dogmatism. On the one hand, British and Scottish intellectuals aspired to use a Newtonian method in their investigations of moral subjects (i.e., ethics and history) to build a scientific understanding of human nature (Grabiner 2002; Wilson

[10] For research on scholastic theology's bearing upon the curriculums of early modern universities, see Klauber, Martin I. 1994. *Between Reformed Scholasticism and Pan-Protestantism: Jean-Alphonse Turretin (1671-1737) and Enlightened Orthodoxy at the Academy of Geneva.* Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press; Harrison, Peter. 1990. *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment.* Cambridge University Press.

2009). On the other hand, Christian fideists in France challenged Cartesian rationalism by espousing a skepticism that promoted special revelation as the primary foundation of Christian belief (Higman 1979; Israel 2005; Popkin 1997). Though Hume appreciated the aggregate rejection of rationalism by these movements, he remained apprehensive about the dogmatism implicit in both English empiricism and Christian fideism (i.e., the tendency to affirm one's own ideas as incontrovertibly true) and chastised adherents of both traditions for arrogantly suggesting that their approaches were necessary to obtain certain knowledge. Hume's *Enquiry* challenges the hubris of his contemporaries by enacting his mitigated form of skepticism through an ethos that fosters a positive moral view of uncertainty and human ignorance. In this way, he invites readers to understand the purpose of moral philosophy as the pursuit of doubt over truth, an idea designed to humble the scientific profession at the peak of the epistemological revolution in Western Europe.

In this chapter, I contend that Hume enacts his mitigated skepticism through a series of argumentation patterns and stylistic choices that encouraged readers to embrace ignorance and uncertainty as moral virtues. This is significant because it reveals how he was able to answer opposition to philosophical skepticism by refashioning its public identity in response to the exigency of Enlightenment epistemology. More specifically, this chapter advances two arguments: first, that the features of Hume's argumentation and style—antithesis and the message effect known as presence—constitute the rhetorical nature of his mitigated skepticism and, second, that Hume's rhetorical practice sustains an optimistic and intellectually productive view of human fallibility. Moreover, this chapter endeavors to explain how his enactment of a collective philosophical identity undermines the Enlightenment's obsession with certain

knowledge. When we examine Hume's enacted ethos in his writings about skepticism, we find his unique and enduring contribution to the rhetorical tradition.

This chapter has three sections. First, I contextualize the eighteenth-century skepticism against which *Enquiry* was written. This section interprets Hume's skepticism as influenced by the Enlightenment's social and intellectual milieu. Second, I explain the rhetorical tactics utilized in Hume's writing: namely, antithesis and the message effect known as presence. Third, I analyze Hume's mitigated skepticism in *Enquiry's* "Section IV: Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding" and "Section V: Sceptical Solutions to these Doubts." This close textual analysis explains how Hume's rhetoric circumvents the limitations of both excessive skepticism and dogmatism by fashioning a new understanding of human fallibility. Finally, this chapter concludes by reiterating the public function of Hume's mitigated skepticism as emboldening action and fostering a pragmatic attitude in the face of uncertainty.

Skepticism in the Enlightenment

The scientific philosophies that arose in the Enlightenment significantly transformed ancient conceptions of skepticism (i.e., especially in the case of Pyrrhonism). By and large, Enlightenment writers repurposed Pyrrhonism, an ancient skeptical tradition that began with Pyrrho of Elis, as a rhetorical weapon in the battle over ideas. In some cases, philosophers merged Pyrrhonian and scientific forms of reasoning to construct new theories of knowledge (Annas and Barnes 1985; Bett 2000) while others used Pyrrhonism to combat and destabilize traditional ideas. René Descartes, for example, frequently followed the path of Pyrrhonism to attack the ideas of his predecessors even though he was *not* a skeptic in the same sense (de Olaso 1997; Fine 2000; Sosa 1996; Williams 1983). In fact, Descartes was contemptuous of scholasticism and yet wielded several weapons from the scholastic's arsenal to advance his own

philosophical system—namely, that scientific knowledge derives from innate ideas cultivated through deductive reasoning (Descartes 1965, 2017). He also believed that unexamined premises were the source of human error, and so he attempted to better equip thinking by emphasizing the power of introspection guided by reason. The skepticism Descartes espoused was thus different than ancient Pyrrhonism because he was interested in using skepticism to expose the errors of scholastic tradition (Damasio 1995; Gaukroger 1980).

Once put in the service of Enlightenment science, ancient skepticism was largely superseded by the positive epistemologies that took their inspiration from the scientific revolution, including French rationalism and English empiricism. As Richard Popkin explains,

> The sort of questioning posed by the [French] skeptical tradition…in the seventeenth century seems to have ended with Pierre Bayle and Bishop Pierre-Daniel Huet, along with its attendant avowal of fideism. The optimism of the Enlightenment, with its conviction that human reason, properly freed and illuminated, could find…the truth, made skepticism part of the dark pre-Newtonian, pre-Lockean age (1997, 17).

In other words, Popkin suggests that ancient skepticism ended in the late Enlightenment because the triumphs of modern science and the breakthroughs associated with Newtonianism nullified any serious consideration of the idea that certain knowledge was beyond the reach of human beings. Instead, natural philosophers and theologians spent more time debating *a priori* speculations and the methodological approaches necessary for establishing objective truths (Carroll 2008). Popkin recognizes that his claim about skepticism's demise during this period may seem strange "in light of the enormous amount of skeptical writing published at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the enormous concern about the skeptical menace haunting European thought indicated by the polemical literature, and the theses being defended in German universities" (1997, 1). "But for all practical or serious purposes," Popkin maintains that

"skepticism as a living or vital movement was dead by the middle of the eighteenth century, save in the person and thoughts of David Hume" (1997, 17).

What made Hume unique among late Enlightenment philosophers was his public affinity for a Pyrrhonism that had previously sustained the fideism of French religious figures up to the turn of the eighteenth century. According to Kenneth Stunkel (1998), Pyrrhonism was unleashed by Catholic polemicists as a "machine of war" in response to the Protestant Reformation (1998, 49). This "new machine" represents the ways Catholic writers undermined the interpretative ability of individuals in order to promote the Church's authority on matters concerning biblical interpretation. Protestant leaders adopted the same tactic against the Catholic Church, leaving "theology and the notion of stable faith in taters" (Stunkel 1998, 49). The confusion caused by these debates led French clergy to push philosopher Pierre Bayle to publish the second edition of his *Critical and Historical Dictionary,* a work that clarified the mutually beneficial relationship between Pyrrhonism and the Christian faith. As Popkin explains, Bayle's essay posited that since Pyrrhonism reveals the "perplexities, contradictions, and absurdities" of all intellectual theories, we should thus "abandon reason as a guide and turn to faith—faith that is above reason, against reason, and without reason" (1997, 3). Hume greatly admired how Bayle forcefully challenged the dubiousness of all rational theories (Pittion 1977; Smith 1941). While many other scientific philosophers were abandoning skepticism because of its uptake by religious figures, Popkin further argues that Hume quickly remained "the only major figure on the intellectual scene" who was "concerned with the fundamental skeptical issues raised by the seventeenth century pyrrhonists" (1997, 1). But as a vocal skeptic of Christianity, Hume was unsatisfied with Bayle's religious conclusions and remained convinced that the issues initially raised by the Christian skeptics endured unresolved.

Though interest in Pyrrhonism declined in the latter part of the eighteenth century with the rise of the secular French *philosophes,* concerns remained regarding the skeptical bacillus that numerous writers believed was causing mayhem throughout the European intellectual world. By 'skeptical bacillus' I mean to emphasize a caricature of Pyrrhonism that was used to represent the French Enlightenment's adversary, a religious worldview that was considered dangerous and misleading because it led adherents to inaction and rampant disbelief in the new rational and empirical sciences. As Ezequiel de Olaso argues, Pyrrhonism was considered so radical as a philosophical system that it was widely rejected as being too unreasonable for any sane, rational person to actually believe in. As de Olaso writes,

> I cannot understand how anyone can be a [pyrrhonist] sincerely and on principle. Either such philosophers do not exist or they are the most miserable of men. Doubt with regard to what we ought to know is a condition too violent for the human mind; it cannot long be endured; in spite of itself the mind decries one way or another, and it prefers to be deceived rather than to believe in nothing (de Olaso 1997, 133).

This conception of Pyrrhonism as a violent and unreasonable form of debilitating doubt was pervasive during the eighteenth century. Many philosophers considered it dangerous primarily because no rational theory could withstand its attacks (Bayle 1702; Perinetti 2018). Jean Pierre de Crousaz, for instance, publicly attacked Pyrrhonism in 1733 by describing it as a universal menace, an attitude that was undermining confidence in everything (Crousaz 1733; Matytsin 2012, 2016). As Olaso further argues, Crousaz tended to "present the skeptic as a mentally sick man and skepticism as a task that demands a continuous state of perplexity" (1997, 133). This pejorative image served as a strawman by individuals who preferred to "exorcise prematurely the phantom of Pyrrhonism" rather than seriously consider its implications for Enlightenment science (de Olaso 1977, 133).

Despite the tension between Pyrrhonism and Enlightenment science during this period, Hume's philosophy was shaped by both intellectual movements. In one sense, Hume was a Pyrrhonist convinced that he needed to make peace with the fact that many of his beliefs could not be rationally justified (Aguirre 2010; Kail 2007). In another sense, Hume was living in an enlightened world, surrounded by avant-garde intellectuals whose interests and concerns were largely scientific and thus epistemologically positive. In his homeland, for instance, many Scottish intellectuals were applying the Newtonian method to moral subjects (Reid 2015; Smith 1982), a pattern also found in Hume's *Treatise*. As Hume himself makes evident, *Treatise* was "an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects" to establish what he called "the science of human nature," an approach that would reject every system…however subtle or ingenious, which was [not] founded on fact or observation" (2000, 1-3). And yet, *Treatise* also gives voice to his struggle to circumvent Pyrrhonism, even to the point of questioning the epistemological assumptions of Newtonian science. Hume was thus pulled in two directions, and since neither religion nor science were adequate alternatives to skepticism, Hume confronted the following delirium:

> The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? And on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me? I am confounded with all of these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, inviron'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty (Hume 2000, 1.4.7).

This passage reflects Hume's initial inability to find his way around the conclusions of ancient skepticism. In fact, Popkin adds that the ancient pyrrhonists recognized this debilitating intellectual state by illustrating that "the more we philosophize and analyze, the more we reveal

the insoluble skeptical difficulties that undermine the validity and reliability of all human conclusions on any subject whatsoever" (1997, 6).

Generally speaking, the French *philosophies* responded positively to the *Treatise's* Newtonian influences and anti-religious leanings (Jones 2008; Malherbe 2005) despite Hume's claim that it "fell dead-born from the press" (Steinberg 1977, ix). Helvetius, Holbach, Voltaire, and Diderot, among others, all expressed admiration for the secular and scientific predilections of Hume's work (Bongie 1961). In fact, Hume's *Treatise* was so admired by the French that he became the only English writer admitted to their club on the Rue Royale (Mossner 1952). And yet, as Popkin further writes, Hume's French "admirers could not find any value in his epistemological writings, in his skeptical questioning" (Popkin 1997, 8). Voltaire, for instance, believed that any reasonable person could easily deal with the problems of epistemology without confronting the issues of radical Pyrrhonism (Israel 2005). Diderot also announced that he would not engage with anyone who denied that which he found obvious (i.e., such as the rules of logic, sensory experiences, and moral distinctions between good and evil). As Diderot writes in the *Encyclopédie*: "I will turn my back on those who seek to draw me away from a simple question in order to set me forth in dissertations on the nature of matter, on that of the understanding, substance, thought, and other subject which have neither limits nor bounds" (Diderot 13, 614). Simply put, French intellectuals seemed confused and frankly uninterested in Hume's skeptical delirium as it appeared irrelevant to the *philosophes'* empirical bent.

The Newtonian influences of Hume's *Treatise* were equally appreciated in his native Scotland, though he expressed frustration about how his countrymen interpreted his ideas about skepticism. The Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid, for instance, was thoroughly impressed by the empirical and inductive bent of the *Treatise*. According to John Angus Campbell, Reid

awoke from his own dogmatic slumbers after reading Hume, which influenced his philosophical response to Hume while also framing his treatises as revolving "one way or another around Hume's orbit" (1986, 355). Reid's resolution in his own *Inquiry*, however, was to criticize and reformulate Hume's skepticism in order to construct his own theory of perception, known as *commonsense realism* (Reid and Brookes 1997). Several other Scottish realists, including Richard Price and James Beattie, followed suit, and thought they had overcome Hume's skeptical dilemma. "To Scottish philosophers," as Vincent Bevilacqua maintains, "the dictates of common sense [philosophy] comprised an incontrovertible rebuttal to [Hume's] philosophical skepticism and epistemological idealism" (1965, 202). Hume blamed this negative reaction on the poor literary quality of the *Treatise* and even advised against reading it, insisting that his later works should serve as the more definitive expression of his philosophical ideas (Hume 1932; Nelson 1972). Hume's *Enquiry* was an attempt to rearticulate his unique view of skepticism against the Enlightenment's dogmatic quest for certainty as well as its repudiation of ancient skepticism broadly defined. To do this, he needed to undermine the hubris of his contemporaries by appealing to the common values of his eighteenth-century audience. Conveying an ethos that represented a new image of the Enlightenment thinker thus enabled Hume to subtly achieve his rhetorical purpose. And it is this rhetorical situation that contextualizes my reading of Hume's writings on scientific epistemology and philosophical skepticism.

Ethos, Antithesis, and Presence

Contemporary research on ethos in rhetorical studies remains indebted to Aristotle's conception of persuasion through character (Condit 2018, 2019; Condit & DeTora 2021; Pittman 2006; Wetzel 2014). More specifically, rhetorical scholars regularly emphasize two interconnected aspects of Aristotle's conception of ethos: first, the creative enactment of

character through discourse and, second, the habituation of social norms and community values. In Eric King Watts' exploration of Alain Locke's, *The New Negro*, for example, he maintains that an African American ethos comprised both the spirit of Harlem in the early-twentieth century and the distinctive voice of Black intellectuals. As Watts argues, "[Harlem] was a dynamic forum for deliberations about the appropriate norms, premises, and practices of a distinct black culture," thus making "available to Black intellectuals the symbolic and material resources for the rhetorical invention and the articulation of a Black public voice" (2002, 19). In this way, Watts privileges the creative capacity of Black intellectuals without totalizing their creativity as constitutive of an identifiable "public voice." Constructing an African American ethos, however, proved difficult due to the "conflicting philosophies and conceptions of art" that exacerbated Harlem's rhetorical dilemma (19). Watts' Aristotelian bent thus informs his examination of Locke's enactment of a hermeneutical rhetoric that draws from the complexities of Black folk tradition, African artistry, and modern pragmatism to constitute an African American collective identity—an identity that nevertheless manifests itself differently among Black intellectuals living in Harlem during this period.

Celeste Condit argues that contemporary studies concerning ethos have also integrated an Aristotelian view of persuasion through character with contemporary interpretations of ethos as a social-level concept (2019, 179). Specifically, Condit's relational view of ethos shifts "from understanding rhetors solely as creative individuals to understanding them as the (re)constructors of social positions" (183), which allows for a more nuanced understandings of the speaker-audience relationship. While the neo-Aristotelian approach centered the rhetor (Vatz 1973; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Edelman, 1971), both Condit's relational perspective and Watts' hermeneutical approach free the individual from this restrained speaker-centered context

while still valuing the generative potential of one's creativity. In a relational context, then, the rhetor can be understood as either an individual or collective that "embodies and reweaves subject position(s)" that simultaneously exist prior to and are constituted during rhetorical situations (Condit 2019, 185). In this way, Condit and Watts respectfully emphasize a conception of ethos as conventional rather than idiosyncratic.

This underscores what Helen Constantinides calls "the duality of scientific ethos" (2001, 61), the fact that rhetorical scholars often forge connections between the discursive features of texts and the social context in order to demonstrate how an ethos is enacted through discourse. Constantinides argues that "by linking Aristotle's concept of ethos to contemporary social norms of science, and these norms to the text, rhetoricians can establish a link between classical theory and practice that can be exploited for the criticism of scientific discourse" (2001, 61). To truly understand ethos, then, scholars must closely read specific textual features of public discourses against the social virtues that are held by individuals within heterogenous societies.

In Hume's case, ethos is constructed through two specific textual features that represent the cultural values of the Enlightenment, which are antithesis and the message effect known as presence. These textual features represent Enlightenment values (i.e., prudence, temperance, and moderation) in the sense that they make it more difficult to uphold propositions as incontrovertibly true. Put differently, these rhetorical techniques force readers to consider the limitations of their ideas, gradually undermining the hubris often exhibited by Enlightenment figures. The first textual feature, antithesis, is a rhetorical figure defined as a juxtaposition of contrasting words or ideas (often, although not always, in parallel structure). Its appeal, Jeanne Fahnestock argues, arises from the formal "matching of opposite with opposite" (1999, 4). As Randy Allen Harris maintains, "opposition is a cognitive affinity, a way of forging and breaking

links to build arguments, organize beliefs, [and] share knowledge" (2019, 21). In fact, Aristotle also recognized this value in argumentation and reasoning, claiming that "the nature of antithesis," as an oppositional form, "is satisfying because the significance of contrasted ideas is easily felt, especially when they are thus put side by side, and also because it has the effect of a logical argument" (1410a). Antithesis' chief argumentative function serves Hume well by allowing him to convey virtues such as moderation and temperance by contrasting them with their conceptual opposites, creating a sense of good moral character through this tropological scheme.

Second, Hume's construction of ethos also requires a sense of presence, a message effect that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca describe as "the displaying of certain elements on which the [rhetor] wishes to center attention in order that they may occupy the foreground of the hearer's consciousness" (1969, 142). Presence represents the increased clearness of a particular idea, a way to captivate attention through "a redistribution of clearness in consciousness, the rise of some elements and the fall of others, with an accompanying total feeling of a characteristic kind" (Titchener 1973, 183). Antithesis, as it appears in Hume's *Enquiry*, creates a sense of presence by drawing readers' attention to the limitations of knowledge through an oppositional scheme. Put differently, creating a sense of presence helps readers visualize ignorance (i.e., information that is either unknown or impossible to obtain). Psychologist William James, in stressing the selective nature of this process, describes presence as "the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form" (1950, 105). In this way, presence is understood as a kind of focalization that renders certain abstractions concrete through, in this case, an antithetical scheme.

In short, this chapter shows how Hume's ethos, as enacted through antithesis and presence, resolves the problematic tension between skepticism and knowledge. It does so by

contrasting ideas to the point when readers become sensible to the limitations of knowledge, conditioning them to avoid dogmatically accepting ideas as incontrovertibly true. This happens because presence is in part a felt quality, a message feature that must be enacted through various rhetorical strategies to secure adherence by way of attention. As an argumentation feature, Louise Karon contends that presence "is a measure of certitude," which is to say, it "is a standard by which we discern the real from the unreal" (1976, 103). Antithesis creates presence in the sense that it draws attention to ignorance (i.e., that which is unknown) and creates a sense of confidence in the impossibility of obtaining certain knowledge altogether. To support this claim, Karon cites the following passage from Hume's *Treatise*:

> An idea assented to *feels* different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us: and this different feeling I endeavor to explain by calling it a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *steadiness*. This variety of terms…is intended only to express the act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in the thought, and gives them a superior influence on the passions and imagination" (Hume 2000, 103).

That Karon recognizes the similarity between Hume's description of the "superior force" or "vivacity" of ideas and the argumentative sense of presence highlights Hume's bearing on the rhetorical tradition. And though Hume's explication of presence is merely descriptive, the felt quality of certain ideas is for Hume perhaps their most significant quality. In fact, as Karon further shows, Hume extends this argument to comprise belief:

> [Belief] is something *felt* by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgement from the fictions of the imagination. It gives them more force and influence; makes them appear of greater importance; infixes them in the mind; and renders them the governing principles of all our actions (Hume, 2000, 100).

The argumentation function of both antithesis and presence thus serves Hume well to bring attention to the limitations of knowledge while also attributing a virtue to one's sense of ignorance. In this way, Hume's skepticism (i.e., his negative epistemological attitude toward

knowledge) is rhetorically enacted through these textual features in ways that constitute a new scientific ethos. Hume's task, therefore, is to communicate his mitigated skepticism in a manner that appeals to the virtues of his public audience, an endeavor that makes readers *feel* skepticism's virtuousness as opposed to simply understanding the complexity of his negative epistemological position.

Conventions of Hume's Mitigated Skepticism

In many ways, Hume's response to the shortcomings of Enlightenment epistemology draws upon that movement's skepticism. There is a substantial difference, however, between Hume's skepticism and the skeptical arguments espoused by other influential figures from the Enlightenment period. As previously stated, while Bayle's skepticism promoted faith and Reid's skepticism promoted realism, Hume's mitigated skepticism foregrounded various bourgeois virtues that would temper both religious and scientific forms of dogmatism. In this way, being skeptical was a sign of humility, indicating that one has faced up to their inadequacies and cognitive limitations. And when we examine Hume's conflation of skepticism with humility, we find his unique and enduring application of the rhetorical tradition.

In the opening pages of *Enquiry,* Hume constructs an ethos by tying the character of the modern philosopher to certain qualities of style: "In order to diffuse and cultivate so accomplished a character [of the moderate philosopher], nothing can be more useful than compositions of the easy style and manner" (1977, 3). Hume's suggestion that compositions should "draw not too much from life" and "require no deep application or retreat to be comprehended" shows his deference to a rhetoric suited to the common experiences of the common citizen. As he further states, mastering the art of effective communication is essential if the purpose of philosophy is to "send back the student among mankind full of noble sentiments

and wise precepts" (1977, 3). In this regard, crafting intelligible compositions that are "applicable to every exigence of human life" is regarded as enabling readers to escape the impulse to blindly abide "by the violence of affirmations and obstinacy of belief" (1977, 111). It is only through such a style that, as Hume puts it, "virtue becomes amiable, science agreeable, company instructive, and retirement entertaining" (1977, 3).

