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Critical Study

Donald Livingston's *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy*

PETER S. FOSL

DONALD W. LIVINGSTON. *Philosophical Madness and Melancholy: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. xviii + 433 pages. ISBN 0-226-48716-4 US \$68.00, cloth; ISBN 0-226-48717-2 US \$24.95, paper.

It is, perhaps, our hermeneutical fate that we are able to illuminate the thought of others only in terms of our own thought. Hume, like other important philosophers, has been interpreted in different ways at different times and by different groups during the same period. During his own time, his rationalistic opponents took him to be a terrible nihilist. Conservative clergymen thought he was a dangerous atheist. He was an inspirational fellow *philosophe*, an agent of progress, and an ally in the war against ignorance and superstition to many from France. James Beattie and his Scottish Common Sense followers claimed that Hume was an insidious skeptic. Jefferson and many early American patriots saw Hume as a royalist reactionary and scorned him.

During the nineteenth century, Hume was largely ignored until Green and Grose published *The Philosophical Works of David Hume* in 1874-75. Green's lengthy introduction portrayed Hume as a crude if clever empiricist whose progress and mistakes would illuminate radical idealism. In the hands of John Herman Randall, Hume became a pragmatist, an image that is still sustained today in some of Richard Rorty's work. The positivists of the early

twentieth century enlisted Hume as a phenomenalist ally in their rejection of idealism and metaphysical nonsense. Norman Kemp Smith's influential 1905 article, "The Naturalism of David Hume," interpreted Hume as a thoroughgoing naturalist in his subversion of skepticism, his understanding of cognition, reason, and perception, and his grounding of morality. Kemp Smith's Hume found precedent in the readings of Charles Darwin, T. H. Huxley, and J. S. Mill.

Another Hume has, however, emerged in our own time—Hume the humanist, if you'll pardon the pun. Like Hume's French contemporaries who were inspired by his ability to write critical history, to produce secular essays of literary and cultural criticism, and to extend Newtonian rationality into social science, a rising group of commentators have sought a more comprehensive picture of Hume. They have done so by teasing, gleaning, and culling insight from his *Essays*, his *History*, and his letters—as well as from his philosophical treatises. Their Hume is concerned not just with epistemology but also with the subtleties of language, culture, moral edification, eloquence, and social dynamics. The work of Gilles Deleuze, Yves Michaud, Nicholas Capaldi, Donald T. Siebert, Annette Baier, and Adam Potkay may be counted among this company.

So may Donald W. Livingston. However, while *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium* (PMD) sits comfortably among the recent humanistic interpretations of Hume, its highly provocative and challenging claims this text make this book a watershed in Hume studies. The book presents, at least to my mind, the most radical reassessment of Hume since Kemp Smith's naturalistic interpretation. Livingston ranges over all of Hume's output, drawing broad and profound lessons from it. It is a grand and sweeping evaluation of modernity, of civilization, of politics, and of the best way to engage contemporary human life.

Livingston's *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium* is visionary, and it should stand as a touchstone for future interpretations of Hume's philosophy. As a visionary text, however, I wonder if it has not, in its enthusiasm, strayed too far from Hume's own texts—texts from which Livingston's views not only claim their origin but also their ground and justification. Indeed, I wonder if Livingston has not strayed too much from Hume's own projects, for a great deal of the book reads like a jeremiad. I am concerned that Livingston's brilliant interpretive insight may be obscured by objections to the contemporary political applications he makes of it and in fact, perhaps also to the way in which his political commitments have driven his reading of Hume.

Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium is organized around the question with which the Preface begins: "What is philosophy?" A distinctive characteristic of philosophy is that it questions its own nature, and Hume's work is no exception. Livingston casts Hume among "those rare thinkers

(Plato, the Pyrrhonians, Hegel, and Wittgenstein) for whom the radical questioning of philosophy is the defining moment and the key in which all their thought is played" (PMD 12). Livingston maintains that in order to understand Hume's project as a whole, as well as his more specific investigations, we must first understand what Hume takes philosophy to be. One of the virtues of *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium* is that it addresses this neglected area of Hume studies. If for nothing else, Livingston's book merits sustained attention for taking up this important issue and for doing so in such a powerful manner.

Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium contains two main sections. In the first, Livingston attempts to describe Hume's "self-understanding" of philosophy. Chapter One ("Is Hume and Empiricist?") recasts a lecture of Livingston's I first heard in the late 1980s. It attempts to define in a general way Hume's self-understanding of the nature of philosophy. Livingston criticizes the common view of Hume as an "empiricist" and in doing so attempts to expose the liberal, progressive agenda that he believes underwrites this characterization. As Livingston see it, Hume constructs a "sceptical system," which while not properly speaking Pyrrhonian, "contains a Pyrrhonian 'moment'," a moment moreover that is essential to humans (PMD 11). Philosophy for Livingston's Hume consists in neither the search for truths (whether empirical or a priori) nor the dissolution of conceptual confusions. Rather it is a unique project of self-knowledge.

While Chapter One offers a general interpretation of Hume's conception of philosophy and thus serves as a general keystone centering and sustaining *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium's* various parts, subsequent chapters present more specific investigations. In Chapter Two ("The Dialectic of True and False Philosophy"), Livingston outlines what he calls a "critical and normative inquiry" that which attempts to "determine what philosophy is and what it ought to be" (PMD 53). According to Livingston, and I agree, the groundwork for Hume's thoughts on philosophy is to be found in *Treatise I iv*.¹ And as Annette Baier does in *A Progress of Sentiments* (1991), Livingston correctly focuses on unpacking *Treatise I iv* in following out his inquiry. It is here he purports to have discovered a "timeless" dialectic describing the essential dynamics of all genuine philosophy.

In Chapter Three ("The Origin of the Philosophical Act in Human Nature") Livingston articulates a second type of inquiry, a Humean "anthropology of philosophy." This inquiry aims to identify the causal and genetic processes that gave rise to philosophy and drove its development. Chapters Four through Seven present what might be called Livingston's "genealogy" of philosophy. When these chapters are taken together with Chapter Three, we might, alternatively, call them Livingston's "natural history" of philosophy. Here Livingston loosely follows Hume's progression in *Treatise I iv*; he provides a narrative of the cultural-historical development

of philosophy, the heroic moment it reached in ancient times (T I iv 3), and its transformation with the advent of modernity (T I iv 4).

In Chapter Five ("Philosophy and Christendom"), Livingston charts philosophy's integration with Christianity. He draws on a wide variety of Hume's texts to show how modern philosophy became "corrupt," how "false philosophy" may be understood as a form of "superstition," and how "true philosophy" reaches its fulfillment in "philosophical theism." In Chapter Seven ("Philosophy and Skepticism"), Livingston argues that Humean thought is distinct from historical forms of skepticism and its nihilistic manifestations.

Chapters Eight through Eleven serve as a transition from the earlier focus on the nature of philosophy to the more speculative and cultural-critical reflections presented in Part Two. In these chapters Livingston culls from Hume's texts theories of "civilization" and "barbarism." He sifts through Hume's historical, political, and epistolary writings for examples of how Hume uses his critical notions of true and false philosophy in coming to terms with events in the world around him. These chapters are a condensed version of Livingston's and Marie Martin's earlier work published in two edited volumes: *Liberty in Hume's History of England* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990); and *Hume as Philosopher of Society, Politics, and History*, Library of the History of Ideas 4 (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1991). Many of Livingston's ideas in these texts have received support and were refined through his involvement with programs sponsored by The Liberty Fund, Inc.

Livingston argues that Hume's custom-bound notion of liberty contradicts the abstract and purportedly transcendent notion of liberty developed by Whiggish thinkers and political figures. Although he dismisses Hegel's account of the organic state because it takes the state to be the human *telos* and abandons providential theism, Livingston's sketch of Hume (Chapter 8) is remarkably similar to Robert Pippin's account of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Livingston argues that Wilkes and his followers were infected by false philosophy and philosophical superstition. According to Livingston, Hume's support for American Independence was not motivated by his Whiggishness, but by his concerns about the growing central power of the English government and his respect for the right of secession.