Hume's ethos thus tempered his approach to philosophy, enabling it to evade the excesses of Pyrrhonism (i.e., overconfidence, undistinguished doubts, and nihilism) by performing moderation, temperance, and restraint through an antithetical scheme that produces the message effect known as presence. It is through Hume's antithetical scheme that he advises hesitancy in inquiry, instilling a balanced temperament for thinkers that "perplexes their understanding, checks their passion, and suspends their action" (1977, 111). In short, Hume argues that "if dogmatical reasoners become sensible of the strange infirmities of human understanding" and humbly accept how little they actually know about the world, then "such a reflection would naturally inspire them with more modesty and reserve, and diminish their fond opinion of themselves, and their prejudice against antagonists" (1977, 111). The following close textual analysis thus illuminates how Hume challenges the philosophy of his time by enacting skepticism through ethos.

Antithesis as Trope

In imitation of the Pyrrhonists, Hume's antithesis contrasts the opposed philosophical positions of empiricism and rationalism. In *Enquiry's* opening passage, Hume juxtaposes these two species of moral philosophy: "The one [the empiricist] considers man chiefly as born for action; and as influenced in his measures by taste and sentiment" while "the other species of philosophers [rationalist] consider man in the light of a reasonable rather than an active being,

and endeavors to form his understanding more than cultivate his manners" (1977, 1). This contrast between an active and a reasonable being reflects the division between moral rationalists and moral sense theorists, categories that allow Hume to distinguish and criticize specific characteristics of Enlightenment philosophy more easily. Moral rationalists such as Samuel Clarke, for example, argued that moral standards were the result of reason, and that moral obligation was the product of God's will intelligible through human rationality (Eggers 2019). In contrast, moral sense theorists such as Francis Hutcheson argued that morality, our sense of goodness and sinfulness, was learned by observing the behaviors of people within society (Sprague 1954; Carey 1997). Though Hume maintains that each species of philosophy "has its peculiar merit," this contrast establishes an oppositional pattern that pits sensory experience against reason—a rhetorical maneuver that attributes bourgeois virtues to the empiricist and aristocratic ideals to the snooty, highbrowed rationalist.

More specifically, Hume's comparison contrasts the inductive approach of the sense theorists with the deductive approach of the rationalists. On the one hand, Hume tells us that sense theorists use "the most striking observations and instances from common life" to express their ideas since it is through past experiences that permanent lessons of value are learned. In other words, the empiricist studies human beings by focusing on social existence—namely, how their sense of morality is a consequence of their social interactions, their subjective preferences, and their broader community. In this regard, empiricists realize that human beings make choices based on how things appear, and that we are deeply influenced by the material and social conditions of our environment. In fact, Hume suggests that the rhetorical appeal of the sense theorists is their use of antithesis; that is, by "placing opposite characters in a proper contrast" they effectively allure readers "into the paths of virtue" by directing their "steps in these paths by

the soundest precepts and most illustrious examples" (1977, 1). On the other hand, moral rationalism treats "human nature as a subject of speculation" whereby philosophers theorize only with "narrow scrutiny" human experience "in order to find those principles, which regulate our understanding, excite our sentiments, and make us approve or blame any particular object, action, or behavior" (1977, 1-2). Ultimately, Hume frames moral rationalists as unconcerned with the common bourgeois citizens because of how they treat knowledge as something that occurs outside of experience through our rational mind. Contrasting the elitism of rationalists with the humility of empiricists thus reinforces Hume's ethos by attributing positive moral values to sense theorists.

Hume also contrasts the different styles of moral rationalists and sense theorists to further differentiate these philosophical perspectives. The sense theorists "make us *feel* the difference between vice and virtue…they paint [human nature] in the most amiable colours; borrowing all helps from poetry and eloquence, and treating their subject in an easy and obvious manner, and such as is best fitted to please the imagination, and engage the affections" (1977, 1). This would suggest that empiricists care about communicating their ideas and perhaps feel fulfilled in their pursuits when they can do so with ease, making their philosophy intelligible and convincing to readers. As Gerald Hauser argues, English empiricists utilized descriptive communication for this reason, "as the fundamental method by which speaker and writer could elicit inferences and excite the passions" (1972, 1). By contrast, Hume portrays rationalists as devaluing experience's epistemic worth and criticizes their dogmatic closure, their thinking it a failure of "all literature that philosophy should not yet have fixed, beyond controversy, the foundation of morals, reasoning, and criticism" (1977, 2). In this way, Hume chides the moral rationalists for their prideful concern only with "the approbation of the learned and the wise" and for thinking

"themselves sufficiently compensated for the labor of their whole lives, if they can discover some hidden truths, which may contribute to the instruction of posterity" (1977, 2). Puffed up by their scholastic reputations, Hume asserts that their writing is typically "abstract and unintelligible to common readers," written exclusively for the approval of their professional colleagues.

Though these philosophical approaches (i.e., rationalism and empiricism) seem to provide constructive ways to cultivate knowledge, a characteristic feature of Hume's skepticism is how he exposes a *knowledge problem*. "It may, therefore, be a subject worthy of curiosity," he writes, "to enquire what is the nature of that evidence, which assures us of any real existence and matter of fact, beyond the present testimony of our senses, or the records of our memory" (1977, 16). In other words, Hume emphasizes our epistemological limitations to expose how human beings come to believe things that are either irrational or simply incredible. Hume's ethos slowly emerges through this line of skeptical reasoning by removing the convictions people have for believing certain things about the world. And by removing these convictions, Hume's rhetorical activity aims to further perplex the understandings, check the passions, and suspend the actions of his overconfident reader.

For instance, Hume demonstrates the limits of reason by dividing the products of thought into two distinct categories: *relations of ideas* and *matters of fact.* Relations of ideas represent the intuitive bonds that link ideas together, the "connections of writing" that "thread or chain" our thoughts together in ways that give order to them (Hume 2000, 416). Since these linkages are entirely conceptual, they are forged independent of experience. For Hume, this means that the validity or truthfulness of such reasoning does not depend on anything actually existing in the external world. Hume illustrates this concept using mathematical examples:

> *That the square of the hypothenuse is equal to the square of the two sides*, is a proposition, which expresses a relation between these figures. *That three times five is equal to the half of thirty*, expresses a relation between these numbers…[Mathematical] propositions of this kind are discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe (Hume 1977, 15).

For the initiated reader, Hume's Euclidean reasoning may appear similar to René Descartes's. In Descartes's *Optics*, as Alan Gross maintains, "reason bears the burden of sole guarantor of the certainty of general principles of which the specific truths of this science are the consequence" (1988, 6). Descartes's faith in reason thus permitted him to use the axioms and theorems of Euclidean geometry to advance his physics of light. As Gross further states, "the intuitions of Descartes's unaided reason, provided they are clear and distinct, form the incorrigible foundation of his new science" which led him to maintain that "the material world consists only of extensions and its laws of motion" (Gross 1998, 6). Hume, in a similar fashion, appears to agree that one can deduce worldly truths without reference to experience. "Though there never were a circle or triangle in nature," he writes, "the truths, demonstrated by EUCLID, would forever retain their certainty and evidence" (1977, 15). His apparent praise for Euclid thus gives the impression that Hume intended to endorse deductive acts of reasoning in this *Treatise* as those "which cause the mind to conjoin [dispersed ideas] more frequently together" (2000, 416).

In contrast, propositions concerning *matters of fact* are empirically verifiable and depend on the actual conditions of the external world. Contrary to mathematical or demonstrative reasoning, matters of fact assume the primacy of human experience. Since propositions of this kind are discoverable through experience, Hume argues that "the contrary of every *matter of fact* is still possible, because it can never imply a contradiction…*That the sun will not rise to-morrow* is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction, than the affirmation, *that it will rise*" (1997, 15). Though the first proposition is not corroborated by evidence, it is not

contradictory to such experience in principle. Unlike mathematical reasoning, this form of reasoning draws conclusions from past experiences and thus depends on clear descriptions of sensory experiences that provide confidence in our judgments in the present.

In the spirit of skepticism, Hume then forces his reader to think about where their confidence in unobservable events derives from. For example, he asks readers to consider the kind of evidence that convinces us that things exist "beyond the present testimony of our senses" (1977, 16). In other words, what compels us to believe that the sun will indeed rise tomorrow? In short, the principle of causation emerges as a solution to this epistemological problem since it can contingently explain how individuals draw conclusions about things outside the boundaries of immediate senses and memory. Consider, for instance, the following passage:

> If you were to ask a man, why he believes any matter of fact, which is absent; for instance, that his friend is in the country, or in France; he would give you a reason; and this reason would be some other fact; as a letter received from him, or the knowledge of his former resolutions and promises.
>
> A man, finding a watch or any other machine in a desert island, would conclude, that there had once been men on that island. All our reasonings concerning fact are of the same nature. And here it is constantly supposed that there is a connexion between the present fact and that which is inferred from it. Were there nothing to bind them together, the inference would be entirely precarious (Hume 1977, 16).

This example reveals the gap between sensory experience and the rational inference we make from it. Hume then goes on to question the epistemological evidence underlying this "constantly supposed" connection. In so doing, he draws attention to the conceptual operations of mind that connect an experienced fact with an inferred one. This rhetorical maneuver ultimately leads readers to an epistemological problem; that is, the gap between finding a watch on a desert island and the conviction that someone else was there before. The rationalist, Hume tells us, claims that there is no such gap in our understanding and that reason is the source of all knowledge. The empiricist, in contrast, embraces their ignorance and only attempts to describe the experiences

that condition our judgments about the world. In this regard, the empiricist is virtuous because they embrace their ignorance and temper their arguments accordingly while the hubristic rationalist disregards skepticism in their dogmatic quest for certainty.

Presence as a Message Effect

As previously stated, Hume uses antithesis to draw attention to gaps in our reasoning, thus giving presence to readers' ignorance, a sensibility to that which they do not know. But he does not stop there. Hume then turns from experiential reasoning to reveal our unjustified faith in empiricism itself. Though the irreducibility of experience was foundational for Hume's epistemology, he sustains his ethic of skepticism by questioning even this. Ironically, he maintains that all knowledge should be connected to human experience, but he also realizes that sense perception has limitations and flaws. "I need not insist upon the more trite topics," he declares, "employed by the sceptics in all ages, against the evidence of sense" (1977, 104). For instance, Hume invites the reader to imagine "the crooked appearance of an oar in water; the various aspects of objects, according to their different distances; the double images which arise from the pressing one eye" (1977, 104). For Hume, these skeptical topics "are only sufficient to prove that the senses alone are not implicitly to be depended on" (1977, 104). And yet, it perplexes Hume how we could remain confident in experience despite this fact and remain convinced that our senses will indeed prove reliable.

To overcome the limitations of empiricism, Hume advances the principle of *custom* to explain the propensity that allows all human beings to learn and make inferences from past experiences. As John Werner explains, "custom" is a word denoting "a psychological or social force" that binds together the "continuously changing aggregate of feelings" (1972, 440). Custom thus represents the great guide or teacher because it is rooted in a series of repeated

experiences from which judgments about the world can be sensibly formed. As Hume writes earlier in the *Enquiry*, "it is [custom] alone, which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom," he adds, "we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact, beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses" (1977, 29). Werner concludes that custom in Hume's philosophy "replaces *a priori* reason as the subjective basis of beliefs about causation in external and human nature" (1972, 440). But custom crumbles under the weight of Hume's skepticism since the connection between experiences and our judgments about them remains unknown. To help us understand this connection, Hume makes us believe that "there is required a medium, which may enable the mind to draw such an inference, if indeed it be drawn by reasoning and argument" (1977, 22).

He then constructs his ethos through *inopinatum*; that is, he admits his ignorance by expressing his inability to believe or conceive that which connects ideas together: "What that medium is, I must confess, passes my comprehension" (1977, 22). Constructed as a concession, this statement has the double benefit of *emphasizing* the speculative nature of *Enquiry* while *preserving* its rhetorical force. What passes as a negative argument serves as an evasion that appeals to an ethic of agnosticism. Hume then places the burden of proof on others, writing that "it is incumbent on those to produce [an explanation of this medium], who assert, that it really exists, and is the origin of all our conclusions concerning matters of fact" (1977, 22). This serves as Hume's negative argument regarding the limits of reason and thus exposes the purpose of his skepticism—to embrace and make peace with just how little we actually know.

To further enact presence, Hume excessively frames his statements as questions that shift from what seems obvious to what is inexplicable. But, in the end, Hume amends the purity of his

own skepticism by suggesting that certain questions are merely more difficult, though not impossible, to answer. Consider, for instance, the following passage in *Enquiry* contemplating the information that human beings derive from experience:

> When it is asked, *What is the nature of all our reasonings concerning matter of fact?* The proper answer seems to be, that they are founded on a relation of cause and effect…
>
> When again it is asked, *What is the foundation of all our reasonings and conclusions concerning that relation?* It may be replied in one word, EXPERIENCE…
>
> But if we still carry on our sifting humour, and ask, *What is the foundation of all conclusions from experience?* This implies a new question, which may be of more difficult solution and explication" (Hume 1977, 20; emphasis original).

It bewilders Hume that our experiences of the external world seem so far removed from the actual understanding of nature and, as he states, "that nature has kept us at a great distance from all her secrets and has afforded us only the knowledge of a few superficial qualities of objects" (1977, 21). He illustrates this concern by appealing to common examples: "It is confessed, that the colour, consistence, and other sensible qualities of bread appear not, of themselves, to have any connexion with the secret powers of nourishment and support" (1977, 23). In this passage, Hume points to the underlying source of his perplexity and curiosity, "that there is no known connexion between the sensible qualities and the secret powers [of nature]" (1977, 21). As fallible creatures, we merely infer a connection between our sensory experiences and natural laws, a fact that leads Hume to claim, "that the mind is not led to form such a conclusion [by] anything which it knows of their nature" (1977, 21). And by revealing this inference as the source of his skepticism, Hume clarifies his central query: "Where is the medium, the interposing ideas, which join propositions so very wide of each other?" (1977, 23) Hume offers no answer, but instead contents himself "with an easy task, and shall pretend only to give a negative answer to the question here proposed" (1977, 21).

Hume's writing shows his commitment to experimentalism, a reliance on experimental or empirical procedures when making judgments, and yet, his treatment of empiricism sustains skepticism toward experience itself. This creates an ethos effect that aligns with the principles of his philosophy. Everywhere in *Enquiry* Hume invites readers to question their confidence about matters of experience. Consider, for instance, how one might easily mistake the properties of ash for those of snow (1977, 22): "May I not clearly and distinctly conceive, that a body, falling from the clouds, and which, in in all other respects, resembles snow, has yet the taste of salt or feeling of fire?" The question recognizes the human tendency to misapprehend even the simplest experiences. But this question is quickly followed by a succession of assertions that reveal just how much trust people place in experience despite its superficial nature: "that all arguments concerning existence are founded on the relation of cause and effect; that our knowledge of that relation is derived entirely from experience; and that all our experimental conclusions proceed upon the supposition, that the future will be conformable to the past" (1977, 23). We should be cautious, Hume again warns, against placing trust in past experiences and recognize that experiential conclusions, causal ones especially, are not themselves experiences but rather inferences. "THOUGH there be no such thing as *Chance* in the world," he writes, "our ignorance of the real cause of any event has the same influence on the understanding, and begets a like species of belief or opinion" (1977, 37). And yet, Hume complicates matters even further by arguing that the supposed medium that connects experiences does not fully explain our confidence in experience itself, that we are "evidently going in a circle, and taking that for granted, which is the very point in question" (1977, 23). Experimentalism thus represents the process by which we arrive at "all our experiential conclusions," but he also simultaneously sustains an ethos of skepticism by continuously throwing doubt upon this as well.

By conjoining the empirical optimism of the naturalist with the skepticism of the pyrrhonist, Hume maintains that doubt "may prove useful, by exciting curiosity, and destroying that implicit faith and security, which is the bane of all reasoning and free enquiry" (1977, 16). Allied with empiricism, skepticism takes on a positive value since "the discovery of defects in the common philosophy will not, I presume, be a discouragement, but rather an incitement, as is usual, to attempt something more full and satisfactory, than has yet been proposed to the public" (1977, 16). In this way, Hume's skepticism thus attempts to liberate the intellectual imagination.

Finally, the ethos of Hume's skepticism becomes fully realized when he explicitly discusses how he comes to terms with his own ignorance and learns to accept it while remaining inquisitive and optimistic about the possibility of obtaining knowledge. When Hume describes his own epistemic limitations he writes: "As an agent, I am quite satisfied in the point; but as a philosopher," he adds, "who has some share of curiosity, I will not say skepticism, I want to learn the foundation of this inference" (1977, 24). Though Hume recognizes the limits of knowledge, his skeptical understanding does not forestall his desire to learn about the natural world. He even appropriates the persona of the natural scientist who, by investigating these new questions, "march[es] through such difficult paths, without guide or direction" from traditional assumptions (1977, 16). Hume's skepticism is therefore different than the Pyrrhonists in that the impossibility of certain knowledge does not deter him from seeking it. As in the following point, we see that he does not make skepticism the enemy of inquiry so much as its necessary companion:

> No reading, no enquiry has yet been able to remove my difficulty, or give me satisfaction in a matter of such importance. Can I do better than propose that difficulty to the public, even though, perhaps, I have small hopes of obtaining a solution? We shall at least, by this means, be sensible of our ignorance, if we do not augment our knowledge" (1977, 24-25).

Hume charges his readers to face their own ignorance even as he encourages them to embrace it as a motive force leading to new questions and eventually new knowledge. Hume thus limits the role of philosophy—making it an activity that delineates our cognitive limitations. And as he concludes the *Enquiry*, he reinforces this conception of *philosophy proper* as well as the true benefit of his mitigated skepticism. Specifically, he writes that "if any of the learned be inclined, from their natural temper, to haughtiness and obstinacy" (i.e., if philosophers become arrogant and stubborn, and think themselves better than others), "a small tincture of Pyrrhonism might abate their pride, by showing them, that a few advantages, which they may have attained over their fellows, are but inconsiderable, if compared with the universal perplexity and confusion, which is inherent in human nature" (1977, 111). "In general," he adds, "there is a degree of doubt, and caution, and modesty, which, in all kinds of scrutiny and decision, ought for ever to accompany a just reasoner" (1977, 111). Ultimately, then, Hume's *Enquiry* offsets the nihilistic tendencies of skepticism by signaling its virtuous potential.

Conclusion

This chapter advances three arguments concerning the rhetorical patterns within the *Enquiry* that offset skepticism with the ethos of the *enlightened skeptic*. First, that the features of Hume's rhetorical practice—antithesis and presence—reveal the rhetorical nature of his mitigated skepticism. Second, that Hume's communication sustains a productive and virtuous view of skepticism. Third, that through his mitigated skepticism, Hume frames moral philosophy as the recognition of ignorance, not merely truth.

Hume's *rhetorical skepticism* thus serves as a metonym for the true aim of moral philosophy as an activity that merely reveals our cognitive limitations. As previously stated, Hume repeatedly chastises the dogmatic overconfidence of modern philosophers who "pretend to

assign the ultimate cause of any natural operation" (1977, 19). "In vain do you pretend to have learned the nature of bodies from your past experience," he adds, since "their secret nature, and consequently, all their effects and influence, may change, without any change in their sensible qualities" (1977, 24). No "rational and modest" philosopher should advocate for a position that evades our intellectual capacity since nature's secrets are "shut up from human curiosity and enquiry" and are therefore beyond our reach (1977, 19). Consequently, then, Hume characterizes natural philosophy as an activity that "only staves off our ignorance a little longer" while moral philosophy should "serve only to discover larger portions" of our ignorance (1977, 19). In short, Hume's skeptical form embodies the virtues of his moral philosophy by tempering our confidence and drawing attention to our obliviousness, thus forcing readers to see their own "blindness and weakness…in spite of our endeavors to elude or avoid it" (1977, 19).

Ultimately, Hume's mitigated skepticism recognizes rhetoric's utility for mobilizing social cooperation by encouraging individuals to be suspicious of all knowledge claims. By revealing the gaps in our understanding and weaknesses in our reasoning, Hume enables readers to sense their own ignorance and feel morally justified to do so. This rhetorical effect, I argue, fosters a pragmatic view of uncertainty that can facilitate social change in productive ways. Thus, I find it imperative to continue studying Hume's mitigated skepticism in order to better understand how he promoted a productive and virtuous attitude toward doubt.

CHAPTER 4

SKEPTICAL BACONIANISM: HUME'S RESPONSE TO THE CONTROVERSY ON MIRACLES

> There never was found in any age of the world, either philosophy, or sect, or religion, or law, or discipline, which did so highly exalt the good of the community, and increase private and particular good as the holy Christian faith…Hence, it clearly appears that it was one and the same God that gave the Christian law to men, who gave the laws of nature to the creatures.
>
> —Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, 1605

Opposition to David Hume's irreligion was constant throughout his life, and at one point gave rise to a coordinated effort to excommunicate him from the Church of Scotland. Though his earlier *Treatise* contributed to his perceived impiety, it was the essay "Of Miracles"—first published in the *Enquiry*—that ultimately fixed upon him what Ernest Mossner calls "the character of an infidel" by questioning the reliability of testimony as proof (1978, 655). More specifically, Hume's provocative essay argues that testimonial evidence is never sufficient to support belief in miraculous events and questions the assumption that revelation has a supernatural origin. The essay's critical assessment of Christianity is traditionally interpreted as a scathing rebuke of all religious belief (Golden 1996; Holder 1998; Larmer 2009; Rivers 2001). Hume, as Claudia Schmidt argues, is thus considered "one of the most wide-ranging, creative, and thorough critics of religion in the history of European thought" (2003, 339). Indeed, the epistemological bent of this essay sharpened Hume's assault on Christianity by making it "more detailed, somewhat more outspoken, and yet on occasion more skillfully disguised in irony" (Mossner 1978, 656). And yet, the cultural significance of this essay comes not only from its

dismissal of religious belief, but from its ability to confront a rationalized conception of religion that had gained popularity with the Protestant Reformation.

"Of Miracles" was one of the most important critiques of Christianity published in this period, but its rhetorical context has rarely been considered—the debates in early modern England about science's ability to adjudicate religious belief and the reliability of testimony as evidence of biblical miracles. After the chaos and religious zealotry of the Interregnum, cries for 'rational religion' were heard when King Charles II returned to the throne in 1660 (Johnston 2004; Keeble 2002). Englishmen during the Restoration engaged in "a many-sided contest" to contrive Christianity on rational grounds, with all contestants claiming that only they knew what a "rational" religion could be (Spurr 1988, 563; see Barne 1675; Sprat 1959).[11] For example, the Nonconformist movement in 1667—led by Sir Charles Wolseley, Martin Clifford, and the Duke of Buckingham—meant by "rational" Christianity a theology that would preserve the mysteries of the Gospel and uphold God as the guarantor of all human knowledge while also repudiating Anglican Church authority (Buckingham 1685; Clifford 1675; Reedy 1977; Wolseley 1668). These Protestant dissenters strove to indict the Church of England and her "despotic and obscurantist clergy" for maintaining "an irrational [and] intolerant religion" bent on subjugation (Spurr 1988, 567-8). And yet, the Church of England also maintained that it promoted a rational view of religion, and that the reasonableness of Anglican doctrines served to safeguard the Church against religious anarchy (Goodman 1675, 1693; Ward 1673). Many Anglican apologists asserted that reason vindicated the divine nature of scripture, but, as John Spurr notes, their purpose in doing so was to compel the faithful laity to "submit to clerical guidance and

[11] The Anglican cleric, Thomas Sprat, wrote in 1667 that, "The universal disposition of this Age [Restoration England] is bent upon a rational religion" (Sprat 1959); For context regarding Sprat's claim, see John Spurr. 1988. "'Rational Religion' in Restoration England." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 (4): 563-585.

instruction" (Spurr 1988, 569). In this way, this Restoration debate encouraged many British churchmen to advance their own theologies as "rational and comprehensive of [the] age," as Gerard Reedy puts it (1977, 304).

Debates on rational Christianity continued into the eighteenth-century as theologians disputed the veracity of biblical miracles. During this time, Catholics and Protestants were also heatedly debating the evidentiary bases of their respective beliefs. Under the sway of England's scientific movement, many Protestant enthusiasts were notorious for exaggerating natural theology's role in the scientific study of God's creation (Boyle 1690; Clarke 1738; Glanvill 1689). The English theologian Thomas Woolston responded to the inflated scientific worth given to biblical miracles by arguing that such events fell outside the scope of English science (Woolston 1727). Woolston's aim was not to denounce religion nor undermine its supernatural claims, but rather to overturn the scientistic assumption that natural philosophy could justify religious belief (Herrick 1992). The idea that religion could be studied scientifically deeply troubled Woolston, and so he relentlessly criticized this scientific form of Christianity while promoting a faith-based reading of scripture.[12] Following in his wake, English Deists continued to challenge all attempts to reform religious doctrines using science, even if those reforms purported to strengthen religious belief (Stevens 1997). While Deism was not an organized movement, Robert Burns argues that "all Deists denied the necessity of revelation and affirmed as a matter of theological principle that natural religion was all-sufficient" (1981, 13). Thus, the controversy on miracles was tied up with the larger Deistic reaction to religious reformers who

[12] See John Spurr's characterization of faith as rational. Specifically, he writes that, "In showing how faith was an act of the reason, they [Anglican apologists] also showed how the reason was convinced of something. Faith was simply an assent of the intellect to the truth of something" (1988, 575). See full citation in previous note.

were promoting an integrated scientific-religious view of Christianity—a perspective Protestant reformers also described as "rational Christianity" (Burns 1981; Harrison 2006).

Hume's attacks on miracles and revelation are consistent in many ways with this Deistic reaction, but it is because of his irreligious reputation that "Of Miracles" is rarely seen as appealing to the religious attitudes of British Deists (Fogelin 1990). It is only by recognizing that Hume drew upon the Deistic movement that we begin to understand the rhetorical genius of his essay—that is, by aligning his attack on miracles with the Deistic reaction against a scientifically informed Christianity, he could undermine Protestant writers' abuse of reason. To do this, Hume drew from what John Angus Campbell calls the "cultural grammar" of Baconianism to reconfigure science's place in an English narrative shaped by the Protestant Reformation. Baconianism had drawn English empiricism into alliance with English Protestantism by the eighteenth century, and this meant that Hume was writing for an audience that at some level had already accepted the allegiance of science and religion (Westfall 1958; Jones 1961). This allegiance, however, gave an impetus to the rise of a scientifically informed Christianity that took as its evidentiary basis the veracity of historical facts (i.e., reported miracles). Though Hume was not a Deist, he nevertheless saw scientific Christianity as a dangerous form of dogmatism, a realization that led him to pry science and religion apart epistemologically (Taylor 1972). In this regard, when Hume described miracles as "violations of the usual course of nature" he was appealing to the Deistic idea that applying scientific principles to Christianity would mean putting it on "such a trial it is, by no means, fitted to endure" (1977, 89). For this reason, Hume's attack on biblical testimony and his separation of science and religion reveals his rhetorical efforts to denounce scientific defenses of scripture.

In this chapter, I argue that "Of Miracles" responds to the exigency of scientific Christianity by rhetorically fashioning a new public identity for natural philosophy more capable of making science and religion incommensurate. What I call *skeptical Baconianism* denotes the rhetorical ways in which Hume altered Bacon's cultural grammar by appealing to the strong anti-Catholic sentiments of British culture. This is to say that Hume's essay draws upon the metaphor of separation implicit in Bacon's cultural grammar (i.e., the two books doctrine of divine revelation) to sustain his epistemological critique of biblical miracles. He also exploits the strong anti-Catholic feelings of his culture by targeting the miraculous claims made by Catholic apologists, which shows his willingness to use skeptical reasoning to adjudicate religious doctrines. In this way, *skeptical Baconianism* does well to divorce religion from science, or more correctly natural philosophy, by exposing the theological differences between Catholics and Protestants to subtlety attack the epistemological foundations of scientific Christianity.

This chapter also proposes conceptual takeaways that extend beyond its close reading of Hume's essay. For instance, it provides a view of cultural grammars as shared rhetorical resources that can enable and constrain the advancement of revolutionary ideas (i.e., political, scientific, and religious). This chapter also speaks to the literature on transnational and social movement rhetoric by attending to the ways actors challenge dysfunctional social systems by forging new public identities. And finally, by attending to the ways context shapes Hume's rhetorical choices, this chapter could assist rhetoricians interested in similar rhetorical situations; that is, periods when the destabilization of cultural authority brings forth competing efforts to reestablish such foundation for pluralistic societies.

In explicating *skeptical Baconianism*, this chapter unfolds in three sections. First, I explain how Francis Bacon's cultural grammar demarcated science and religion in Protestant

England to ensure their compatibility. Second, I explain the religious controversy brought about by scientific Christianity, specifically the evidentiary role of biblical miracles in Hume's time. Third, I explore Hume's refashioning of Baconianism by demonstrating how his epistemological critique exposed the incongruity of religious belief and English empiricism and how his habits of equivocation exploit the anti-Catholic sentiments of Protestant culture.

Baconianism as a Cultural Grammar

The English philosopher, Francis Bacon, was the architect of a scientistic movement that rhetorically entangled science with an emerging Protestant social order.[13] Bacon recognized that the new experimental science, as opposed to Scholastic science, needed to accord within the normative frameworks of this society. This required a rhetoric capable of harmonizing science with an emerging Protestant view of history, one that promoted a reformed social identity that fostered change in a time of tremendous social liquidity. According to Thomas Lessl, Bacon accomplished this by tying science "to the larger religious movement that was unfolding around him" so that science could draw upon "the ultimate value that the Reformation now assigned to the unmitigated reception of God's revelation" (2012, 33). The guiding premise of Bacon's advocacy for science, Lessl argues, was "the supposition that science deserves a more central place because it gave distinct expression to England's faith commitments" (2012, 50). In other words, Bacon believed that scientific inquiry, if correctly undertaken, will inevitably strengthen faith. He conceded that "a little natural philosophy inclineth the mind to atheism, but a further proceeding bringeth the mind back to religion" (Bacon 1968, 33). The scientific enterprise so

[13] For research that characterizes the Bacon's scientific revolution as a 'scientistic movement,' see Ben-David, Joseph. 1965. "The Scientific Role: The Conditions of its Establishment in Europe." *Minerva* 4 (1): 15-54; — 1970. "The Rise and Decline of France as a Scientific Centre." *Minerva* 8 (2): 160-179.

envisioned thus resulted, not from religious estrangement, but from "the ideological allegiance that the scientific culture formed with the Protestant movement" (Lessl 1996, 384).

Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* forged this allegiance by upending the view that science had little intrinsic religious value. Though early modern religionists were largely concerned with scientific experimentation, they often believed that scripture discouraged natural inquiry (Lindberg and Numbers 1986; Matthews 2017).[14] Bacon rejected this view as a facile judgment reflecting the "zeal and jealousy of divines" (Bacon 1968, 264), and argued instead that science and Christian theology were two branches of the same cultural and intellectual heritage. As Margaret Osler argues, the cultural embeddedness of Bacon's rhetoric meant that seemingly scientific questions could now be taken to have theological import (1997, 93). In this way, Bacon envisioned a shared cultural heritage that set the stage for science's reintegration into the broader scope of religious history.

This alliance of science and religion was constructed through Bacon's reworking of the two-book metaphor that viewed the Bible as the "book of God's Word" and nature as its complement, the "book of God's works." Bacon gave this traditional trope a millenarian spin by proposing in his unfinished magnum opus, *The Great Instauration*, a role for science to play in God's restoration of a fallen nature (Serjeantson 2017; Sessions 1996; Weeks 2008). As George Hendry posits, this was a drastic departure "from that found in the piety of the Middle Ages, in which it [nature] was seen as a realm of dark and sinister forces with which it was dangerous to meddle" (Hendry 1980, 27). The new, experimental science of the Reformation was thus sanctioned by the rehabilitation of nature anticipated in Scripture.

[14] Though this is not universally true, I am referring to an interpretation of Biblical passages that support the idea that the physical world was cursed during the Fall (Gen 3:17-19; 5:29).

This idea also allowed Bacon to refashion natural philosophy as an extension of clerical study, relating science to a millenarian narrative that gave it a part to play in salvation history. Millenarianism, as generally conceived in Western theological traditions, refers to the future 'golden age of prosperity' brought on by Christ's return to earth (Feingold 2013). The notion that the Church's mission was to prepare the way for Christ's ultimate reign on earth had traditionally been applied to the spiritual work of the faithful. Bacon merely expanded the scope of that role to the pragmatic realm of instrumental science (Lessl 2007). In other words, Bacon's millenarian narrative represented science as an instrument of providence that brought the remnant Church into the prophesied millennium. Moreover, Bacon's millenarian rhetoric liberated Protestant reformers from the long-standing Catholic authority by shifting historical interpretation toward the future. On this point, Lessl writes:

> Appeals to this prophesied future undermined the historical authority of the Catholic past, but their more important effect was a vital shift in temporal orientations. Providential history could no longer afford to find its point of reference in the past, since this was what sustained Catholic authority. It needed to find its main point of historical reference in the future, and millenarian prophecy enabled Protestants to do this without abandoning their self-imposed requirement that all teachings have a biblical grounding (2012, 74-5).

Bacon's vision of science was indeed tied to the past by biblical authority, but it was oriented toward the future as an approach that would emancipate religionists from their compliance with Catholic authority by appreciating divine revelation in this new way. As Katherine Attié argues, Bacon's *Advancement*, for example, was fashioned "as an improved translation of God's works—a kind of second Scripture—in order to align his interest in natural philosophy with the Protestant emphasis on biblical exegesis" (2019, 153). By representing science in culturally normative terms as a theological 'second coming,' Bacon was able to construct a separation between theology and natural philosophy all while representing both approaches as legitimate ways to study God's revelation.

Once subsumed by this larger Protestant narrative, natural philosophy could play an important role in the Christian religion as the official adjudicator of reported miracles. As Peter Harrison argues, it was because of science's familiarity with the ordinary course of nature that natural philosophers could "claim expertise in the identification of exceptions to that normal course" (2006, 494). With this newfound authority, it was now science's job to both legitimize Protestant readings of scripture and challenge the veracity of errant ones by adjudicating the reliability of testimonial evidence. Harrison further maintains that "natural philosophers could thus argue for the religious significance of their activities, inasmuch as they now performed these crucial adjudicatory functions in the context of this new understanding of true religion as a body of doctrines within objective and rationally justifiable foundations" (2006, 494-5). This new context encouraged natural philosophers to begin viewing themselves as priests who could now "lay claim to the same authority that entitled English clergymen to draw from the public treasury" (Lessl 2012, 33). And while science still ranked beneath theology as a merely temporal form of revelation, the independence it now gained safeguarded it somewhat from traditional religious authority.

As part of this effort, Bacon also reimagined the character of the natural scientist through an ethic of skepticism. The aim of Baconian science was truth and certainty, and the *telos* of the natural philosopher was described as such: "Now the true and lawful goal of the sciences is none other than this: that human life be endowed with new discoveries and powers" (1860, 1xxxi). And yet, Bacon was careful not to overestimate the intellectual capacity of human beings. According to Moody Prior, Bacon adopted "a very critical attitude toward the limited capacities by means of which man perceives and comes to a knowledge of the universe" (1954, 349). In his *Novum Organum*, Bacon merged his optimism for science with skepticism about human

cognition by advancing the Christian narrative of grace as a corrective to the fallen condition of human beings (Bacon 1676). As Prior further writes, Bacon believed that "if the past was to be swept aside, the mind wiped clear, and a new way charted, the positive program could begin only after all established illusions about man himself had been anatomized and taken into account" (Prior 1954, 349). Bacon's newly conceived scientific worldview was thus "reflected in the image which he seems to have clearly visualized of the new scientist who was to be the instrument of the new learning as well as its product" (1954, 348).

Bacon promoted skepticism as a way to check the deficiencies and dogmatic propensities of the human mind. He believed that undisciplined reason and unreflective experience were dangerously unreliable, but he remained optimistic that the right method would overcome our faults just enough to achieve reliable theories. As he argues,

> By forbidding men to pronounce and to set down principles as established until they have duly arrived through the intermediate steps at the highest generalities, I maintain a sort of suspension of judgement, and bring to it what the Greeks call *Acatalepsia*—a denial of the capacity of the mind to comprehend truth (1676, cxxvi, 111).

Doubt played a crucial role in Bacon's new science, but his skeptical attitude was very different from *Ataraxia*—the state of undisturbed tranquility depicted by Sextus Empiricus in which one finds happiness by embracing the skeptical realization that human knowledge can never amount to certainty (Machuca 2011, 2020; Svavarsson 2011). To emphasize the differences between the Pyrrhonian skepticism of Empiricus and his own moderate form, Bacon further writes, "that which I mediate and propound is not *Acatalepsia*, but *Eucatalepsia*; not denial of the capacity to understand, but provision for understanding truly" (1676, cxxvi, 111-2). In this regard, Baconian skepticism tempered the propensity for embellishment in argument and circumvented cognitive faults by following the strict criteria of his proposed method.

Bacon also rejected the totalizing skepticism that led to the "deliberate and factitious despair" of those who assert that nothing can be known. He does concede "that not much can be known in nature," but only "by the [method] which is now in use." And while the Pyrrhonians "go on to destroy the authority of the senses and understanding," Bacon proposes to "devise and supply help for the same" (Bacon 1860, 53). Here, we can see that Bacon's skepticism was aimed only at dogmatism and the agitation encouraged by the disputatious methods of his time. This view thus encouraged an optimistic outlook among scientific thinkers who believed that Bacon's new method promised unlimited results.

As a cultural grammar, then, Baconianism involves three distinct aspects of science's rhetorical practice. First, it fashioned a new public identity for natural philosophy that gave it cultural and normative functions. Specifically, natural philosophy became an extension of clerical study and served a new role as the official adjudicator of religious claims. Second, it constructed this new identity by relating science to a millenarian narrative that gave it a part to play in salvation history. Bacon's two-book metaphor and futuristic millenarian orientation, for instance, enabled him to construct a separation between theology and natural philosophy all while representing both approaches as legitimate ways to study God's revelation. Third, Bacon established a norm of skepticism through an interpretation of the Christian doctrine of the fall and its relationship to grace. In the next section, I further explain how misapprehensions of Baconian science contributed to the increasing scientistic conceptions of religion in the eighteenth-century. In particular, I examine the religious controversy brought about by scientific Christianity and the new evidentiary role of biblical miracles.

The Debate on Miracles

Baconian standards were certainly influential in subsequent centuries, but the enthusiasm for science that began to appear in the late seventeenth-century also seems to have been shaped by misapprehensions of Bacon's vision. Indeed, the two books doctrine had granted natural philosophy some independence in the quest to investigate God's revelation since at least the Middle Ages (Murphy 1981). And this autonomy "eventually enabled natural revelation to compete with and even supersede special revelation as a basis for cultural authority" (Lessl 2012, 104). In this way, Bacon's rhetoric created a historical rationale for science's rising importance that eventually led to the construction of a dichotomy between the natural and supernatural (Goodare and McGill 2020). As a pervasive cultural grammar, then, we should understand Baconianism as a source of invention that contributed to the gradual dogmatization of natural philosophy (i.e., something akin to positivism) and the rationalization of Christianity.

As natural revelation gained cultural authority, Enlightenment writers began applying it to authenticate Christian belief (Clarke 1738: Fleetwood 1701). This was fueled by deep and irresolvable divisions about the ultimate source of Christian authority. On the one hand, Roman Catholics believed that genuine orthodoxy required the teaching guidance from the Church. On the other hand, Protestants typically rejected the idea that religious belief required submission to an official ecclesiastical order. As Peter Harrison argues, many Protestants throughout history held that "the doctrines of revealed theology were evident in the natural world, rendering superfluous arguments that relied on miracles to establish the veracity of special revelation" (2006, 500). This tendency to vest nature with revelatory significance, Harrison adds, reinforced Protestant opposition to the Church's arbitration of religious belief, leading many to "insist, against both Catholics and radical enthusiasts that the age of miracles had long ended" (2006,

500). Biblical miracles such as the Resurrection remained vital to Christianity, but some early modern theologians began viewing reported miracles as "evidence only of human credulity, ecclesiastical imposture, and of the ever-present danger of demonic delusions" (Harrison 2006, 501). Though personal faith remained of fundamental importance, Harrison concludes that "the very fact of religious pluralism called for the creation of a set of rational criteria that would enable an objective assessment of the rival claims of the religions" (2006, 502-3). Science as natural theology often provided this.

It is easy to assume that skepticism about miracles grew directly from the rise of modern science, but closer examination supports the opposite conclusion that belief in miracles increased among thinkers most in touch with the scientific spirit. According to Robert Burns, "the new theology which laid such stress on miracles was in fact very closely connected with the movement which had brought about the scientific revolution in England" (1981, 12). The skeptical attack on miracles thus began as a defensive reaction against natural philosophers who exaggerated "the importance of miracles to a greater degree than ever before in the history of Christianity" (Burns 1981, 12). Joseph Glanvill, for example, a leading propagandist for English empiricism in the late seventeenth century, devoted a considerable amount of time to investigating the reality of witchcraft using the experimental method of the Royal Society (Glanvill 1676, 1689). "His main intention," Burns writes," was to provide palpable evidence for the existence of a world of spirits, and therefore indirect evidence which would help to confirm the truth of the traditional Christian worldview" (1981, 47). In doing so, "Glanvill dealt at considerable length with philosophical problems connected with testimony of unusual and miraculous events in a manner entirely characteristic of moderate empiricism" (1981, 47).

Many other late seventeenth-century Protestant writers endorsed the new evidentiary role of miracles in establishing the divine nature of Christianity, a trend that Harrison further describes as "parasitic upon the new, propositional and rationalized [i.e., scientific] conception of religion" (2006, 503). During this time, forensic procedures that were once used to authenticate historical testimony were beginning to be used to assess the veracity of reported miracles (Sargent 1989; Shapiro 2002). Given their confidence in empirical science, it is not surprising that natural philosophers would leverage their expertise in adjudicating the accuracy of testimony to singular events such as miracles. Though John Locke was not one of these natural philosophers per se, his argument that "the miracles that Christ did, are a proof of his being sent from God, and so his religion the true religion" further endorsed the enthusiasm for natural philosophy's new religious jurisdiction (1823, 6:401). In response, many Catholic apologists during Locke's time turned to an argument predicated upon the "broad witness" of the Church—the cumulative wisdom of tradition handed down by believers through the ages—to undermine the interpretative ability of English empiricists (Popkin 1968). Specifically, Burns argues that

> [Catholic apologists] demanded to know how any individual could know *for certain* which books were truly Scripture and which were not; how he could *know* that the Scriptures had been handed down unaltered throughout the centuries by men whom he admitted were fallible; how he could be *sure* that he grasped the real meaning of a single sentence; how indeed he could be sure that he had correctly understood the meaning of every single word (1981, 39; emphasis original).