Part Two of *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium* ("Humean Intimations") is even more speculative and even more loosely based upon Hume's texts than Part One. It is for all that, no less provocative and powerful. Readers will find in its passages little pretense to discovering the meaning of Hume's own texts. What they will find is a series of experiments in thinking in a Humean "idiom" about the character of our social and conceptual orders as they have developed since Hume's time.

At times, however, I have worried that the two main sections of this book are not so distinct and that Livingston's putatively historical investigations too often shade into the spinning out of less rigorous, idiomatic intimations. I am particularly concerned that Livingston's idiom has become politically driven and politically tendentious. If one were to list those valorized in these pages, the collection would include the following: aristocracy, patriarchy, monarchy, Allan Bloom, Holy Mother Russia, the Catholic Church, providence, Althusius, the Church of England, private property, Vico (the influence of Livingston's close friend Donald Verene), tradition, Michael Oakeshott, Lord Acton, federalism, the U.S. founding "fathers," the antebellum U.S., and the Confederate States of America. A list of those Livingston condemns would include: Marx, Proudhon, the Soviet Union, the post-bellum U.S., imperialism, Rorty, Rousseau, Derrida, Eco, Nietzsche, Foucault, feminists, libertarians, centralized government, the notion that the U.S. Civil War was about slavery, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, natural rights, monied elites, the Puritan Revolution, Wilkes, egalitarianism, and public debt. Chapter Fourteen ("The Right of Resistance: Secession and the Modern State") has circulated for years among traditionalist conservatives and is the primary reason why publications such as *The Southern Patriot* have endorsed *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*.

To draw up such lists and make a judgment about a text's philosophical merit based upon them (and the political background to them) would, however, be a shallow venture. Indeed, there is much more than this to praise and much more than this to criticize in Livingston's book. For my own part, I wish to examine three related notions central to Livingston's vision: (a) "common life," (b) "skepticism," and (c) "true philosophy." Livingston proclaims in the very first sentence of Chapter One that "modern philosophy has been obsessed with epistemology." Much of *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium* may be understood to explain Hume's recognition of that obsession, his critique of it, and as his presentation of an alternative view of philosophy. Livingston's first book, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago, 1984; hereafter PCL) was, in his own words, an attempt to subvert "the Descartes-Locke-Berkeley reading of Hume as a kind of phenomenalist." "In its place" Livingston advanced "the thesis that common life is the governing idea of Hume's philosophy and is internal to his reformed notion of rationality" (PMD xvii). Livingston's effort in *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium* complements and continues that earlier work. While his first book focuses principally upon Hume's conceptions of "reason" and "history," the aim of his second book is to explain (a) how skepticism relates to the philosophy of common life and (b) in what manner the philosophy of common life is true philosophy.

As Livingston sees it, "false" philosophical thought is the condition to which philosophy generally tends. It is, if you will, a malady that, for

philosophers, cannot finally be cured. In contrast to true philosophy, its false kin pretend to having transcended or else to have grounded common life. They claim to have gained independence or detachment from common life, to have acquired the ability to operate “autonomously” from it, and to do so with an “authority” all its own in establishing “ultimate” truth and “dominion” over the totality of the vulgar world of custom (PMD 18 ff.).

So extraordinary is false philosophy’s arrogance that it claims authority to judge wholesale the practices and beliefs of common life, even dispensing with them altogether. Moreover, it does so in favor of ways of thinking and acting that it believes to be of its own free creation. False philosophers, however, are deceptive and disingenuous. They claim to theorize from a liberated, absolute view from nowhere, but through a kind of “alchemy” or “Midas touch” (PMD 30-31) they actually present their own favorite prejudices—prejudices drawn from none other than common life and dressed up in philosophical garb. In its most extreme forms, this delusion results in total subversion, including self-subversion, of philosophy. When consistently pursued, it results in utter nihilism.

This is heady and powerful stuff. One of the great pleasures for me in reading *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium* is to revisit once again the spellbinding pyrotechnics I encountered in Livingston’s seminars at Emory as he proceeded to diagnose, dissect, and unmask philosophical error using the terms of criticism he deploys here. Livingston’s readings and critiques of philosophical approaches are eloquent and captivating. Again and again, one will find one’s views of the nature and practices of many forms of philosophy profoundly challenged when placed under the intense light of his scrutiny.