Burns' quotation further touches on the hermeneutical differences between Catholics and Protestants regarding the authority of Christian belief. Reformers like Martin Luther, for instance, insisted upon the perspicuity of the Bible—that its teachings were so plain that readers did not need scholarly or theological guidance from the church. In rejecting individual interpretation, Catholic apologists posited that the only source of certitude was the divine authority of the Church, "and the only way in which the individual could appropriate this

infallible certitude…was by abandoning himself in an act of total fideistic submission to the Church" (Burns 1981, 39). Many Catholics thus held an underlying presumption "that all real knowledge [theological and scientific] must be flawlessly certain [and] beyond any possibility of doubt" (1981, 39). And it was only through the clergy that such certitude could be achieved.

In a complicated series of events, Baconianism came to represent both the rational impetus for scientific Christianity and skeptical anti-clericalism throughout eighteenth-century England. As previously stated, this occurred in three primary ways. First, science's scope expanded with the Protestant Reformation to encompass all events, encouraging natural philosophers to expand science's jurisdiction. The optimism that Bacon inspired encouraged this intellectual expansion and ushered in a new conception of natural philosophy. Second, science's expansion meant that new forms of evidence were slowly being used in new ways to judge the veracity of nonscientific ideas. Above all, testimonial evidence emerged as a primary form of proof in the assessment of religious claims despite its epistemological limitations. And third, a new public ethos transformed the social landscape for natural philosophers, giving them a newfound cultural authority independent of the church.

In the following sections, I analyze how Hume's attack on scientific Christianity led to greater demands for the proof of revealed authority. I argue that this necessitated a reinterpretation of Baconianism that would enable Hume to 1) argue for the incommensurability of science and religion, and 2) exploit the anti-Catholic sentiments of Protestant readers.

Skeptical Baconianism in "Of Miracles"

Hume's attack on scientific Christianity was an effort to make radical ideas socially intelligible by couching them in familiar language conventions. As noted, Hume greatly admired Bacon, but the extent to which the latter's ideas contributed to the growing Protestant

dependence on natural theology represented a major concern for him. Hume's ability to challenge scientific Christianity thus depended on his ability to repurpose a cultural grammar that was already deeply embedded within Protestant thought. What I call *skeptical Baconianism*, then, denotes the rhetorical innovation that enabled Hume to alter the Baconian cultural grammar. My analysis of this begins by exploring the perceived incongruity between miraculous claims and English empiricism constructed in "Of Miracles." The second section examines a pattern of equivocation that is exhibited throughout Hume's essay. Specifically, this section draws attention to the multiple ways Hume uses the term "miracles" to interpose metaphysical assumptions into his discourse, which also serves to challenge the miraculous claims made by non-Protestants. While Hume's critique does undermine a specific theological interpretation of scripture, I maintain such criticism is in line with the Deistic reaction to scientific Christianity and thus implicitly endorses a Deistic approach to biblical interpretation.

Metaphor of Separation

Hume's critique begins by exposing the incongruity between religious belief in miracles and English empiricism. Put differently, Hume endeavors to show how sensory experience undermines rather than endorses belief in the supernatural, an argument that establishes a separation between science and religion. For example, Hume begins "Of Miracles" by referencing John Tillotson's argument against transubstantiation, the idea that the body and blood of Christ are present in the Eucharist instituted by Christ when he commanded his disciples during the Last Supper to consume bread and wine as his body and blood (Macy 1994, 2011).[15] In the seventeenth century, Tillotson published a refutation of the Catholic Church's

[15] The term "transubstantiation" does not appear in the New Testament (i.e., 1 Corinthians). This theological term was invented many centuries later in interpretation of the Last Supper. For reference, see Gary Macy's "The Dogma of Transubstantiation in the Middle Ages." In this essay, Macy writes: "Under the heading 'transubstantiation' in the *Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church*, one finds that the word

doctrine for asserting that consecration literally replaced the substance of these items with the essence of Christ. "The absurdity of this doctrine" for Tillotson was that it violated sensory experience. Transubstantiation could not be true, in other words, "unless our senses, and the senses of all mankind, be deceived about their proper objects" (Tillotson 1820, 407). Hume considered Tillotson's refutation "concise, and elegant, and strong as any argument can possibly be" against this miraculous claim (1977, 72). The utility of Tillotson's refutation for Hume thus comes from his repudiation of the Catholic doctrine on the grounds that it does not comply with the standards of English empiricism.

Hume raises similar questions about the credibility of testimonial evidence in judging miraculous claims. More specifically, he gives voice to *phronesis* or practical wisdom by encouraging readers to judge the veracity of testimonial evidence in light of experience. According to Barbara Warnick, "*phronesis* is realized most assuredly in human affairs when reasons are given" about how one is obligated to behave (1989, 306). "Because *phronesis* can be applied only in the particular case and because human affairs are intrinsically changeable and contingent," Warnick adds, "the standards for right action must be relative and applied to the case at hand rather than invariant and universal" (1989, 306). In this way, Hume enacts *phronesis* by suggesting that miraculous claims always contradict experience. Consider, for instance, the following passage:

> When any one tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle (1977, 77).

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was in widespread use in the later part of the 12th cent., and at the Lateran Council of 1215 belief in Transubstantiation was defined as *de fide*; but the elaboration of the doctrine was not achieved till after the acceptance of the Aristotelian metaphysics later in the 13th cent., when it found classic formulation in the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas" (1994, 11). See complete citation in bibliography.

Hume enacts probable reasoning predicated upon the continuity of human experience by comparing the likelihood of a resurrection to the likelihood that such an event was based on flawed or deceptive testimony. “If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates,” he writes, “then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief and opinion” (1977, 77).

To further examine the credibility of testimonial evidence, Hume considers the reasons why human beings trust eye-witness reports. Epistemologically speaking, Hume argues that the connections assumed between a person’s testimony and the event it reports are merely customary. “The reason why we place any credit in witnesses and historians,” Hume contends, “is not derived from any *connexion*, which we perceive *a priori*, between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them” (1977, 75). The wide embrace of scriptural authority by theologians, he adds, is “founded merely in the testimony of the apostles” because they believe that the apostles “were eye-witnesses to those miracles of our Saviour, by which he proved his divine mission” (1977, 72). Thus, religionists seem to trust eye-witness reports because they comply with standards of proof established by tradition.

Expanding this argument, Hume maintains that our affinity for testimonial evidence comes from our social experiences (i.e., our social interactions within our local communities), which shapes one’s view of human nature. Specifically, he writes that, “we should never repose the least confidence in human testimony, were not the memory tenacious to a certain degree; had not men commonly an inclination to truth and a principle of probity; were they not sensible to shame, when detected in a falsehood” (1977, 74). In other words, he suggests that we trust testimony when we assume that people are typically inclined to help each other and feel guilty or shameful when they are caught lying. In contrast, we distrust testimony when we distrust human

nature or the moral character of an individual. As Hume further writes, "a man delirious, or noted for falsehood and villainy, has no manner of authority with us" (1977, 74). And though there are several other factors that "may diminish or destroy the force of any argument deprived from human testimony" (1977, 75), Hume shows that the epistemological veracity of testimonial evidence is tied up with other non-evidentiary premises about human morality and behavior.

Hume then raises the epistemological difficulty of proving miracles empirically through testimonial evidence by articulating all the legitimate reasons individuals should be suspicious of such reports. Above all, Hume's skepticism emerges from his observation that no miracle has ever been proven or "established on [testimonial] evidence" so thoroughly that auditors unanimously embrace it without suspicion (1977, 78). On this point, he writes,

> There is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good-sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts, performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable: All which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men (1977, 78).

Without question, this proposes an extremely high burden of proof for the veracity of testimonial evidence in support of miracles, and I suspect that there is no historical event that could overcome these criteria for authentication. However, Hume is not arguing that belief in past events must be entirely above suspicion. Instead, he is merely suggesting that the epistemological limitations of testimonial evidence make it reasonable to doubt all human testimony, especially regarding miraculous events. Though this may seem like a small point, it sows a seed of doubt that slowly evolves throughout the essay to reinforce Hume's skepticism about testimony.

Hume then appeals to a modernist ethic by questioning why miracles are only reported in "ignorant nations" unfamiliar with the marvels of modern science, a move that further separates science and religion by associating the latter to an antiquated past. "It is strange, a judicious reader is apt to say, upon the perusal of these wonderful historians, that such prodigious events never happen in our days. But it is nothing strange," Hume writes, "that men should lie in all ages" (1977, 80). Once more, Hume asks his reader to consider which is more likely, that a few privileged individuals witnessed a supernatural event or that they reported a falsehood. For example, he recounts the "False Prophet" fable told by the Greek author, Lucian, regarding Alexander of Abonoteichos who was hailed as an oracle in Paphlagonia for making it appear that the god Asclepius was being born in the form of a serpent from a goose's egg.[16] As Hume states, "It was a wise policy in that false prophet, ALEXANDER, who…lay the first scene of his impostures in PAPHLAGONIA, where…the people were extremely ignorant and stupid, and ready to swallow even the grossest delusion" (1977, 80). According to Martin Devecka, Hume enlists Lucian's fable "as evidence for his claim that miracle narratives first take root among gullible, rural populations before spreading to cultured city-dwelling elites" (2022, 515). However, Hume's point is simply that the gullibility of all people (i.e., both knowledgeable and ignorant) and the supernatural quality of such stories make them difficult, if not impossible, to corroborate by other means. On this point, Hume further writes,

> People at a distance, who are weak enough to think [reported miracles are] worth enquiry, have no opportunity of receiving better information. The stories come magnified to them by a hundred circumstances. Fools are industrious in propagating the imposture; while the wise and learned are contented, in general, to deride its absurdity, without informing themselves of the particular facts, by which it may be distinctly refuted (1977, 81).

[16] For more on Hume's use of Lucian's *Alexander* and *On the Death of Peregrinus* see Devecka, Martin. 2022. "The Humed Serpent: Lucian, Miracles, Enlightenment, and Empire." *Classical Receptions Journal* 14 (4): 515-532.

Hume further posits that both clinging to incredible stories and rejecting them without serious consideration sets a dangerous precedent for society since these are the conditions that sustain the continued propagation of false information. Specifically, Hume suggests that, on the one hand, the imprudent citizen contributes to the propagation of false information without ever questioning its veracity. On the other hand, the wise, prudent citizen makes the mistake of rejecting incredible stories without taking the time to properly refute them. He further elaborates on this point in the following passage:

> The most ignorant and barbarous of these barbarians carry the report abroad. None of their countrymen have a large correspondence, or sufficient credit and authority to authority to contradict and beat down the delusion. Men's inclination to the marvellous has full opportunity to display itself. And thus a story, which is universally exploded in the place where it was first started, shall pass for certain at a thousand miles distance" (1977, 81).[17]

Here, Hume expresses his frustration with "ignorant citizens" who seem to relish in spreading false stories and his larger concern with the supposed educated citizenry's growing inability to repudiate falsehoods in the public domain. Without learning to negate false information, in other words, society writ large becomes unable to refute even the simplest of fictions.[18]

As indicated by Walter Fisher (1985, 1989), it should not be surprising that people cling to falsehoods without hesitation since we seem to enjoy telling stories even if we know they are untrue. As emotive beings, Hume suggests that we "love to partake of the satisfaction" of sharing stories secondhand, "and place a pride and delight in exciting the admiration of others" (1977, 78). "The passion of surprise and wonder arising from miracles," he adds, "gives a sensible

[17] Hume uses the term "barbarous" in many ways throughout his writings, a term that carries overt racist and discriminatory connotations. For secondary research on Hume's use of this term, see McArthur, Neil. 2005. "Laws Not Men: Hume's Distinction between Barbarous and Civilized Government." *Hume Studies* 31 (1): 123-144.

[18] The rhetorical deficiencies of English rhetors were a major concern for Hume, so much so that the next chapter will examine his response to the declining oratorical standards of modern English eloquence.

tendency towards the belief of those events, from which it is derived" (1977, 78). In this way, Hume maintains that people propagate falsehoods not only for their own amusement, but to support good and noble causes. Specifically, he writes,

> A religionist may be an enthusiast, and imagine he sees what has no reality: He may know his narrative to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intentions in the world, for the sake of promoting so holy a cause (1977, 79).

Belief in the mysterious, Hume contends, is commonplace primarily because people crave the excitement of incredible stories. And though testimony loses its authority once it is abused, it is not atypical for individuals to propagate marvelous stories about "sea monsters, their relations of wonderful adventures, strange men, and uncouth manners" (1977, 79). However, Hume warns that "if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; and human testimony, in these circumstances, loses all pretentions to authority" (1977, 79). When false stories are spread for these reasons, lay individuals learn to propagate false information in ways that leave little room for reflection. Communication, then, changes from perspicuous to superfluous when storytelling is only used to entertain and excite lay audiences. Furthermore, Hume warns that spreading falsehoods can be dangerous since, "[lay] auditors may not have…sufficient judgement to canvass [the] evidence." In fact, they may even get caught up in the "sublime and mysterious" and let their "passion and a heated imagination disturb the regularity of [their rational mind]" (1977, 79). Thus, it seems, speaking of the propagator of false stories, the "credulity [of the public] increases his impudence: And his impudence overpowers their credulity" (1977, 79).

A Pattern of Equivocation

As previously stated, the growing dependency upon natural theology within Protestant culture placed science at the center of public life in eighteenth-century England. The

communication habits that cultivated this change, however, were largely unable to satisfy the new ethical demands of natural philosophy. For instance, science was often regarded as an objective, ethically agnostic activity that was only concerned with cultivating knowledge. But its new role within the larger Protestant narrative gave it moral significance within the broader scope of salvation history. Science's ethical neutrality, in other words, is what made it virtuous and productive for society for its ability to authenticate God's revelation without relying on traditional authority.

This tension between science's perceived neutrality and its moral purpose often necessitates patterns of equivocation that subtly obscure the presence of metaphysical or moral meanings in works of natural philosophy (i.e., as well as modern science). "Equivocation in its simplest verbal form," Lessl writes, "occurs whenever the sense given to a term at one juncture of an argument shifts in some significant and especially contradictory way at another" (2013, 67). This occurs in Hume's writing when the term "miracle" is used at one moment to mean an event attributed to a supernatural agency (i.e., such as the Christian God or the Islamic prophet, Muhammad) and at others to mean an unexplainable phenomenon in nature; an event that is not attributable to an agency or prior cause. This habit of equivocating about miracles disposes Hume's readers to assume they are getting an overt rejection of all biblical miracles (i.e., events ordained by a divine power) when, in fact, his essay offers yet another argument about the limitations of human cognition.

Though Hume's essay divorces science and religion, his awareness of the limitations of inquiry draws upon an underlying assumption that linked natural philosophy and Protestant theology—namely, that both should cultivate an awareness of the weaknesses and blind spots in human understanding. In "Of Miracles," Hume does not denounce Christian faith itself, but only

"those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the Christian religion who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason" (1977, 89). Hume tells us that science, or more correctly natural philosophy, cannot verify the doctrines of Christianity, and to believe the contrary is to abuse scientific thinking at the detriment of religion. Merging science and religion in this way, Hume contends, frames religion as a failed science in the sense that it is unable to overcome its epistemological limitations in the ways that science can. In this way, science thus benefits from Hume's argumentation patterns by subsuming a greater authority in the pursuit to natural understanding.

A closer look at the patterns of equivocation exhibited in "Of Miracles" will also show how it appeals to the strong anti-Catholic sentiments of British culture. Though Protestants also believed in biblical miracles, many Catholic doctrines cannot easily be deduced from biblical texts (i.e., such as the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception) and so the Catholic Church would often appeal to corroborating miracles in later history to bear these out. Hume disposes readers to assume, then, that the term "miracle" denotes the divine events Catholic apologists often attribute to a supernatural agency. For instance, Hume's opening discussion of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation was a notable point of contention for many Protestants in the eighteenth-century (Sands 2000; Weinbrot 2016). Since transubstantiation is a theological doctrine deduced from exegesis (i.e., the interpretation of Christ's words at the Last Supper along with St. Paul's commentary in 1 Corinthians), it is not exactly the kind of miraculous claim that "Of Miracles" targets. And yet, referring to this event as a "miracle" denotes the religious contexts that bear upon the Catholic reading of scripture.

In addition to anti-Catholic undercurrents of Hume's essay, he also draws upon the Protestant rejection of non-Christian faiths by pejoratively describing the divine events proffered

by these religions as "miraculous." Hume's rejection of non-Christian faiths draws on the emotional sentiments of his readers, but it also serves an argumentative function as a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*—that is, by accepting the criteria given by Protestants for accepting miracles, theologians would have to apply these criteria to other religions as well, thus endorsing other theological systems. For instance, Hume denounces the miracles professed by non-Christians when advancing the argument that "there is no testimony for any [miracle]…that is not opposed by an infinite number of witnesses; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of testimony, but the testimony destroys itself" (1977, 81). Here, Hume seems to make an inductive generalization, that experiences of causal regularity so outnumber miraculous claims that we should infer the universality of natural causality. He then contends that in religious matters "whatever is different is contrary," which is to say, that the reported miracles of one religion challenge the legitimacy of other faiths, including "the religions of ancient ROME, of TURKEY, of SIAM, and of CHINA" (1977, 81). On this point, Hume writes,

> Every miracle, therefore, pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions (and all of them abound in miracles), as its direct scope is to establish the particular system to which it is attributed; so has it the same force, though more indirectly, to overthrow every other system. In destroying a rival system, it likewise destroys the credit of those miracles, on which that system was established; so that all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as *contrary facts*, and the evidences of these prodigies, whether weak or strong, as opposite to each other (1977, 81; emphasis added).

The "contrary facts" reported by the religions that rival Christianity undermine the credibility of the latter. "According to this method of reasoning," Hume writes, "when we believe any miracle of MAHOMET" or consider the testimony of the "GRECIAN, CHINESE, and ROMAN CATHOLIC[S]" who have professed miraculous claims, we should, he adds, "regard their testimony in the same light as if they had mentioned that MAHOMETAN miracle, and had in express terms contradicted it, with the same certainty as they have for the miracle they relate"

(1977, 81-2). In other words, Hume contends that we should treat miraculous claims uniformly and, with a healthy dose of suspicion, recognize that all reported miracles contradict each other in the sense that they offer conflicting accounts of a divine being. And since Hume subtly promotes Protestantism as "our most holy religion" (1977, 89), readers may likely assume from these passages that Protestant interpretations of scripture destroy these "rival systems" by undermining the miraculous claims attributed to those religions.[19]

Elsewhere in Hume's essay, the term "miracle" takes on an epistemological meaning as an unexplainable phenomenon in nature. For instance, Hume uses the noun "miracle" and the adjective "miraculous" to emphasize the cognitive and epistemological limitations of human beings. In this sense, the Immaculate Conception and Resurrection of Christ are miracles *solely* because it is impossible to explain how such events could have actually happened. For instance, Hume posits that, "Nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happens in the common course of nature" (1977, 76). This implies that miracles must break the ordinary course of events, making them rare occurrences that violate the common experiences of people in daily life. "It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden: because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle," Hume argues, "that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed, in any age or country (1977, 76-77). Miracles, he assumes, must be understood as "violations of the laws of nature" since it is through sensory experience that such laws are initially comprehended. Hume also tells us that miracles must completely break the normal

[19] For research on Hume's implicit promotion of Protestantism, see Kidd, Colin. 2004. "Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate interpretation of history." *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55 (3): 502-519; Hill, Jacqueline R. 1988. "Popery and Protestantism, Civil and Religious Liberty: The Disputed Lessons of Irish History 1690-1812." *Past & Present* 118: 96-129; Siebert, Donald T. 1990. *The Moral Animus of David Hume*. University of Delaware Press.

course of nature, which means that there should always "be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation" (1977, 77). And yet, since we can only experience nature's normal course through sense perception, no perceivable occurrence could qualify as miraculous. The religious connotation of the term "miracle," in other words, is replaced by a scientific, albeit skeptical, connotation. This does not mean that miracles are impossible, but rather that it is impossible, epistemologically speaking, to empirically experience certain phenomena in nature.

Moreover, Hume's critique of scriptural miracles demonstrates how his skepticism can make readers sensible to the idea that biblical miracles are mere products of human imagination. "Let us examine those miracles," he writes, "not as the word or testimony of God himself, but as the production of a mere human writer and historian" (1977, 90). Since miracles are unexplainable events that occur beyond nature, Hume must critique the testimony and character of those who report miraculous events. Therefore, toward the end of his essay, Hume argues that reported miracles are nothing more than stories told by human beings while assuring his readers that disproving the accounts of a few fallible men does not challenge the existence of God. For instance, Hume writes that, "Upon reading this book [the Bible], we find it full of prodigies and miracles" (1977, 90). Of these accounts, he writes,

> It [the Bible] gives an account of a state of the world and of human nature entirely different from the present: Of our fall from that state: Of the age of man, extended to near a thousand years: Of the destruction of the world by a deluge: Of the arbitrary choice of one people, as the favorites of heaven; and that people the countrymen of the author: Of their deliverance from bondage by prodigies the most astonishing imaginable (1977, 90).

For one who adheres to the standards established by ancient or early modern skeptics, these aspects of the Bible should raise suspicions. Hume, after depicting the incredibleness of scripture, makes yet another request of his readers, writing,

> I desire any one to lay his hand upon his heart, and after a serious consideration declare, whether he thinks that the falsehood of such a book, supported by such a testimony, would be more extraordinary and miraculous than all the miracles it relates; which is however, necessary to make it be received, according to the measures of probability above established (1977, 90).

Hume recognizes that the incredible nature of miracles is the condition of possibility for religious faith (and this is *not* a condemnation). Put differently, if natural philosophy has jurisdiction over nature and thus has command over empirical inquiry, then religion requires something beyond experience to give it legitimacy. This is what Hume implies when he says that the evidence "for the truth of the Christian religion is less than the evidence for the truth of our senses" (1977, 73). This statement emphasizes the type of belief necessary to sustain an interpretation of genuine Christianity apart from science. Ultimately, Hume seemingly endorses the power of faith when he declares, "Our most holy religion is founded on Faith, not reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it to put it to such a trial as it is, by no means, fitted to endure" (1977, 89). In other words, religionists who defend Christianity on scientific grounds are not strengthening the religion, but rather opening it to criticism it is unable to withstand—a reductive justification on Hume's part that conflates the rationality of belief with the evidentiary basis for miracles.

In short, Hume's "Of Miracles" postulates that genuine Christianity must exist apart from science since its doctrines must be embraced on faith rather than reason. In one sense, this argument implicitly endorses the view that scientific explanations are the only legitimate (i.e., rational) explanation for anything. In another sense, Hume's seeming endorsement of faith via skepticism aims to establish "an everlasting check" on attempts to justify religious belief on scientific grounds by demarcating faith from empirical evidence.[20] And yet, Hume never actually defines faith, leaving readers to speculate whether his use of the term has a religious or a

[20] These drastically different readings of Hume appear consistent with the contrary interpretations of Hayek and Ayer discussed in Chapter One.

newfound secular connotation. Instead, Hume merely suggests that faith in biblical miracles plays an important role in maintaining the Christian religion. He states,

> So that, upon the whole, we may conclude, that the *Christian Religion* not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by Faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience (1977, 90).

Here, Hume's pattern of equivocation ushers in a third definition of the term "miracle" as that which "subverts all the principles of [one's] understanding." In other words, Hume uses the term "miraculous" in a facetious sense to describe the process by which individuals suppress their faculties of understanding to believe things that are "contrary to custom and experience." In this way, rhetoric can also be seen as miraculous, as something that produces miraculous effects, since it appeals to the full range of human faculties (i.e., such as the passions and the will).

By treating miracles as necessary to sustaining a sacred worldview, Hume reasons that Christianity is *unreasonable*, that it is something irrational that sustains religious belief apart from science. In this way, Hume strategically defines "miracles" as the subversion of reason, which appeals to many Enlightenment philosophers who, like Hume, seek to challenge the dogmatic posture of rationalists and their tendency to abuse reason. To have faith, in other words, requires the continued suppression of reason; and if religion was reasonable, we would not need faith.

Conclusion

After closely reading Hume's essay "Of Miracles," I contend that Hume responds to the exigency of scientific Christianity by articulating a rationale for divorcing the concerns of science and religion while also attempting to liberate secular inquiry from religious interference. What I call *skeptical Baconianism* thus denotes the rhetorical ways in which Hume altered

Bacon's cultural grammar to 1) reveal the epistemological incommensurability between science and religion, and 2) appeal to the strong anti-Catholic and pro-scientific sentiments of British culture by way of equivocation. Hume's essay also draws upon the metaphor of separation implicit in Bacon's cultural grammar to sustain his epistemological critique of biblical miracles. Thus, *skeptical Baconianism* does well to attack the foundations of Christianity by divorcing religion from natural philosophy while also exploiting theological differences between Catholics and Protestants.

In addition, this chapter contributes to literature on cultural grammars through an analysis of Hume's writing that supports John Angus Campbell's finding that "popular science gains its moral authority form its suppressed religious grammar" (1986, 369). As previously stated in Chapter One, the work of Lessl and Campbell builds upon the thesis that nineteenth-century scientists were "exploiting Baconian categories to show the intelligibility of a worldview everyone thought the rules of the cultural grammar had excluded" (1986, 352). When we examine from a rhetorical perspective the paradigm shift launched by Darwinian evolution, for instance, we find, as Campbell writes that "epochal transformations in human self-understanding always subsume earlier patterns as the ground of their intelligibility" (1986, 364). In this regard, the intelligibility of Baconianism is what subsequently becomes "the *lingua franca* of mid-Victorian science," which is one reason why "Baconianism was popular not only among professional philosophers of science but among the religious public as well" (1986, 352).

While English scientists found rhetorical success in adopting Baconianism, it was Scottish philosophers who, by popularizing Bacon, strengthened the alliance between empirical science and piety (Bozeman 1977; Hull 1973). Thomas Reid and James Beattie, for example, were among the most active contributors to Scottish Common-Sense philosophy, a movement

heavily influenced by Bacon. "While the general verdict of history has not been friendly to the Philosophy of Common Sense as philosophy," Campbell writes, "as a cultural rhetoric its importance for understanding the philosophical and scientific universe of discourse in England and America…is difficult to exaggerate" (1986, 355). Reid, in particular, developed a Scottish grammar that established the meaning of chief scientific concepts and delimited the relationship between the spheres of religion and science (Reid 1863). Accomplishing this required a modification of the dominant cultural grammars, which for Reid was the Baconian grammar and the Scottish philosophical tradition previously established by Hume. Though Reid's resolution in his own *Inquiry* was to criticize and reformulate Hume's skepticism, Campbell describes Reid's rhetoric as a "neo-Baconian grammar" that enabled him "to combine a dynamic view of science with a conservative view of religion" (1986, 355). This detail informs Campbell's main argument that "Darwin relied on the dominant Baconian grammar as filtered through Scottish realism to guarantee the correctness of his evolutionary interpretation" (1986, 366). Campbell's analysis makes evident that the Scottish Enlightenment played a substantial role in the reshaping of Baconian categories, but his assessment of the Scottish philosophical tradition recognizes Hume only for his philosophical contributions. This informs Campbell's proposition that "when the memory of Hume began to fade and pressure was placed on the Scottish thinkers to account for the development of scientific knowledge, the essential, but polemically concealed, flexibility of Reid's position came to the fore" (1986, 357). The lack of scholarly attention given to Hume's persuasive communication fuels this type of assessment, an error that this dissertation project seeks to address.

CHAPTER 5

DISCURSIVE TRANSCENDENCE: HUME'S RESPONSE TO BRITISH ELOQUENCE AND POLITICAL CENSORSHIP

> Wisdom without eloquence does too little for the good of communities, but eloquence without wisdom is, in most instances, extremely harmful and never beneficial.
> – Cicero, *De Inventione,* 1470

Hume's literary prominence is often attributed to his lucid and perspicuous writing style (Boswell 1928; Christensen 1987; Mossner 1947, 1952, 2001). Novelist Tobias Smollett, for instance, ventured to say that Hume's literary works epitomized "the good sense, moderation, and the public spirit of the elegant writer" (Fieser 1996, 650). Columnist William Rose similarly described Hume's corpus of "sprightly and ingenious compositions" in 1757 as reflecting "a delicacy…a perspicuity, and often an elegance" that was highly revered by his readers (1996, 649). Though Hume's diverse readership expressed mixed opinions about his literary corpus,[21] these reviews indicate that Hume's reputation stemmed largely from the perceived intelligibility of his rhetorical style (Box 2014; Hanvelt 2012; Potkay 1991, 1994).[22]

Hume's communication is also admired because it outwardly aligned with the principles of his empirical epistemology. As an empiricist, Hume upheld the belief that all knowledge,

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[21] Though Hume's literary reputation is largely positive, his political and philosophical essays did provoke negative responses from critics. For research on Hume's early critics, see Fieser (1995). In addition, for research on Hume's later critics, including those who characterize Hume as a proponent of racism, see Immerwahr, John. 1992. "Hume's Revised Racism." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (3): 481-486; Popkin, Richard. 1980. "Hume's Racism." *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*. Ed. Richard A. Watson and James E. Force. San Diego: Austin Hill Press: 251-266.

[22] It is important to note that even critics of Hume's philosophical and political views expressed admiration for his literary excellence. See Bongie, Laurence L. 1961. "Hume, 'Philosophe' and Philosopher in Eighteenth-century France." *French Studies* 15 (3): 213-227; Jones, Peter. 2005. *The Reception of David Hume in Europe*. London: Thoemmes Continuum.

though filtered through our rational capacity, had a sensory basis (Demeter 2012; Garrett 2002; Passmore 2013). His communication style needed to reflect this epistemological capacity by vividly describing experiential knowledge, the information we gather from sensory experiences (Gaillet 1998; Patton 1975). According to Gerard Hauser, Hume thus viewed description "as a communicative method naturally growing out of man's capacity to express what was knowable—conveying information in a manner imitative of knowledge's sensory acquisition" (1972, 25). The exquisite detail and vividness of Hume's descriptive style was, for this reason, ostensibly legitimized by the prevailing epistemological revolution that erupted during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—a context that conditioned a modern, scientific rhetorical style that was seemingly commensurate to an *enlightened* age.

While attending to this correspondence between empiricism and description, rhetorical scholars have typically overlooked how Hume's affinity for classical eloquence arose due to distinguishing qualities of his rhetoric that transcended the limitations of a strict empirical epistemology. Likewise, they often disregard how an empirical rhetorical style suffices to convey the features of Hume's philosophy that are not reducible to empirical description. Indeed, English advances in scientific thinking during the Enlightenment contributed to the apparent rejection of classical eloquence due to its association with imperial Christianity (Gay 1966; Israel 2006). Enlightenment rhetoric thus developed in step with attacks on Church authority, including overt refutations against the ornamented and sublime language used by the clergy (Caplan 1933). And yet, abolishing clerical eloquence from modernity proved to be a difficult task for European writers.[23] For instance, Eric Voegelin (1961, 1975) argues that the French Enlightenment's

[23] Recent scholarship on the Ibero-American Enlightenments also reveal a perceived affinity between enlightened science and Catholicism, indicating that "divine revelation and scriptural authority" were commensurate with "empirical observation and reason" for many Spanish and Portuguese-speaking intellectuals (Meléndez and Stolley 2015, 6).

notable condemnation of spiritual authority did not purge religious orthodoxy from new scientific worldviews and their preferred modes of expression. More specifically, Voegelin addresses a fundamental shortcoming that Enlightenment philosophers bent on undermining Church authority struggled to resolve, their inability to replace religious or sacred meaning with a profane alternative. For this reason, Voegelin holds that Enlightenment philosophy retained religious entailments (e.g., such as the Christian belief in the universal) even when the doctrines of Christianity were being publicly ridiculed (1975, 6-7).

If Voegelin is correct that certain religious views persisted in the Enlightenment mind because they were substantially part of new scientific worldviews, then we should be able to find instances where these thinkers advocated for a kind of rhetoric capable of masking those inconsistencies. In this dissertation, I have argued that Hume's writing does so by creating an impression of cultural continuity between the past and present that is needed in order to maintain its coherence. Specifically, there are two sides to this continuity: first, the impulse to sustain a transcendent view of history that would enable the Enlightenment to offer itself as an alternative to traditional spirituality, and second, the need to accommodate indigenous national movements that overtly wished to reconcile tradition with new scientific epistemologies. Accounting for this makes Hume's rhetoric even more complex as a rhetorical form that paradoxically embodies secular and transcendent features while simultaneously possessing the capability of masking this tension within Enlightenment thought.

Hume's 1742 essay "Of Eloquence" is a particular example of Enlightenment rhetoric about rhetoric that belies the empirical epistemology of its author.[24] Specifically, "Of Eloquence" overcame the discursive limitations of empiricism by comparing the classical eloquence of

[24] References to this essay will come from the Liberty Fund's edition of *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary* (1987). See complete citation in bibliography.

Cicero and Demosthenes with the emphasis on perspicuity emerging in English culture. Marc Hanvelt writes that in making this comparison Hume insists that a "certain strain of ancient eloquence ought to be rekindled and integrated into modern political discourse…[which] will prove more persuasive than any rhetoric of the modern age" (2012, 8). But Hume's empirical worldview could not reckon with the transcendent dimension of classical eloquence. For this reason, Hume needed to verbalize this transcendent dimension in ways commensurate with the polite English style, a rhetorical maneuver that I call *discursive transcendence* that compensates for the rhetorical limitations of his own empiricism. Hume did not advocate for any alternative spirituality, but as Kenneth Burke (1961) argues, he "[borrows] from the realm of everyday experiences, out of which our familiarity with language arises" in order to compensate for the spiritual deficit noted by Voegelin (1961, 7). Burke holds that "overly naturalistic views conceal from us the full scope of language as motive, even in the sheerly empirical sense," and thus purely scientific theories of rhetoric misjudge how "religion's language of transcendence seeps into symbolic action, even when religion itself does not explicitly appear" (7-10). As Burke continues:

> But such oversimplification of linguistic complexities can be avoided if we approach the subject roundabout, through a systematic concern with linguistic principles exemplified with thoroughness in the dialectics of theology. They warn us of a dimension which we should not omit from our study of language, even if that dimension is to be treated not literally, but as a sheerly *technical* kind of "transcendence" (10).

By *discursive transcendence* I mean a strictly linguistic phenomenon analogous to this, rhetorical tactics that have as their symbolic effect some *transcendence* of empirical meaning.

This chapter thus examines Hume's discussion of rhetoric in "Of Eloquence" to discern the practices that enabled his philosophical writings to exceed these epistemological limitations. Above all, I contend that Hume achieves a transcendence akin to that produced by classical

eloquence but through alternative rhetorical strategies. For instance, Hume substitutes imagined dialogue for the classical device prosopopoeia. An audience that engages in what this device imagines must violate the confines of empirical experience and must imagine the plausibility of transcendence.

Ultimately, I maintain that the dialogic pattern found in "Of Eloquence" also appears in the *Enquiry* as a strategy that enables Hume to challenge political and religious opposition to natural philosophy. Specifically, the essay "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State"—section XI of the *Enquiry*—recreates a conversation Hume supposedly had with an acquaintance about philosophy's political consequences "during the ages of antiquity" (1977, 92). In so doing, Hume's acquaintance performs a speech as the ancient Greek philosopher, Epicurus, to imagine how such a figure might communicate his ideas to a lay public audience (i.e., the common Athenian citizen). By attributing his own thoughts to his acquaintance, Hume's dialogic pattern transcends the limitations of his empirical epistemology by finding other ways to recreate the spiritual dimensions of classical eloquence (especially those formerly created by apostrophe and prosopopoeia) by appealing to the public's emotional attachments to antiquity. I argue that this qualifies Hume's writing as a kind of transcendent rhetoric since it adds a spiritual dimension to an otherwise secular discourse, an observation largely informed by the contributions of Hispanist scholars studying the Enlightenments in Ibero-America (Castro-Gómez 2005; Fernández Sebastián 2009, 2012; Safier 2008; Soto Arango and Puig-Samper 1995, 2003) and scholarship on the broader-European Enlightenment movements (Barnett 2004; Feiner 2011; Knott and Taylor 2005; Pichichero 2017; Sher 2006; Stockhorst 2010). The following inquiry thus reveals how Hume imitates certain rhetorical practices that enabled his political writings to exceed the

rhetorical limitations of an overt empirical epistemology, thus salvaging some kind of transcendence embedded within the rhetorical devices of classical eloquence.

Controversy and the European Enlightenment

Hume's "Of Eloquence" emerged amidst social tensions and controversy brought about by the irreligionism of the French *philosophies* and the Christian temperament of the Scottish public (Russell 2008; Kraal 2013). As a public intellectual, Hume wrestled with this tension by being both highly critical of religious knowledge claims while also satisfying the religious predispositions of his audience. The heavy hand of the Scottish clergy and the diversity of his readers thus constrained how Hume expressed his scientific worldview, forcing him to find creative ways to make clergymen, secularists, and lay readers receptive to his ideas—an endeavor he approached in different ways throughout his professional career.[25] In order to challenge philosophical and political worldviews that were deeply a part of the standing social order, Hume's rhetoric needed to conform to such diverse expectations while creating something new. This tension thus represents the controversial rhetorical climate Hume operated within and speaks to the complex nature of his writing.

First, Hume's rhetoric needed to address English perceptions of French irreligion. Due to paradigmatic conceptions of the Enlightenment, scholars often think of religious views and Enlightenment principles as adversative. Voltaire's notorious exhortation "Crush the vile thing!"—his imperative to reject the traditional alliance between the Catholic Church and the French monarchy—suggests as much.[26] Generally speaking, however, condemnations such as

[25] For research on Hume's alternating literary style, particularly concerning the different ways he wrote about a single subject, see Heydt, Colin. 2007. "Relations of Literary Form and Philosophical Purpose in Hume's Four Essays on Happiness." *Hume Studies* 33 (1): 3-19.

[26] The original phrase was *Écrasez l'infâme!* and it was first written in a letter to Jean le Rond d'Alembert (28 November,1762); see Voltaire. 1919. *Voltaire in His Letters: Being a Selection from His Correspondence*. Translated by S. G. Tallentyre. GP Putnam's Sons.

Voltaire's were directed against the Catholic Church's political hegemony, not religion in general or in principle (Arnal 1980). Nevertheless, French irreligion persisted as an attitude that shaped discussions about the acceptability of religious ideas throughout Western Europe (Braghi 2021). Hume's discourse was largely shaped by the Enlightenment's radical secularism (Israel 2001), but Hume's English-speaking audience (i.e., especially British and Scottish readers) were patently hostile to irreligion and would have rejected Hume's works unless he took, at the very least, an ambiguous position towards certain religious attitudes. As James Fieser argues, "Hume wrote at a time when challenging traditional religious views could lead to censure, imprisonment, and exile" (1995, 4). Hume did not shy away from publicly criticizing sensitive topics, but he did show caution in selecting which topics to criticize "and, more importantly, the literary approach he would take in his critique" (4). For this reason, Hume could not simply adopt a French cultural grammar that positioned Enlightenment and religious values as diametrically opposed.

Unlike the French movement's hostility to religious ideas, the general tenor of English culture was much more hospitable to religion and openly embraced a variety of religious attitudes and perspectives. Within this English movement, as Charly Coleman writes,

> champions of 'religious Enlightenment' sought to reconcile the dictates of faith with the operations of reason. They advanced the cause of peaceful pluralism against doctrinal absolutism, as part of a thoroughly pragmatic, moderate movement that garnered support from solicitous monarchs as well as the broader public sphere (2014, 105).

Voltaire had himself witnessed and extensively documented the thriving pluralistic religious culture in England. In the *Lettres Anglaises*, first published in 1728, he wrote, "If there were only one religion in England, there would be reason to fear the prospect of despotism; if there were two, they would cut each other's throats, but there are thirty, and they live…at peace with one another" (1994, 145-6). Voltaire's assessment, as Susan Rosa posits, "far from implying an

indifference to religion on the part of the English people, suggests that religion played a central role in their lives" (1994, 146). Such religious diversity within the English public empowered Hume to communicate his ideas in ways that recognized the close allegiance between religious thought, generally defined, and new developments in secular learning as that which constituted the specificity of many English-speaking Enlightenments. For instance, Hume's famous investigation of natural religion appropriated religious argumentation patterns (i.e., such as Thomas Aquinas' use of philosophical dialogue) when discussing the existence of God. According to Michael Prince, philosophical dialogue (as a literary genre) was an important means of religious discourse during the Enlightenment "because it was thought to replicate in formal terms the dominant argument of rational Christianity" (1992, 284). Hume thus cast "the attack upon analogy, induction, and design within a dialogue whose failure to achieve consensus dramatized the deeper structural fallacies of natural religion" (284). Discursive adaptations of this kind may help explain why Scottish clergy who were generally hostile to the French *philosophies* were nevertheless receptive to Hume.

Second, Hume's rhetorical skill was brought forth by the polemical demands and circumstances of his diverse audience. What makes these circumstances *polemical* are discrepancies between the peculiarities of Hume's local milieu and those of the international Enlightenment movement. John Robertson (1997) argues that these discrepancies are the result of the Enlightenment's patriotic and cosmopolitan entailments, informed by the specific national Enlightenment movements (e.g., such as the Scottish and Irish Enlightenments) and the broader European-wide intellectual landscape. Hume formulated his views on philosophy, political economy, and history through correspondence with his Scottish contemporaries as well as in opposition to the salient model provided by the French *philosophies*. As a result, Hume's

rhetorical climate is *polemical* in the sense that the national and international philosophical expectations were often antithetical, and thus it seemed impossible for Hume to reconcile the competing demands of his diverse public audience. Hume's rhetorical choices thus reflect this controversial situation by both engaging and evading certain intellectual and rhetorical facets of Enlightenment philosophy, which is why Hume's writing simultaneously advances and breaks governing Enlightenment logics (Sternhell 2010; Taylor and Buckle 2011).

When properly accounted for, the controversial entailments of Hume's immediate situation anticipate the inconsistencies and tensions embedded within his ideas and rhetorical practice. Failure to read Hume in this context risks attributing a clarity to his work that it did not possess, ultimately minimizing the social and subjective factors that drove his persuasive efforts. Thus, I will read Hume's writing against this backdrop to fully account for the particularities of his rhetoric.

The Language of Empiricism

Philosophical investigations since antiquity have been concerned in some degree with perspicuity, a commitment to clarity and precision in thought and expression. As an indication of a rhetor's creativity and conceptual proclivities, J. H. Lesher (2010) argues that Aristotle's treatment of *saphêneia* (often translated as *clarity*) served as an ideal for Enlightenment writers bent on criticizing those who expressed their ideas in superfluous and abstruse manners. More specifically, Lesher contends that Aristotle "identified truth and *saphêneia* [clarity] as the twin standards by which his own philosophical accounts ought to be judged" (2010, 143). It would appear then that perspicuity was an ancient philosophical concern, especially when Aristotle offers suggestions about how to improve the clarity and precision in one's thought and

expression.[27] Michele Kennerly seems to agree, writing that perspicuity was originally canonized by Aristotle and was extended in the medieval period with Cicero's *perspicua* meaning clarity and transparency (2010, 278-9). Kennerly adds that perspicuity is itself a figurative term and is borrowed from the operations of sight (i.e., from the Latin *aspicio* meaning *to look through*). Perspicuity is thus understood as "the quality of being easily seen through" (279), which is why it has regularly signified the desire to make language transparent, an instrumental mode of transmitting information that is clear, sensible, and instructive.