Among the most interesting and creative dimensions of *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium* are Livingston’s portraits of the sentiments and character traits constitutive of both true and false philosophers. False philosophers—we are told in a voice reminiscent of Nietzsche’s—are contemptuous, resentful, fearful, ascetic, proud, guilty, giddy, disloyal, self-mutilating, and anti-social (PMD 23 ff.). Confident of its independence, autonomy, and authority, false philosophy is given to dangerous flights of fancy or delirium. When it indulges in such flight, nothing is safe from its world-consuming extravagance. However, when it becomes aware of its own vanity without also acknowledging the primacy of common life, it is prone to profound disappointment, nihilism, cynicism, and melancholy.

True philosophers, by contrast, are more temperate. They are curious, humble, pious, patriotic, foolish, eloquent, extensively benevolent, and exhibit “greatness of mind” (PMD 35 ff.). “True” philosophy amounts to philosophy conducted in the light of what I call—following Stanley Cavell—an “acknowledgment” of its finitude, its boundedness to common life as well as of the dangers and futility of attempting to transcend it. By

maintaining the sustained centrality of this gesture in Hume's work, Livingston relates Hume's thought (and his own) to that of Michael Oakeshott, Gadamer, Heidegger, Michael Polanyi, Wittgenstein, Fredrich von Hayek, and Ryle (PMD 45). True philosophy, Livingston maintains, is only possible if a thinker has encountered the profound force of Pyrrhonian doubt. The depths of this doubt contain, says Livingston, an "absolute moment"—a moment of philosophical insight in which "the world of common life can appear in its full radiance, untainted by philosophical reflection" (PMD 8; 405). Indeed Livingston, whose own doctoral dissertation explored idealistic conceptions of history, compares Hume to Hegel and maintains that *Treatise* I iv "anticipates something of the logic of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*" (PMD 12).

In this rendering of Pyrrhonian doubt, Livingston sings a song he had previously sung in Chapter One of *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, a chapter entitled, "Post-Pyrrhonian Philosophy." There, as here, he also outlines the character of "true" and "false" philosophy. More importantly for us, he writes in that earlier book of Hume's "Pyrrhonian Illumination," a moment of insight which makes it possible for a philosopher to see "for the first time the magnificent, philosophically unreflective order of common life in opposition to whatever is constituted by autonomous philosophical reflection" (PCL 28). Just preceding this passage, Livingston writes that "Pyrrhonian skepticism...is a way of life designed to overcome that peculiar melancholy to which those of philosophic nature are given" (PCL 26). For Livingston in that first volume, common life was claimed to possess a "transcendental" status (PCL 15ff.); the "illumination" consequent upon engaging skepticism was held to yield "a transcendental point outside" other philosophical systems (PCL 16).

Livingston's current effort may be read as building upon and developing the implications of that seminal first chapter of *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (as well, politically, as upon the last three chapters: 10—"Metaphysical Rebellion;" 11—"Politics and Providential History;" and 12—"Conservatism"). Noteworthy, however, is a shift Livingston has made—a shift that pleases me since it is consistent with the position I defended in my dissertation (*Skepticism and the Promise of Philosophy*, Emory University, 1992) and have pursued ever since. In *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, Livingston argues that the acknowledgement consequent upon philosophy's confrontation with skepticism overcomes skepticism. *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, by contrast, argues rightly that the acknowledgement is part and parcel of Hume's skepticism. Chapters One, Two, and Seven of PMD present subtle, accurate, and provocative readings of this line of interpretation.

It is, however, at this point that I part company with Livingston. Despite the important shift Livingston has made, he nevertheless continues to

misconstrue the way in which Hume characterizes the relation between skepticism and common life. Because he misconstrues this relation, Livingston's intimations and applications of Hume's thought are unfortunately skewed.