Lesser known is the interpretation of perspicuity as language that is properly suited for a rhetor's purpose and that accurately corresponds to their subject matter. According to Patricia Spence, this alternative view of perspicuity is generally understood as "the distinguishing quality of discourses that achieve their ends" (1974, 95). This means that the term was not only used to represent how clearly ideas were expressed, but also if a discourse was sufficient enough to adequately convey ideas and achieve the rhetor's desired rhetorical objective. Lesher further argues that this view of perspicuity comes from an altogether different interpretation of Aristotle. He writes that "Aristotle sometimes speaks of *saphêneia* not as a function of the manner in which we express some view but rather of the degree of correspondence between the account we provide and the subject under investigation" (2010, 145). Elsewhere Lesher adds that

> When Aristotle observes that his predecessors 'failed to make things *sapheis'* or 'to speak *saphôs*' he does not proceed to criticize them for uttering muddled or indistinct claims, or using unfamiliar words, or using words with multiple senses without any attempt made to distinguish them from one another. His criticism is rather that many earlier thinkers failed to develop the kind of richly detailed accounts that could successfully identify and describe the different causes and principles at work in the phenomena (2010, 146).

[27] See Aristotle, Edward Meredith Cope, and John Edwin Sandys. 2009. *Aristotle: Rhetoric*. Cambridge Library Collection. Classics. Cambridge University Press. For secondary research on Aristotle's advice on effective expression, see Gross, Alan G., and Arthur E. Walzer, eds. 2000. *Rereading Aristotle's Rhetoric*. Southern Illinois University Press.

This suggests that the term 'perspicuity' has a dual meaning whereby the clarity of a discourse also directly corresponds to the method and subject under investigation. Spense argues that for Scottish Enlightenment writers "perspicuity consisted of three elements: simple words, the "natural" arrangement of words, and the compatibility of the communicator's style and character" (1974, 95). This makes sense when we consider the correspondence between Scottish moral philosophy and the Scottish rhetorical tradition (Longaker 2015). For example, the notions of "sympathy" and "propriety" that are drawn from Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* "provide the central keys with which to interpret his belletristic rhetoric" (Spence 1974, 95). "We shall observe," Spence concludes, "that aesthetically appropriate communication consists of the same elements as sympathetic communication—the portrayals of characters, emotions and circumstances" (95). Perspicuity, therefore, does not always name a general kind of clear discourse, but instead references the suitability of the discourse to its subject matter to achieve the aims of rhetors.

Interpretations of Hume's rhetorical habits are largely informed by the empirical bent of his philosophy, conditioned in part by a paradigmatic understanding of the Enlightenment strictly characterized by scientific thinking and irreligionism. As John Werner (1972) argues, "Hume was an empirical philosopher in the tradition of Locke and Berkeley, but, unhampered by theological scruples, Hume was able to draw empiricism out to its logical conclusion—skepticism" (440). What Hume's skepticism endeavored to show, Werner contends, was that "the structure of reality could not be entered merely by rational insight" (440). This view of Hume's philosophy endorses a conception of the Humean approach as empirical and inductive, meaning that it moves from specific observations of human behavior to broader generalizations about the limits of human knowledge. Indeed, Hume expressed serious reservations about

induction as a philosophical approach, but he conceded the utility of an inductive, empirically oriented approach to communication (1977, 1-2).[28] As a result, Hume frequently employed a rhetorical strategy that begins with description of the requirements for making careful, systematic observations that are necessary to produce quality facts. Hume's rhetoric is thus often seen as imitating an empirical epistemology in the sense expressed by Hauser, by "[placing] the roots of effective discourse in facticity, selectivity of details, and clarity and concreteness of expression" (1972, 29). In this way, Hume seems "primarily concerned with factual presentation" since experience "was the necessary, universal, and only method for reasoning about contingent matters" (29-30).

Underlying Hume's conception of empiricism, however, is an idealistic quality that when noticed reveals a tension that is caused in part by the limitations of description. This tension is most pronounced in the *Treatise* where he proposes "to introduce the experimental method into moral subjects" (2000, 3). Since the philosophy of morality is not reducible to empirical description, Hume found other ways to verbalize the spiritual or idealistic dimension of his subject without resorting to religious language explicitly. For instance, Hume's *Treatise* denied both the existence of spiritual *selves* and that God was the primary causal force in the universe, but he does not object to the idea that the world is thoroughly immaterial. Indeed, Hume develops a pluralistic conception of phenomenalistic idealism, which is to say, a philosophical outlook that views the world as immaterial, idealistic, but that is nevertheless discoverable

[28] For secondary research on Hume's views on induction, see Howson, Colin. 2000. *Hume's problem: Induction and the justification of belief.* Clarendon Press; Pérez Otero, Manuel. 2008. "The Humean problem of induction and Carroll's Paradox." *Philosophical Studies* 141 (3): 357-376; Weintraub, Ruth. 1995. "What was Hume's Contribution to the Problem of Induction?" *The Philosophical Quarterly (1950-),* 45 (181): 460-470.

empirically.[29] In order to successfully communicate this to readers, Hume employed rhetorical strategies that allowed him to express an idealistic philosophy through a rhetoric that was consistent with the language of empiricism.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of Hume's contrast between empirical experience and his implicit idealism can be found in the first paragraph of "Of Eloquence" which juxtaposes the revolutionary structure of science with the uniformity of civil history. For instance, his essay welcomes readers with the following passage:

> Those, who consider the periods and revolutions of human kind, as represented in history, are entertained with a spectacle full of pleasure and variety, and see, with surprize, the manners, customs, and opinions of the same species susceptible of such prodigious changes in different periods of time. It may, however, be observed, that, in *civil* history, there is found a much greater uniformity than in the history of learning and science, and that the wars, negociations, and politics of one age resemble more those of another, than the taste, wit, and speculative principles. Interest and ambition, honour and shame, friendship and enmity, gratitude and revenge, are the prime movers in all public transactions; and these passions are of a very stubborn and intractable nature, in comparison of the sentiments and understanding, which are easily varied by education and example (1987, 97-98).

Right away, Hume introduces a contradiction that his descriptive, empirical rhetoric cannot fully account for. Specifically, the paragraph contrasts the ephemeral nature of scientific certainty and the continuity Hume observed in civil society. Timothy Engström similarly reads this paragraph as a reflection of Hume's frustration with the "tendency to ignore the revolutionary character of change within science" and the "continued effort to find metaphysical consolation" in the "ostensibly fixed speculative principles of Philosophy and Religion" (1997, 156). In other words, both scientific and speculative explanations of human nature prove to be insufficient for Hume when describing social life. What Engström specifically draws our attention to in this passage is

[29] For research on the idealism implicit in Hume's philosophy, see Grene, Marjorie. 1994. "The Objects of Hume's Treatise." *Hume Studies* 20 (2): 163-177; Ott, Walter. 2006. "Hume on Meaning." *Hume Studies* 32 (2): 233-252; Hausman, Alan, and David Hausman. 1992. "Idealizing Hume." *Hume Studies* 18 (2): 209-218.

the historicization of science and philosophy within the context of civil history. In so doing, Engström argues that Hume "draws on the rhetorical force of concepts [such as] *true*, *nature*, and *universality* to lend support to what is essentially a social and historical process of comparison" (157). Hume's reliance on these modern conventions allows him to appeal to the commonplace assumptions of his reader through skepticism—that is, by pointing out the incapacity of general principles to explain change. This tension between science and philosophy is due, according to Engström, to the "contrast between subjectivist and objectivist explanations of aesthetic judgment" (153). As a result, Engström argues that Hume develops "a conventionalist notion of shared similarities of human nature and social context" to bridge competing worldviews (153).

By eliciting the tension between empiricism and rationalism, Hume quite cleverly appeals to the conventionalist notion of shared similarities by emphasizing the capacity to observe the role of passions during artistic activity. By identifying these passions as *prime movers*, Hume imitates a rhetorical strategy advanced in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* when expressing his secular view of an eternal cosmos. Both Hume and Aristotle benefit from the theological association that exists between the phrase "prime mover" and God, even though their arguments are intended to introduce secular topics. For Aristotle, the focus of this phrase is the apparent motion of "fixed stars" (i.e., referring to the daily rotation of celestial bodies). For Hume, this is an observation about the ephemeral, idealistic nature of passions in shaping human behavior, which in this case is public speech. Hume replaces the idealism of religious belief with his own profane idealism and communicates this through the language and logic of empiricism (i.e., through description).

Beyond Aristotle, Hume excavates something from Cicero and Demosthenes that laid hidden under the discarded rubble of the classical tradition. Yet, Voegelin's thesis persists, that Enlightenment philosophy and empirical rhetoric cannot fully account for the sublime and

figurative aspects of classical eloquence. The question we are left with is how Hume reconciled classical eloquence with the emphasis on perspicuity emerging in his own culture. The subsequent sections provide two examples of Hume's writing— "Of Eloquence" and "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State"—that recreate the effects of classical rhetorical devices using alternative discursive techniques.

The Rhetorical Devices of Ancient Eloquence

Hume needed to discover in his subject matter and in the circumstances of his immediate situation the materials necessary to add a transcendent dimension to an otherwise secular discourse. This means repurposing the beliefs and conventions of the past in order to make his arguments socially intelligible, a persuasive effect that was socially revolutionary. In order to articulate a modern view of eloquence, which we could call *Scottish Enlightenment rhetoric*, Hume needed to overcome the preexisting perspectives held by his readers about ancient rhetorical traditions and the proper function of language in polite English society. Although Hume is explicit that "modern orators should not elevate their stile or aspire to a rivalship with the ancients," he is determined to excavate something that remains buried under or displaced by modernist rhetorical norms (1987, 109). "Of Eloquence" thus attends to a contradiction between classical and modern rhetorical styles for the specific purpose of correcting a "material defect" Hume sensed in eighteenth century English oratory.

In even recommending that scholars seek rhetorical guidance from classical traditions, Hume needed to circumvent the prejudices of his polemical context. As previously stated, Hume praised the rhetorical craftsmanship of Cicero and Demosthenes, especially their ability to appeal to the emotional and communal sentiments of lay audiences. And yet, there is much about classical eloquence that Hume avoids such as the sublime and figurative devices that were

readily used by ancient Roman orators. Instead, in the process of discussing (and seemingly dismissing) classical devices as inappropriate for modern English speakers, Hume uses related techniques of expression that achieve similar ends. In particular, I focus on how Hume's dialogic pattern creates a message effect similar to apostrophe and prosopopoeia—two rhetorical devices frequently employed by classical orators. I will then examine this pattern in Hume's *Enquiry*.

Apostrophe

Apostrophe or *aversio* is a classical exclamatory figure of speech. For Quintilian, apostrophe, or "turning back" in Greek, is "a diversion of our words to address some person other than the judge" (1920, 62). As Quintilian describes its use in forensic oratory, apostrophe occurs when a rhetor redirects a message from its proper or present audience either to an imagined or fictious one. Although Quintilian warns against its overuse, he argues that during communication "some striking expression of thought is necessary" (63). Jonathan Culler extends Quintilian's conception by arguing that apostrophe is similar to other figures that "give greater point and vehemence" to utterances, but it "is different in that it makes its point by troping not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication itself" (1977, 59). In this way, apostrophe is a turning away from a proper audience, usually by way of what Brendan McGuigan (2011) describes as "a forceful, emotional device," in order to trope on a rhetor's rhetorical situation.

Apostrophe was employed in Greek drama to emphasize the significance of an argument or particular situation. Homer's *Odyssey*, for instance, employed apostrophe by having the narrator intervene in the narrative to provide information or commentary for the audience. This narrator usually provided a rich description of what was occurring in the scene as if they were an impersonal, detached investigator. Especially when employed by poets, apostrophe would

sometimes redirect attention toward objects in nature like a rose or mountain (Ford 1984). In these instances, the inanimate object functioned to illustrate a presupposition or underlying sentiment that the rhetor sought to emphasize such as beauty and passion or constancy and eternity. Apostrophe can also accomplish this by personifying something inanimate or abstract so that the rhetor is able to address it directly, as is the case in William Wordsworth's (1977) famous poem "Ode to Duty."

In "Of Eloquence," Hume actually discusses such use of apostrophe to demonstrate its unsuitability for modern audiences. He writes:

> How absurd would it be, in our temperate and calm speakers, to make use of an *Apostrophe*, like that noble one of DEMOSTHENES, so much celebrated by QUINTILIAN and LONGINUS, when justifying the unsuccessful battle of CHÆRONEA, he breaks out, *No, my fellow-Citizens, No: You have not erred. I swear by the manes of those heroes, who fought for the same cause in the plains of* MARATHON *and* PLATÆA (1987, 100).

This is a curious example of apostrophe because in this quotation Demosthenes is not addressing the manes or souls of dead ancestors directly, as would be the case in classical poetry. Demosthenes instead 'turns back' in this oath to the battles of Marathon and Platæa in order to emphasize the reason why the battle of Chæronea was necessary and to justify the sacrifices made by Greek citizens. Immediately following this, Hume provides an example of apostrophe used by a well-known Roman orator:

> Who could now endure such a bold and poetical figure, as that which CICERO employs, after describing in the most tragical terms the crucifixion of a ROMAN citizen. *Should I paint the horrors of this scene, not to* ROMAN *citizens, not to the allies of our state, not to those who have heard of the Roman Name, not even to men, but to brute-creatures; or, to go farther, should I lift up my voice in the most desolate solitude, to the rocks and mountains, yet should I surely see those rude and inanimate parts of nature moved with horror and indignation as the recital of so enormous an action* (1987, 100-1).

For Hume, Cicero's employment of apostrophe seems almost identical to Demosthenes'. Instead of addressing the rocks and mountains directly, Cicero offers the audience a hypothetical

proposition, asking if he *should* "lift up [his] voice in the most desolate solitude" in order to "paint the horrors of this scene." In both Cicero and Demosthenes' utterances, Hume identifies apostrophe as the turning away from the primary message to instances that generate emotion that enhance the original sentiment. Hume concludes by explaining his reasoning for presenting these "excessive" quotations for the reader: "[These quotations] will at least serve to give an idea of the stile of ancient eloquence, where such swelling expressions were not rejected as wholly monstrous and gigantic" (1987, 101). Hume's reference to these Roman orators produces a similar 'turning back' effect. In directly calling upon or referencing Cicero and Demosthenes, Hume's modern citation, if you will, detaches the reader from the empirical world just as these classical orations would. Hume transcends empirical description through the emotional scenario being recreated. In this regard, the reader cannot parse empirical description from the trauma and emotion conveyed through these examples, which allows Hume to strategically convey the importance of classical eloquence in civil society without explicitly suggesting that the modern English style be refashioned under these ancient standards.

In addition to its spiritual or symbolic deficiencies, empirical description often fails to produce a sense of urgency, a sentiment necessary when one is attempting to inspire or encourage social action of the kind advocated by Hume. The two previous quotations from Cicero and Demosthenes reveal that apostrophe is an effective rhetorical device for creating such urgency, especially when justifying social transformations. Later in the essay, Hume praises the high status of great orators throughout history and their ability to inspire action. He states,

> In ancient times, no work of genius was thought to require so great parts and capacity, as the speaking in public; and some eminent writers have pronounced the talents, even of a great poet or philosopher, to be of an inferior nature to those which are requisite for such an undertaking (1987, 98).

Hume praises Cicero in particular. "CALVUS, CÆLIUS, CURIO, HORTENSIUS, [and] CÆSAR," he writes, "rose one above the other: But the greatest of that age was inferior to CICERO, the most eloquent speaker, that had ever appeared in ROME" (1987, 98). This reference not only conveys public esteem for classical orators, but also emphasizes a deficiency in modern English society. In other words, the description of Cicero is used to convey the political and oratorical shortcomings of modern rhetors. More specifically, Hume writes:

> But what has ENGLAND to boast of in this particular? In enumerating the great men, who have done honour to our country, we exult in our poets and philosophers; but what orators are ever mentioned…A hundred cabinet-makers in LONDON can work a table or chair equally well; but no one poet can write verses with such spirit and elegance as Mr. Pope (1987, 99).

Hume uses "England" as an exemplar for his readers, making evident modernity's failure to produce great speakers: "At the present, there are above half a dozen speakers in the two houses, who, in the judgement of the public, have reached very near the same pitch of eloquence; and no man pretends to give any one preference above the rest" (1987, 99). This serves as "certain proof" for Hume about England's artistic mediocrity, and "that the species of eloquence, which they aspire to, gives no exercise to the sublime faculties of the mind, but may be reached by ordinary talents and a slight application" (1987, 99). Poor oratorical standards, Hume tells us, reflects the political and intellectual conditions of society. In this regard, Hume's criticisms of English eloquence also function as a critique of England's political system.

Prosopopoeia

The rhetorical figure prosopopoeia was employed in classical oratory when a rhetor used an absent or imaginary figure to represent an idea or point of view as if that figure was actually speaking. It is found in *Pro Caelio*, regarded as the finest documented case of Roman oratory, when Cicero defends Marcus Caelius Rufus from five charges brought against him. One charge

accused him of attempting to poison his former lover, Clodia. According to Christer Bruun, it is commonly held that the most powerful passages of this defense occurred when, via prosopopoeia, Cicero "pretended, apparently both by gestures and by voice, to be one of Clodia's most famous ancestors, the censor Appius Claudius Caecus" (1997, 364). This allowed Cicero to counter this accusation in a manner that was "so powerful and effective that the jurors must have been persuaded to disregard any charges and allegations emanating from Clodia" (364).

This example demonstrates prosopopoeia's function as a rhetorical device that creates a character that the rhetor can use to express points of view that better serve their immediate persuasive needs. Elizabeth Mackay expresses a similar view by defining prosopopoeia as "person-making" meaning that this device "could create, generate, bring forth entities and their stories in texts" (2014, 203). Cicero could have refuted the charges without such a performance, yet Bruun writes that the evocation of past virtues combined with the immediate rhetorical situation "was simply a convenient and witty invective" (1997, 372). Such a rhetorical maneuverer could benefit the persuasive communication of modernists by couching the transcendent aspects of their arguments in pointed criticisms. By this I mean that modernists could use similar discursive techniques that provoke the emotional whims of auditors in ways that gave rhetors plausible deniability, which is to say, indirectly generating emotional effects through discourse consistent with the perspicuous standards of modern eloquence so that the persuasiveness of one's message could be attributed to its seeming truthfulness. And though the performative aspect of prosopopoeia does not seemingly align with modern tastes, I will shortly show how Hume's *Enquiry* proves otherwise.

Other interpretations of prosopopoeia contribute to commonly held views of its function in both oral and written communication. In Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, prosopopoeia occurs

when an orator parodies the melody or accent of another speaker in order to evoke their voice, allowing the orator to create the impression of that character. An orator could parody the voice of other people as well as abstractions such as nations or ideas. Christian Benne writes that orators often employ prosopopoeia "to present their innermost thoughts…in order to recount real or fictive conversations, or in order to embody figures who, for example, can convincingly give advice, criticize, praise, show compassion, and so on" (2016, 281). In instances of refutation or condemnation, prosopopoeia can even create a barrier between the orator and their message by associating an unfavorable point of view with a character of their own creation. This contributes to the ethos of the detached investigator that empiricist philosophers seem so keen about cultivating through their work.

The Enlightenment's contradictory positions create favorable conditions for prosopopoeia. By this I mean that due to the controversial entailments of Hume's immediate situation, his admiration and critique of both the classical tradition and modernity is extremely difficult to convey in a single essay, especially since his admiration for Cicero and Demosthenes does not comport with the Enlightenment's rejection of antiquity. Hume overcomes this in "Of Eloquence" by creating the impression that a character is present whose ideas counter his own. Rather than simply articulating and rebutting certain arguments, Hume first entertains them by inviting the reader to consider them as if they were uttered by an adversary in a debate. For example, Hume previews the arguments advanced in the latter half of his essay by proposing the following: "Shall we assert, that the strains of ancient eloquence are unsuitable to our age, and ought not to be imitated by modern orators? Whatever reasons may be made use of to prove this, I am persuaded they will be found, upon examination, to be unsound and unsatisfactory" (1987, 102). This quotation is best characterized as an example of hypophora, where a rhetor proposes a

question and then immediately answers it. In this particular instance, hypophora sets up the assumption Hume seeks to refute. Because of Hume's employment of empirical language, the reader is conditioned to interpret "Of Eloquence" in a manner consistent with the sensory acquisition of knowledge. As a result, the question Hume proposes is interpreted as a rebuttal to an actual position held by member(s) of his community. Like the rhetorical function of dialogue in *Treatise*, this dramatizes Hume's argument by adding a transcendent dimension to an otherwise empirical assertion.

This effect can be found in the opening sentence of each of Hume's arguments. By themselves, each of the following phrases seems insignificant. But the dimension this adds to the text is a symbolic one in which the personified oppositional voice takes shape, thus creating the illusion that this essay is a dialogue between Hume and an adversary rather than a monologue. For example, Hume's first argument begins as if he was repeating the accepted understanding that oratory needed to do the work now done by law. He writes:

> *First,* It may be said, that, in ancient times, during the flourishing period of Greek and Roman learning, the municipal laws, in every state, were but few and simple, and the decision of causes, was, in a great measure, left to the equity and common sense of the judges. The study of the laws was not then a laborious occupation, requiring the drudgery of a whole life to finish it, and incompatible with every other study or profession (1987, 102).

The phrase "it may be said" commonly indicates the existence of a counter position, and here Hume employs it to create the impression that the following perspective will be addressed as if it were held by a specific individual. This is because the reader has by this point come to expect the transparency that is produced through empirical description and thus reads into this expression the presence of a dissenting voice. In this way, Hume's rhetorical practice reveals a symbolic dimension of meaning that transcends the limitations of empirical description, producing similar effects of prosopopoeia.

Hume's second and third points are expressed in the exact same way by inviting the reader to consider whether established opinion might be wrong. For instance, Hume starts his second and third point with the phrase "It may be pretended" which attributes some deception to the imagined adversary. The modern reader will imagine a character who holds "that the decline of eloquence is owing to the superior good sense of the moderns, who reject with disdain all those rhetorical tricks, employed to seduce the judges, and will admit of nothing but solid argument in any debate or deliberation" (1987, 103-4). This second argument presents the opportunity for readers to further speculate about what Hume actually means by the "superior good sense of the moderns." And Hume's third argument is that it is incorrect to assume "that the disorders of the ancient governments, and the enormous crimes, of which the citizens were often guilty, afforded much ampler matter for eloquence than can be met with among the moderns" (106).

Ultimately, by finding alternative ways to imitate the effects of prosopopoeia, Hume provides what can be interpreted as evidence of oppositional perspectives that create the impression that they are actually held and have been expressed by a political adversary. Again, this strategy is similar to Hume's use of philosophical dialogue in his investigation of natural religion. As noted, philosophical dialogue is a way for Hume to dramatize the structural fallacies of natural religion. Though the content and form of this essay makes it quite different than *Dialogues*, Hume is nevertheless aware of the persuasive function dialogue serves. Hume's rhetorical practice can thus be seen as substituting a metonym for a metaphor, which is to say, replacing an adversarial voice for the outright portrayal of an absent figure whom the rhetor speaks through. This is exactly what Hume does in the *Enquiry*, revealing a dialogic pattern that

produces similar message effects of classical eloquence in a manner consistent with polite English prose.

Philosophical Dialogue in the *Enquiry*

Hume's *Enquiry* exhibits discursive patterns like those exhibited in "Of Eloquence" in order to couch his criticisms of both modern eloquence and the English government's authoritative policies related to free speech and open inquiry. Specifically, Hume's essay "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State" frames his criticisms of belief in creation (i.e., the belief that God created the universe) within a larger discussion of intellectual freedom by challenging the view that granting intellectual liberty to philosophers endangers both the state and the sanctity of religion itself. As Hume writes, "I think that the state ought to tolerate every principle of philosophy" and it should do so with confidence since no "government [has ever] suffered in its political interests by such indulgence" (1977, 101). Though Hume largely denounces speculative philosophies, he is even more contemptuous of politicians who censor philosophical ideas for the sake of political security and religious heresy. This section of *Enquiry* could thus have serious political consequences should Hume not temper his disapproval of state and church officials.

These criticisms are salient because they are expressed as a dialogue between Hume and an unidentified fellow skeptic.[30] This dialogue begins with Hume's assertion that philosophy can only flourish in societies that embrace "the free opposition of sentiments and argumentation" (1977, 91). "During the ages of antiquity," Hume writes, "[people] lived in great harmony with

[30] As Hume writes in the opening of the essay, "I WAS lately engaged in conversation with a friend who loves skeptical paradoxes; where, though he advanced many principles, of which I can by no means approve…they seem to be curious, and to bear some relation to the chain of reasoning carried on throughout this enquiry" (1977, 90).

the established superstitions" by partitioning speculative philosophy and religion (92). He continues by writing that,

> EPICURUS lived at ATHENS to an advanced age, in peace and tranquility; EPICUREANS were even admitted to receive the sacerdotal character, and to officiate at the altar, in the most sacred rites of the established religion: And the public encouragement of pensions and salaries was afforded equally, by the wisest of all the ROMAN emperors, to the professors of every sect of philosophy (1977, 91).

These examples portray a progressive antiquity, an age in which Romans and Athenians embraced intellectual freedom and valued public disagreement. Hume even praises Marcus Aurelius, a former Stoic philosopher, as "the wisest of all the ROMAN emperors" because he promoted intellectual freedom by financially supporting all philosophers and religious leaders (Dodds 1990). Hume thus seems to revel in the idea that "[philosophy] received its first birth in an age and country of freedom and toleration, and was never cramped, even in its most extravagant principles, by any creeds, confessions, or penal statutes" (1977, 91).

This depiction of antiquity strongly contrasts Hume's portrayal of modern societies in which politicians have grown "jealous of certain tenets of philosophy." Their "pertinacious bigotry" toward anti-religious speculations, he writes, is motivated by their fear that the new sciences might "loosen, in a great measure, the ties of morality, and may [thus] be supposed…pernicious to the peace of civil society" (1977, 91-2).[31] Hume's friend replies that intellectual censorship has indeed occurred in every age, but ancient philosophers possessed an ability that is lost to many modern thinkers; the rhetorical skill to defend themselves against oppositional perspectives. Intrigued by this proposition, Hume challenges his friend to present an

[31] Hume provides two caveats: "Except [for] the banishment of PROTAGORAS, and the death of SOCRATES," he adds, "there are scarcely any instances to be met with, in ancient history, of this bigoted jealousy, with which the present age is so much infested" (1977, 91).

imaginary speech for Epicurus, an ancient philosopher known for rejecting superstition and divine intervention, that would reveal the exceptional quality of ancient eloquence. He writes,

> I wish, said I, you would try your eloquence upon so extraordinary a topic, and make a speech for EPICURUS, which might satisfy, not the mob of ATHENS, if you will allow that ancient and polite city to have contained any mob, but the more philosophical part of his audience, such as might be supposed capable of comprehending his arguments (1977, 92).

"The matter would not be difficult upon such conditions," Hume's friend replies. Persuading a like-minded audience is no worthy accomplishment. Instead, Hume's friend proclaims, "I shall suppose myself EPICURUS for a moment, and make you stand for the ATHENIAN people, and shall deliver you such a harangue as will fill all the urn with white beans, and leave not a black one to gratify the malice of my adversaries" (92).[32]

Hume's essay thus conveys his arguments using a dialogic pattern of argumentation, a rhetorical choice that creates similar effects of classical eloquence—especially the devices apostrophe and prosopopoeia. Employing this dialogic pattern has traditionally enabled philosophers to guise their criticisms in discussions set in distant political contexts, a rhetorical maneuver that safeguards public intellectuals from the political consequences of criticizing authoritative regimes. As Stephen Buckle argues, the dialogue form was revived in the early modern period by Shaftesbury who famously "lamented its decline since the Ancients, and attributed the fact to the closeting of philosophy in the Schools" (2004, 277). Buckle adds that "dialogue is the literary form *par excellence* of skeptical thought" because it enables skeptics to express divisive views "on topics that admit no certain answer" (2004, 278). Cicero, for instance, strengthened the connection between dialogue and skepticism by arguing that "the undogmatic exposition that dialogue allowed was especially suitable for enquiries into the most difficult of

[32] In ancient Athens, beans were used for balloting. During political elections and public debates, white beans signified assent or agreement and black beans represented dissent or disagreement.

all subjects, the nature of the Gods" (278). Hume's concern for an overly undogmatic way of discussing difficult questions, Buckle concludes, is perhaps "the best explanation for [his] use of dialogue form in this section [of the *Enquiry*]" (278).[33]

By couching his criticisms of creation in an imaginary speech written on Epicurus' behalf, Hume suggests that religious philosophers have strayed from tradition by using reason to prove the existence of God—an argument thoroughly developed in the preceding section, "Of Miracles." He reiterates his attack on scientific Christianity by arguing that religionists have become unsatisfied with sacred traditions and church doctrines, and merely "indulge rash curiosity" by seeing "how far they can establish religion upon principles of reason" (1977, 93). In this way, religious thinkers simply "excite, instead of satisfy, the doubts which naturally arise from a diligent and scrutinous enquiry" (1977, 93). On this point, Hume's friend, as Epicurus, proclaims that,

> They [religionists] paint, in the most magnificent colours, the order, beauty, and wise arrangement of the universe; and then ask, if such a glorious display of intelligence could proceed from the fortuitous concourse of atoms, or if chance could produce what the greatest genius can never sufficiently admire (1977, 93).

Theologians, in other words, voice their objections to naturalistic cosmologies by vividly describing the magnificence of nature. Hume challenges this line of reasoning by arguing that theologians simply infer that God created the perceived uniformity of the universe since such an inference cannot be observed in the operations of nature.[34] In this way, Hume's imaginary speech

[33] In fact, Buckle adds that "it seems likely that Cicero's dialogue on the gods provided the basic problematic of Hume's discussion [in the Enquiry], since *De Natura Deorum* addresses both what can be known of the gods, and also the consequences for social order" (2004, 278-9).

[34] Hume makes this point clear in the following passage: "You then, who are my accusers, have acknowledged, that the chief or sole argument for a divine existence (which I never questioned) is derived from the order of nature; where there appear such marks of intelligence and design, that you think it extravagant to assign for its cause, either chance, or the blind and unguided force of matter. You allow, that this is an argument drawn from effects to causes…If you cannot make out this point, you allow, that your conclusion fails; and you pretend not to establish the conclusion in a greater latitude than the

subtly encourages his readers to recognize this faulting reasoning in an example far removed from the present. As the speech continues, Epicurus makes his intentions clear.

> I shall not examine the justness of this argument [Creation]…It is sufficient, if I can prove, from this very reasoning, that the question is entirely speculative, and that when… I deny a providence and a future state, I undermine not the foundations of society, but advance principles, which they themselves [creationists] must allow solid and satisfactory (1977, 93).

Simply put, this speech endeavors to show that questioning religious doctrines is itself a speculative activity and that voicing skepticism about religious matters should not endanger society. On the contrary, challenging the rationalization of religion will "advance principles" consistent with more traditional interpretations of scripture (i.e., such as those that emphasize the importance of faith over reason as the basis of religious belief).

Moreover, Hume uses this speech to show that creationist arguments necessitate a form of speculative reasoning that transcends (in a pejorative sense) empirical experiences. Put differently, Hume argues that reason itself cannot justify creationism. It may be true that "the gods [are] the authors of the existence or order of the universe," but Hume firmly asserts that religious philosophers cannot prove this simply by observing natural phenomena. It may be presumed, he adds, "that [the gods] possess that precise degree of power, intelligence, and benevolence, which appears in their workmanship; but nothing farther can ever be proved, except we call in the assistance of exaggeration and flattery to supply the defects of argument and reasoning" (1977, 94). Creationism, in other words, benefits from the transcendent dimension of clerical eloquence in the sense that it overrides a strict empiricism through emotive and figurative language. Hume cannot adopt the techniques of clerical eloquence, but he does

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phenomena of nature will justify. These are your concessions. I desire you to mark the consequences (1977, 93).

encourage his readers to understand how religious language strengthens the public's affinity for creationism despite it being a speculative religious doctrine. On this point, he writes,

> You find certain phenomena in nature. You seek a cause or author. You imagine that you have found him. You afterwards become so enamored of this offspring of your brain, that you imagine it impossible, but he must produce something greater and more perfect than the present scene of things, which is so full of ill and disorder (1977, 95).

Hume's friend, as Epicurus, further calls the Athenian public to recognize that "all your reasonings on this subject [are] drawn from effects to causes," and for any religious leader's assertion of causality "must of necessity be a gross sophism; since it is impossible for you to know any thing of the cause, but what is antecedently, not inferred, but discovered to the full, in the effect" (97). In this regard, Hume portrays creationists as subduing reason in order to advance arguments that exceed their epistemological capacity. "You forget," Epicurus proclaims, "that this superlative intelligence and benevolence are entirely imaginary, or at least without any foundation in reason" (95). Please understand, he cries, that "as the universe shows wisdom and goodness, we infer wisdom and goodness. As it shows a particular degree of perfections, we infer [perfection]" (99). You should thus "let your gods be suited to the present appearances of nature: And presume not to alter these appearances by arbitrary suppositions, in order to suit them to the attributes, which you so fondly ascribe to your deities" (95).

"Of a Particular Providence and Of a Future State" plainly continues *Enquiry's* assault on the religious metaphysics of rationalist philosophy, and Hume's thrust continues to be that reason cannot lead us beyond what we find in experience. In this regard, he reiterates his assertion that most religious doctrines (i.e., including creationism) must be accepted or rejected on faith alone. Hume not only criticizes the idea that God manifests himself in nature, but also that we should not infer additional information about the world from this belief. "The religious hypothesis," he contends, "must be considered only as a particular method of accounting for the visible

phenomena in nature: But no just reasoner will ever presume to infer from it any single fact, and alter or add to the phenomena, in any singular particular" (1977, 96).

As previously stated, this dialogic pattern distances Hume from directly criticizing the political censorship that is commonplace in modern English politics. For instance, Hume concludes his friend's speech for Epicurus in the following manner:

> Thus I bring this dispute, O ATHENIANS, to a short issue with my antagonists. The course of nature lies open to my contemplation as well as to theirs. The experienced train of events is the great standard, by which we regulate our conduct. Nothing else can be appealed to in the field, or in the senate. Nothing else ought ever to be heard of in the school, or in the closet. In vain would our limited understanding break through those boundaries, which are too narrow for our found imagination (1977, 97-98).

Hume returns in the dialogue as himself to praise his friend's efforts to utilize "the artifice of the demagogues of old" and for "embracing those principles [of eloquence] to which, you know, I have always expressed a particular attachment" (1977, 98). And yet, Hume distances himself from the views expressed in Epicurus' speech by playing devil's advocate. "But allowing you to make experience (as indeed I think you ought) the only standard of our judgment," he writes, "it may be possible to refute this reasoning, which you have put into the mouth of Epicurus" (1977, 98). Hume thus proceeds to challenge Epicurus' arguments to which his friend counters with extensive examples and commentary. In doing so, Hume presents himself as momentarily defending creationism while attributing the more skeptical disposition to his unnamed acquaintance.

Ultimately, Hume disagrees with his friend's conclusion that "religious doctrines and reasoning *can* have no influence on life because they *ought* to have no influence" (1977, 101). Hume asserts that his friend, as Epicurus, has failed to consider that ordinary citizens constantly make choices based on their religious beliefs. Specifically, he asserts that people "draw many consequences from the belief of a divine Existence, and suppose that the Deity will inflict

punishment on vice, and bestow rewards upon virtue" (1977, 101). Despite the truthfulness of their beliefs or the soundness of their reasoning, Hume maintains that anyone who "disabuses them of such prejudices cannot be considered "good citizens or politicians since they free men from one restraint upon their passions, and make the infringement of the laws of society, in one respect, more easy and secure" (1977, 101). In other words, Hume believes that espousing skepticism for political purposes is morally contemptuous, and that censoring certain philosophical worldviews (even those that are patently false) nullifies a citizenry's ability to publicly articulate their ideas and refute fallacious ones. Censorship, then, is a serious infringement upon intellectual liberty that yields disastrous consequences for society writ large.

Hume's dialogic pattern thus enables him to indirectly denounce the authoritarian tendencies of national governments and clerical orders. In so doing, this dialogic pattern distances Hume from his criticisms by attributing certain ideas to his unnamed acquaintance while also framing this discussion as an evaluation of an antiquated yet progressive past. Hume's essay thus exposes both his admiration for classical eloquence and his dissatisfaction with modern politics, an inversion of the paradigmatic view that the Enlightenment is universally contemptuous of tradition. Not only is the content and rhetorical style of "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State" like "Of Eloquence," both works also provide evidence that Hume found philosophical dialogue to be an effective way to couch his criticisms of modern English society.

Conclusion

This chapter shows how the polemical circumstances of the Scottish Enlightenment as a social movement necessitated rhetorical approaches that could compensate for the discursive limitations of new scientific worldviews. By comparing Hume's rhetorical practice in "Of

Eloquence" with his use of dialogue in the *Enquiry*, this chapter explains how Hume imitates certain rhetorical strategies that enable his political writings to exceed the discursive limitations of an overt empirical epistemology, a rhetorical maneuver that I call *discursive transcendence*.

There are good reasons to accept the paradigmatic characterization of the Enlightenment as an apostatic revolt or secular overthrow of religious orthodoxy. It is true that the Enlightenment represents a period in human history where antiquities were challenged on philosophical and political grounds and that modernity first took shape on the basis of this rejection. And yet, it is also the case that Enlightenment thinkers commonly saw themselves as classical revivalists. They departed from Renaissance thinkers in supposing that the modern age could surpass the achievements of the classical period, but they nevertheless believed they were resurrecting a lost intellectual culture. It is also true that figures such as Descartes, Bacon, Locke, and many others contributed to the intellectual innovations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that became the bedrock for Enlightenment secular thought. Recognizing these tensions in Hume's rhetorical practice thus enables scholars to understand that the persuasiveness of eighteenth-century discourses goes beyond mere appeals to science and irreligionism. In this regard, Hume's rhetorical choices should be considered since they enabled him to communicate in ways that are provocative and emotive but within the cultural boundaries of his modern English audience.

CONCLUSION

SKEPTICAL RHETORIC: RECONSIDERING HUME'S CONTEXT WITHIN AND BEYOND WESTERN EUROPE

Hume's influence on modern thought is shown in the many books and articles published on his ideas since the Enlightenment. His influence is also clear insofar as scholars continue to revisit his works for guidance when confronted with inescapable intellectual problems.[35] As discussed in Chapter One, Hume's empiricism was instrumental in bringing about advancements in scientific thinking during the centuries after the Scottish Enlightenment (Ayer 1980; Einstein 2005; Hayek 2007, 2010; Popper 2005; Schulmann et al. 1998). And yet, his writings on moral responsibility remain highly utilized by economists (Boettke & Lesson 2004; Boettke & Coyne 2005; Dow 2009), political theorists (Hanley 2011; Krause 2004; Sabl 2009), and legal scholars (Mahoney 2001; Milton 1982; Jaconelli 1999) investigating issues concerning property rights, jurisprudence, and market exchange. Hume's intellectual legacy is thus sustained by the continued influence of his writings upon the moral and cultural milieus shaped by the Enlightenment.[36] To repurpose a phrase from Paul Stob, Hume's work seems to possess "a

[35] Albert Einstein wrote in 1915 that Hume's scientific philosophy inspired his theory of special relativity (Einstein 2005; Schulmann et al. 1998) while Karl Popper declared that Hume's reformulation of the induction problem profoundly shaped his conception of knowledge (Popper 2005, 95). Beyond Hume's contributions to science, the David Hume Institute, an independent think tank based in Scotland, and the David Hume Institute Foundation, a research center devoted to exploring the evolution of rules and institutions, are two examples of organizations dedicated to Hume's work.

[36] As previously discussed, I suspect that Hume's writing style and keen awareness of the public has played a role in the continued utility of his writings on politics and morality. As Ernest Mossner argues, "[Hume's] studies of government, economics, ethics, religion, and the social sciences in general might interest only the relatively well educated; but his national history might, and actually did, appeal to most of those who were capable of reading" (1980, 3). While I agree with Mossner's assessment of Hume's historical works, I maintain that Hume's attentiveness to public readers is a common feature of his literary corpus following his perceived failure of *Treatise*.

currency that transcends its historical period" (2008, 130) enabling scholars to appropriate his philosophical and political works in multiple ways.

This dissertation examines the intelligibility of Hume's discourse by examining how he accommodated his mitigated skepticism to a public readership in ways that upended various forms of dogmatism circulating throughout Western Europe during the eighteenth century. It analyzes how Hume enacts skepticism through discourses that reorient a public's attitude toward knowledge, a feat that mobilizes public doubt in ways that create space for new ideas. Each chapter establishes a framework that recognizes the dispositional linkages between Hume's rhetorical practice and the broader social forces constituting his immediate situation.[37] In doing so, this close textual analysis shows how Hume's argumentation patterns and stylistic choices contribute to the contrary meanings that are constructed in his philosophical writings. Ultimately, then, this project sheds light on Hume's ability to translate complex ideas for lay readers while also considering how his rhetoric can be brought to bear on modern struggles related to dogmatism *and* incredulity.

This concluding chapter reviews the main arguments of this dissertation, but it also seeks to explicate two conceptual takeaways that connects all four case study chapters. First, I consider the role context plays in the historical study of Enlightenment thought and explain how my approach to reading the interplay between invention and context synthesizes aspects of modernist historiographies and the post-modernist critique of intellectual history—two approaches that are often seen as antithetical (Baweja 2016; Ferguson 1990). In doing so, I emphasize the largely overlooked rhetorical situations that shaped Hume's enactment of skepticism—namely,

[37] By "dispositional linkages" or *dispositio* I mean the arrangement of the discrete elements of a discourse. See Condit, Celeste. 2009. "Rhetorical Criticism and Audiences: The Extremes of McGee and Leff." *Western Journal of Communication (includes Communication Reports)* 54 (3): 330-345.

professional hubris, Deistic reactions to religious fundamentalism, and Britain's declining oratorical standards and political censorship. Focusing on these overlapping yet distinct social contexts enables readers of this dissertation to further understand how Hume's rhetoric was conditioned by conflicting contextual forces while also recognizing how his *Enquiry* rebels against the social norms of an *enlightened* European society.

Second, I conclude this dissertation with suggestions for future research both on Hume's rhetorical practice and on the uptake of Hume's mitigated skepticism beyond the European Enlightenment context. As discussed in Chapter One, Hume's literary and philosophical corpus has had a profound influence on numerous academic disciplines and intellectual movements across the globe. In the late eighteenth-century, for instance, Spanish-speaking intellectuals from Mexican and Guatemalan universities repurposed European skepticism to denounce the authority of Spain's Bourbon monarchy. During this time, Hispanist intellectuals and activists used Hume's mitigated skepticism to challenge ethnocentric interpretations of political and religious history. Moving forward, I intend to expose and decenter the Eurocentric undercurrents of Enlightenment thought by emphasizing the intellectual contributions of Latin and Ibero-American scholars. In this regard, my scholarship seeks to explain how American-born Spanish intellectuals challenged imperialism in ways that denounced monarchical and imperialist regimes. Indeed, I have neither the time nor space to responsibly describe Hume's legacy throughout Latin American. For my purpose, I merely seek to call readers of this dissertation to understand how Hume's mitigated skepticism became a rhetorical resource for numerous Spanish-speaking intellectuals.