Hume's engagement with skepticism in *Treatise* I iv does yield a deeper appreciation of human finitude and of our situatedness in a world of nature, custom, and reflection. What it studiously does *not* do is ground some new form of dogmatic philosophy. Pyrrhonism itself may well be thought to result in the abandonment of philosophy. Hume, by contrast, embarks upon the fascinating task of attempting to continue to pursue philosophical projects in a skeptical fashion—with an sense of the apparent contingency of philosophical theory, the apparent limitations of reason, and an awareness of what he has found to be some of the pathological pitfalls of the philosophical project.

All of Hume's philosophical work (and, for that matter, all of his work), should be read as having been produced in the light of this sensibility and comportment. Hume's epistemology, his work on induction, his criticisms of natural religion, his moral theory, his essays, his history, are all, if you will, wrapped in skepticism. About his own activity and those who would follow his path, Hume writes: "In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism.... Nay if we are philosophers, it ought *only* to be upon sceptical principles and from an inclination we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner" (T 270). In constructing philosophical theories, the best that we can hope for is that "we might hope to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for that is perhaps, too much to be hop'd for) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination" (T 272). Hume is a philosopher of finitude, perhaps even of hope, not dogmatics.

The problem is that while Livingston sees that for Hume "the 'true sceptic' and the 'true philosopher' are the same" (PMD 167), he nevertheless paints a portrait of the Humean true philosopher as simply another form of dogmatist—a dogmatist of tradition. Because he does so, Livingston is stuck with the incoherent position of maintaining both (a) that true philosophy is skeptical and (b) that true philosophy entails substituting the authority of tradition for the authority of reason. "If philosophy is to continue at all," he writes, "it must reform itself by abandoning the autonomy principle and by affirming the philosophically unmediated authority of the domain of prejudice to command judgment" (PMD 20; 395; PCL 29; 33).

There is something right in this view of the importance of tradition. It is, after all, similar to the skepticism of Sextus Empiricus, who in his *Outlines of Philosophy* includes among the skeptical fourfold or practical criterion the instruction to live "undogmatically" according to the traditions of one's society. I wonder, however, if in describing Hume as a philosopher who

accords custom such strong authority Livingston has not intensified Hume's claim beyond Hume's own intentions and beyond the implications of his writings. It seems, in fact, that through Livingston's own specious alchemy, Hume is transmuted into someone more resembling the historical Burke (PMD 288-89). (It is perhaps no accident that Livingston wrote the foreword for Liberty Classics's publication of the second edition of Laurence L. Bongie's *David Hume: Prophet of the Counter-Revolution* (1999), a text whose stated objective is to demonstrate the way that Hume preceded Burke in France as a critic of revolution.)

Livingston is right, of course, to see in Hume a profound respect for custom, habit, and tradition. He is right to see Hume's criticism of false philosophy and of various political events as animated by his respect for custom and by his appreciation of the situatedness of human beings within common life. It is, however, one thing to appreciate and respect tradition. It is quite another to venerate it. The gap between my own position and Livingston's on this point is the gap between acknowledgment and sanctification, between appreciation and fetishization, between respect and piety. In my own estimation, Livingston's positive doctrines concerning tradition are not well grounded in Hume's texts—and they are not philosophically tenable.

For example, in characterizing the purported piety of true philosophers, Livingston writes that for them "custom as a totality is sacred." His evidence for this assertion is the claim that Hume "views our regard for property as 'sacred'" (PMD 38).² In fact, Hume writes no such thing, and implies just the contrary. In the second *Enquiry* (EPM 199), Hume explains the binding force of promises (including those concerning property) in terms of social interest. He argues that attempts to explain this obligation in other ways leaves it as mysterious (and therefore philosophically unsatisfactory) as the process by which a priest's recitation of a liturgy transforms a mere structure of bricks and wood into a sacred building. Property *per se* is not the specific topic of reflection here (nor is it specifically addressed at T 524, the other passage Livingston cites).

In the passage he quotes from the *Treatise*, Livingston's abuse of the text is even more pronounced. There Hume vigorously distances the artificial institution of promise keeping (and by implication the artifice of respect for property) from the "monstrous doctrines" of transubstantiation and holy orders, which, he says, are "merely priestly inventions." Hume, in other words, clearly does not consecrate custom in the way Roman Catholic priests consecrate the Eucharistic host or church buildings, and he is decidedly and self-consciously not, as Livingston maintains, a philosopher of "enchantment" (PMD 398).