Hume's Skepticism in/and Context

It may surprise readers of this dissertation that the epithet *Scottish Enlightenment* is a historiographical construction that emerged only in the twentieth century (Robertson 1997). Historians Duncan Forbes and Hugh Trevor-Roper are widely credited for framing the intellectual and political contributions of eighteenth-century Scottish thinkers as constituting an *Enlightenment* movement (Berry 2018; Rasmussen 2017; Skjönsberg 2020).[38] Forbes first expressed his conception of this intellectual movement in a series of essays and lectures given at Cambridge University in the 1960s, which culminated in his book *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (1975). He maintained that the intellectual and cultural debates that erupted in eighteenth century Scotland were informed by a broader social movement that extended well beyond Scotland's national borders. Trevor-Roper expressed a similar view in 1966 at the annual Enlightenment Conference held in St. Andrews. Specifically, he argued that Scotland's willingness to embrace new ideas from continental Europe and the rapid economic and social developments that occurred in the mid-eighteenth century sparked a renewed interest in what the Scottish thinkers termed "the progress of society" (Trevor-Roper 1967, xviii). Forbes and Trevor-Roper thus forged new ground in the study of eighteenth-century Scottish thought, sparking a new renaissance of intellectual history that caught the attention of Quentin Skinner, Nicholas Phillipson, and Ernest Mossner, among many others.

The Italian historian Franco Venturi also endorsed the idea that historical studies of the Scottish Enlightenment should be situated within a broader Western European context (1971,

[38] In addition, the English term "Enlightenment" only emerged in the nineteenth century to encompass all the ingenious intellectual and political movements that erupted in Western Europe during the previous century. See Gay, Peter. 1966. *Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism.* New York: Norton and Company; Schmidt, James, ed. 1996. *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions.* Volume 7. University of California Press.

1972). This was because, as John Robertson explains, “Venturi’s Enlightenment was a single intellectual movement whose adherents were spread throughout the European world and were committed both to understanding and to furthering the modernization of society” (1997, 1). And yet, Robertson argues that Venturi, as well as Forbes and Trevor-Roper, viewed Scotland as an architype of all Enlightenment reforms that had erupted throughout eighteenth-century Europe. “It was in Scotland that the essential elements of the Enlightenment were to be found,” Robertson adds, “a backward and a modern world existing in close chronological and geographical proximity, along with patriotic groups and societies concentrating attention on economic and social problems" (1977, 1). In this way, the Scot’s preoccupation with social progress and their broader contribution to modernizing society placed the Scottish Enlightenment at the center of eighteenth-century European history. Modernist historiographies of Hume—and Adam Smith—thus modeled a universalist view of Enlightenment thought, perpetuating the belief that Scotland played a central role in the modernization of Western society.

Forbes, Trevor-Roper, and Venturi’s recontextualization of Scottish intellectual history caught the attention of several US-American scholars who began studying the Scottish origins of early US-American thought. In 1978, for example, Garry Wills published *Inventing America: Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence*, a book that analyzed the American founding within the context of Scottish Enlightenment thinking. Though his work sparked controversy among professional historians (Luker 1980), Daniel Howe argues that Wills’ book fostered a new public interest in figures such as Hume, Smith, and Adam Ferguson. “All of a sudden,” Howe writes, “eighteenth century Scottish moral philosophy was being discussed in the *New York Times*, the *New York Review of Books*, and all the major relevant professional journals” (1989, 572).

In spite of all these acclamations, the movement also had a negative side. Elizabeth West argues that Hume's work not only shaped modern US-American politics, but that he also "had an enormous influence on racist thinkers for the next half century" (2008, 16). "Many American and European thinkers," she adds, "cited Hume as their authority on race" (16). Immanuel Kant, for example, was among those European figures that cited Hume to endorse black inferiority and his estimation of black intellectual ineptness (1960, 110-11). Thomas Jefferson also drew upon Hume's work to argue that "in imagination they [Black Americans] are dull, tasteless, and anomalous," and that there was no evidence suggesting that "[Black Americans] had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration has ever surfaced" (1999, 147). "These racialized sentiments," West concludes, "highlight a view of humanity rooted in a certain ethnocentric vantage that has required the objectified other to prove the contrary" (2008, 16). In this regard, treating Scotland as archetypical of a broader European Enlightenment seems to have profoundly shaped the study of Scottish history and the application of Scottish thought in national contexts well-beyond Scotland (Brock and Brock 1982; Hook 1975; May 1976; Meyer 1976). Ultimately, then, many US-American historians and political theorists began painting eighteenth century Scotland as the birthplace of a strictly ethnocentric conception of social progress.

Building upon these observations since the 1970s, scholars have challenged readings of history that advance straightforward narratives of continuous progress. "Under the combined assaults of Post-Structuralism, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism, [and] the rise of new social history," Jonathan Israel argues, "the Enlightenment conceived as a movement of ideas appears to be not just firmly in retreat and increasingly under siege but also fragmenting into disparate remnants with no coherent profile" (2006, 523). Perhaps the most influential contribution to this

shift was Michael Foucault's critique of modernist histories. As he himself argues in *The Archeology of Knowledge*,

> For many years, historians have preferred to turn their attention to long periods, as if, beneath the shifts and changes of political events, they were trying to reveal the stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances, the irreversible processes, the constant readjustments, the underlying tendencies that gather force, and are then suddenly reversed after centuries of continuity, the movements of accumulation and slow saturation, the great silent, motionless bases that traditional history has covered with a thick layer of events (2002, 3).

Foucault encouraged historians to focus on the "several pasts, several forms of connection, several hierarchies of importance, [and] several networks of determination that undergo change in the presents" (5). In doing so, Foucault shows how systems of thought are governed by rules operating beneath the consciousness of individual subjects. His archeological method endorsed a historiography that disregarded how individual subjects produced subjectivity by displacing the primacy of human agency. Archaeology's critical force thus encouraged historians and social theorists to compare the discursive formations of different periods, a trend that revealed the limitations of traditional readings of Enlightenment histories and the atrocities that are overlooked by such readings. For instance, critiques of the Brazilin Enlightenment reveal that calls for "enlightened thinking" by the marquis of Pombal, a powerful chief minister who ruled Portugal between 1750 and 1777, served as a mechanism for enhancing autocracy, suppressing criticism, and furthering colonial exploitation (Maxwell 1995). "Much can be said about several other supposedly 'enlightened' autocratic regimes," Israel maintains, "which implemented major reforms employing the rhetoric of enlightenment" (2006, 526). In this regard, postmodernist critiques of Enlightenment histories exposed the failures and shortsightedness of universalist views of the Enlightenment by attending to the historical discontinuities that constituted modernist thinking.

Indeed, critiques of Enlightenment histories have shown that the scientific and political developments of the eighteenth century resulted from contingent turns of history. And yet, as Israel further writes, overemphasizing historical contingency often perpetuates "a thoroughgoing relativism" that views all attitudes and beliefs as "ultimately equivalent" (2006, 524). Israel also posits that postmodernist readings of history often "break down" due to "postmodernism's evident failure to evaluate the Enlightenment intellectual arena fully or correctly" (2006, 526). Rhetorical scholars have similarly challenged Foucauldian readings of history on these grounds, arguing that Foucault's archeological approach falls short at closing reading individual texts (Blair and Cooper 1987; McKerrow 2011). By situating eighteenth century discourses in their proper contexts, Stephen Bronner maintains, scholars can better understand the historical and social circumstances that make Enlightenment thought "the best foundation for any genuinely progressive politics not simply in the West but in those states that suffered most at its [i.e., the West's] hands" (2004, 159). "To anyone authentically committed to democracy, toleration, and personal liberty," Israel concludes, "this seems undeniable" since it is in the works of the "radical writers of the Enlightenment" that we find "the roots of anti-colonialism itself as well as the modern idea of racial, ethnic, and sexual equality" (2006, 524). This is not to disregard postmodernist critiques of Enlightenment thought, but rather to argue that our understanding of early-modern Western Europe remains remarkably patchy and incomplete.

This dissertation thus offers a rereading of the Scottish Enlightenment context(s) by attending to the various exigencies and social forces—both local and global—that conditioned how Hume expressed his ideas, an endeavor informed by both modernist historiographies and the postmodern critique of progress narratives. Chapter Three, for instance, situated Hume's enactment of ethos in a context shaped by the repudiation of scholasticism, Scotland's

transforming public readership, and skepticism's pejorative status among philosophers and theologians during the mid-eighteenth century. His frustration with modern universities and the rising literacy of his public audience also shaped how Hume expressed his views about epistemology by using familiar examples and language. In so doing, Hume challenged the professional hubris of his contemporaries by modeling an ethos that appealed to the virtues of the common bourgeois citizen, enticing an audience with different cultural values than the typical aristocratic university elite—namely, prudence, temperance, and moderation. Hume's *Enquiry* thus emerged in a context extremely antagonistic to skepticism, forcing Hume to reformulate his mitigated form of skepticism by appealing to the moral standards of a Scottish citizenry.

Chapter Four interprets Hume's notable essay "Of Miracles" as a response to rational Christianity, a movement that was shaped by early modern debates in England about science's ability to adjudicate religious belief and the reliability of testimony as evidence of biblical miracles. As noted, Englishmen during the Restoration engaged in "a many-sided contest" to contrive Christianity on rational grounds, with all contestants claiming that only they knew what a "rational" religion could be (Spurr 1988, 563). In this way, this Restoration debate encouraged many British churchmen to advance their own theologies as "rational and comprehensive of [the] age," as Gerard Reedy puts it (1977, 304). These debates continued into the eighteenth-century as many Protestant enthusiasts began exaggerating natural theology's role in the scientific study of God's creation (Boyle 1690; Clarke 1738; Glanvill 1681). The English theologian Thomas Woolston responded to the inflated scientific worth given to biblical miracles by arguing that such events fell outside the scope of English science (Woolston 1727). English Deists echoed Woolston's concern and forcefully denounced all attempts to reform religious doctrines using

science. Thus, the controversy on miracles was tied up with the larger Deistic reaction to an integrated scientific-religious view of Christianity.

To account for the nuances of Hume's message, Chapter Four also situated Hume's rhetoric in a context that was shaped by two contrary interpretations of Baconianism. On the one hand, philosophers and theologians drew upon Bacon to justify science (or more correctly natural philosophy) as an extension of clerical study. On the other hand, Bacon's separation of science and religion fueled an enthusiasm for science that motivated many natural philosophers to utilize scientific patterns of argumentation to justify religious belief. Against this backdrop, Chapter Four demonstrated how Hume's essay draws upon the metaphor of separation implicit in Bacon's cultural grammar to sustain his epistemological critique of biblical miracles. It also shows how his discourse was shaped by the strong anti-Catholic feelings of his culture by exhibiting a pattern of equivocation that targets the miraculous claims made by Catholic apologists. Hume certainly attacks an interpretation of Christianity in this essay. And yet, it is only by recognizing that Hume drew upon religious traditions that we begin to understand the rhetorical genius of his essay—that is, by aligning his attack on miracles with the Deistic reaction against a scientifically informed Christianity, he could undermine the scientific zealotry of many Protestant writers.

Chapter Five situates Hume's writing within a context shaped by the irreligionism of the French philosophies and the Christian temperament of the Scottish public. As previously stated, French secularism persisted as an attitude that shaped discussions about the acceptability of religious ideas throughout Western Europe (Braghi 2021). Hume's discourse was thus largely shaped by the international prominence of secularism—a European theme characterized by Israel (2001) as "radical Enlightenment." And yet, the heavy hand of the Scottish clergy and the

religious diversity of his public audience influenced how Hume was able to express his scientific worldview. As James Fieser (1995) argues, "Hume wrote at a time when challenging traditional religious views could lead to censure, imprisonment, and exile" (4). Hume did not shy away from publicly criticizing sensitive topics, but he did show caution in selecting which topics to criticize "and, more importantly, the literary approach he would take in his critique" (1995, 4). For this reason, his largely religious audience as well as the social and intellectual demands of the Scottish Enlightenment movement strongly bent his arguments about church authority. Hume wrestled with this tension by being both highly critical of ancient eloquence and its ability to perpetuate spiritual knowledge while also acknowledging the defect in modern, scientific forms of eloquence. This context thus necessitated Hume to find creative ways to make clergymen, secularists, and lay readers receptive to his ideas—an endeavor he approached differently throughout his professional career.[39]

Ultimately, this dissertation positions *Enquiry* against the specific intellectual, political, and social forces that shaped the production of Hume's mitigated skepticism and empirical epistemology. In doing so, this project reveals qualities of Hume's rhetoric that have been previously overlooked. For instance, Hume's affinity for classical eloquence and his willingness to accommodate arguments to his religious readers reveals qualities of his discourse that challenge paradigmatic interpretations of the Enlightenment as antagonistic toward religious belief and antiquity. By reconsidering context, then, this project offers a much more nuanced assessment of Hume's rhetorical craftsmanship.

[39] For research on Hume's alternating literary style, particularly concerning the different ways he wrote about a single subject, see Heydt, Colin. 2007. "Relations of Literary Form and Philosophical Purpose in Hume's Four Essays on Happiness." *Hume Studies* 33 (1): 3-19.

Hume in Latin America

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, numerous ingenious Enlightenment movements emerged throughout Latin America in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, and Mexico, among many others. What scholars know about skepticism's prominence in these countries largely comes from Oswaldo Porchat (1985, 1991, 2006) and Ezequiel de Olaso (1977, 1978, 1980, 1988). Indeed, their historical and philosophical works attracted a significant amount of attention in Latin America to skepticism, but it was Olaso who traced the influence of Hume's mitigated skepticism—and Scottish moral philosophy more broadly—in the social and intellectual revolutions that erupted throughout Latin America in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In fact, Olaso's research made such an impact during his lifetime that Porchat once described him as "the father of Brazilian skepticism" though Olaso himself was not Brazilian (Porchat 1997, 107).

What made Olaso's research profound was his ability to study skepticism as both a historical phenomenon and as a philosophical orientation. For instance, Olaso's well-known 1988 essay "Zétesis" challenged the coherence of Pyrrhonism by historizing its reemergence in both ancient and Latin Enlightenment contexts. Pyrrhonism, he argued, was an extreme response to dogmatic thinking, which led him to expose and denounce its normative implications as an attitude toward inquiry (1988, 9-11). As Plínio Junqueira Smith and Otávio Bueno contend, Olaso's research sparked a skeptical renaissance throughout Latin America that fostered two prominent areas of inquiry: first, Olaso conceived skepticism "as an epistemological problem and, in the light of the linguistic turn, set the task of reinterpreting and making sense of this philosophical stance;" and second, Olaso "initiated a scholarly investigation of the history of skepticism" by studying its circulation throughout the ancient and modern world (2016, 2).

In doing so, Olaso's research made a strong case for the cultural and intellectual implications of Hume's mitigated skepticism as an orientation that could temper the excesses of modernity and overcome the pitfalls of excessive incredulity if properly utilized by Latin America scholars.

More specifically, Olaso encouraged his contemporaries to reinvestigate Hume's writings about necessitarianism and popular sovereignty. For instance, necessitarianism (i.e., the view that all human actions and physical phenomena are causally determined) was perceived in the eighteenth century as a threat to both Christian morality and the rule of law. As George Pitcher explains, many religionists believed that if human actions were "brought about by causes for which the agent [was] not responsible," then individuals could not be "censored or punished for doing something bad" (1961, 201). Paul Edwards similarly describes the threat of necessitarianism as follows,

> If [necessitarianism] is true, then everything people do is completely caused; and, given the causal antecedents in any particular case, nothing could happen except what does happen. It seems to follow that nobody can ever act differently from the way [one] acts, and hence that freedom must be an illusion and that human beings are never properly accountable for their conduct (1957, 312).

Many religionists were deeply concerned about the growing support for necessitarianism among natural philosophers in eighteenth century England, and these concerns were intensified by the political tensions between British and Scottish citizens. Indeed, the feud between these countries began well before the eighteenth century, but Sebastiano Gino contends that many Englishmen during this period harbored resentment toward the Scots "because of the brief political experience of Lord Bute, a Scot who served as first minister of George III and was held

responsible…for the short-sighted British policies relating to the colonies" (2020, 111).[40] Consequentially, many British thinkers of this period associated Scottish philosophy "with the fear of despotic and arbitrary political designs" (111). Joseph Priestley's philosophical works exploited these public concerns by directly refuting the doctrines of Scottish moral philosophers (i.e., mainly Reid, Beattie, and Oswald). In doing so, Priestley often exaggerated the political differences between English necessitarians and Scottish libertarians in ways that made public dialogue about this topic difficult. Ultimately, these social tensions intensified the perceived dangers attributed to British necessitarianism among the Scottish public because their political differences with Englishmen created a rhetorical climate that made communicating about anything hostile and contentious.

Prior to Priestley's invectives against Scottish philosophers, Hume's writings on necessitarianism attempted to overcome these public concerns and political conflicts by reconciling English necessitarianism and Scottish libertarianism. More specifically, Hume reformulated this long-standing controversy by articulating a philosophical doctrine known as compatibilism, the view that necessity (i.e., causal determinism) can be reconciled with liberty (i.e., human agency). Indeed, philosophers and theologians since at least the Reformation questioned whether human beings could act freely in a universe governed by a divine sovereign

[40] Gino provided additional reasons why Priestley in particular was hostile to Scottish philosophers. He writes: "Unitarian ministers such as Priestley also had other reasons to show a scornful attitude toward the Common Sense philosophers, in a time when the London dissenting community was struggling to reach an agreement with the authorities in order to be excused from subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles of Faith. But while such agreement was never reached, the Anglican clergy lavishly praised James Beattie's *Essay on Truth*, which also granted him a state pension from the king. Such circumstances might understandably have driven the Unitarian Priestley into despising Scottish Common Sense. Notwithstanding his concerns with political and religious issues, Priestley also was prompted to theoretically rebut the doctrines of Reid and his followers. In particular, their quarrel showcases the most relevant differences between two general approaches with regard to the study of the mind in eighteenth-century Britain; that is to say, associationism on the one hand, and faculty psychology on the other" (2020, 111).

(Berofsky 2016; Russell 1995, 2021). Those known as "libertarians" believed that human agents had absolute power over their choices while "necessitarians" (i.e., also known as hard determinists) thought that human actions were determined by factors beyond our control (Botterill 2002; James 2005). Hume's essay "Of Liberty and Necessity," which was initially published in the *Treatise* and then in amended form in the *Enquiry,* suggests that libertarians and necessitarians unknowingly hold "the same opinion with regard to this subject" and that their political differences blind them from seeing "that a few intelligible definitions would immediately put an end to the whole controversy" (Hume 1977, 54). Hume's essay thus attends to the ambiguous terms and superfluous arguments used by disputants to show "that the whole dispute has been hitherto merely verbal" and that "all mankind [has always] agreed in the doctrines of liberty [and] necessity" (1977, 63). In this way, Hume's compatibilist perspective encouraged his contemporaries to look beyond their political differences and recognize that they inadvertently embrace necessitarianism without endangering religion or the rule of law.

Olaso recognized similar concerns about liberty as well as the growing political polarization that was dividing many citizens of neighboring countries throughout South America. For this reason, his research on Hume's compatibilism inspired several others to excavate something from Scottish moral philosophy that could overcome their immediate philosophical and political controversies (Escobar Viré 2011; Dascal 2006). Moving forward, I seek to understand the rhetorical significance of Hume's essays on compatibilism to better account for the uptake of Humean thought by Olaso and others during this period.

Indeed, scholars have typically overlooked how Hume's attempt to reconcile the political differences of his readers has produced drastically different, though equally favorable, interpretations of his compatibilist perspective. In one sense, Hume is regarded as a classical

compatibilist concerned with cultivating a rationalistic account of moral responsibility (Backmann 2013; Flew 1961; Stroud 2006). Hume's approach is considered rationalistic in that it "involves a kind of pure conceptual or philosophical analysis that is required to clarify the framework within which any independent empirical investigation into the nature of moral life must take place" (Russell 2002, 4). In another sense, Hume is seen as a naturalistic compatibilist concerned with fostering an empirical, descriptive approach to this issue. From a naturalistic perspective, Hume's essay "locates the foundation of moral responsibility in the observable features of human nature" (2002, 170). In other words, Hume's approach is considered naturalistic in that it describes the experience of feeling responsible as well as the experience of holding others accountable for their actions (i.e., especially in cases of criminal conduct). It seems, then, that Hume's attempt to reconcile the dispute between libertarians and necessitarians has resulted in conflicting interpretations of his ideas.

Moreover, Hume's writings on social organization and popular governments has also influenced how Hispanist intellectuals have conceptualized the public sphere and its bearing on political activity (Guerra and Lempèriére et al. 1998; Myers 1995; Sabato 1998). As Elías José Palti argues, several Mexican and Argentinean scholars have drawn upon Hume's "Of the First Principles of Government" to question why individuals seem so comfortable accepting the authority of established political elites. In fact, Palti contends that many twentieth century Hispanist scholars cited the same passage from Hume's essay; that "nothing is more surprising to those who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye than to see the easiness with which the many are governed by the few" (2001, 255). "Hume's surprise," Palti writes, "revealed the profound cultural change that had completely altered Western modes of conceiving political power by the eighteenth century" (255-6). Monarchical rule was no longer natural nor divine

and, in its place, emerged popular sovereignty, "a conceptual mutation [that] in turn accompanied fundamental displacements in the modes of conducting politics" (256). In this regard, Palti shows that Hume's ideas "gave rise in Latin America to an incipient "public sphere" that effectively conditioned the action of those in power, thus determining specific political behaviors and attitudes" (256).

Hume, if you recall, is widely considered the most creative and thorough skeptic in the history of European thought, but even his skepticism was mitigated by his concern for persuasion. He cared deeply about expressing his ideas in ways that would promote humility, encourage self-reflection, and foster liberal principles (i.e., such as toleration and intellectual freedom). What I find interesting is that Hume's mitigated skepticism was utilized throughout Latin America as a rhetorical resource to temper dogmatism and challenge incredulity in drastically different cultural contexts. For this reason, I hope to continue this research by studying the enactment of mitigated skepticism in Latin America to further understand the rhetorical influence of Hume's work beyond the Western European context.

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