Without the sanctity of custom, Livingston's traditionalist reading of Hume begins to unravel. It becomes, for example, an overstatement to

maintain that for Hume the “task of ‘free government’ is to *preserve* [the moral traditions and ways of life of a polity], to allow their cultivation, and to render their communication as harmonious as possible” (PMD 371, italics mine). No author who approvingly writes of the disruption of the traditions that subordinated and harmed native Americans could hold such a position (EPM 190-191). No author who presented such an innovative and democratic vision of government as that rendered in “The Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth” could be understood simply to regard the objective of government to be “preserving” traditional forms of rule. No theorist who made social interest, sympathy, and pleasure the bases of social and political life could justly be understood to embrace traditional practices as sacred and fundamentally authoritative. Indeed, it is—as Hume acknowledges—often upon precisely the bases of sympathy, interest, and pleasure that traditional practices are restructured or even abandoned—as was, for example, the traditional exclusion of women from holding private property (EPM 191).

Hume’s remarks about his own political writing also indicate that he does not sanctify custom. His description of his *Three Essays* in a letter of February 1748, shortly before its publication, distances the work from then-reigning political thought—including Tory thought:

One [of the essays] is against the original Contract, the System of the Whigs, another against passive Obedience, the System of the Tories; A third upon the Protestant Succession, where I suppose a Man to deliberate, before the Establishment of that Succession, which Family he shou’d adhere to, & to weigh the Advantages & Disadvantages of each.³

(Fearing the responses of Whiggish supporters of the Glorious Revolution, “Of the Protestant Succession” was ultimately removed from the final copy, not to appear in print until 1752; it was replaced with another essay, “Of National Characters.”) If Hume were a traditionalist, his sympathy would have been more distinctly Tory.

Livingston’s criticisms of false political thinking—political thinking based on specious metaphysical and transcendent viewpoints—are trenchant. In fact, his traditionalist reading limits them unnecessarily. If we reject Livingston’s traditional reading, we may use his critical devices much more extensively. We might explore, for example, the idea of a true feminism, a true politics of human rights, a true democratic socialism, a true environmentalism, even a true and humane liberalism. Instead of the grandeur of Holy Mother Russia, might we not—following a less conservative muse—think profitably about *traditions* of labor struggle, civic participation, women’s and African resistance to oppression, egalitarianism, ecological wisdom, and non-violence? Might we possibly use the critique of

false philosophy to undermine superstitious ideas of racial, class, and gendered hierarchy, homophobia, censorship, and “free”-market economics? From the clearances to colonialism to the subversions of independent crafts people and guilds, it is perhaps, as E. P. Thompson has recently argued in his book *Customs in Common*, market capitalism, more than any other force, that has destroyed traditional practices. Perhaps capitalism somehow bears the taint of false philosophy. The critique of false philosophy might be employed in other ways as well.

My point is not to argue that the topics I suggest are truer extensions of Hume's vision, but simply to illustrate the biased way in which Livingston applies Hume's philosophy of common life. The topics I list that become available to Humean reflection once Livingston's dogmatic traditionalism is abandoned show that in pursuing his own intimations Livingston “secretly borrows some favorite prejudice” of his own and presents it as timeless philosophy (PMD 36, 38; PCL 30). Livingston has committed “the fundamental error” (PMD 29) of philosophers. Like other philosophers, he denies the variety of the world in an attempt to reduce everything to his favorite putatively transcendent philosophical principle (PMD 29).⁴ Doing so even partially—though not fundamentally—compromises the accuracy and power of his interpretive framework.

What leads Livingston to do so? I think Livingston is partly seduced, as are the false philosophers he criticizes, by the attempt to write from a “transcendental point of view,” by appealing to a “higher,” “absolute skepticism” (PMD 22, 395). But there is something else. Livingston is profoundly concerned about the issue of authority and its purported security. He not only criticizes false philosophy for abandoning the traditional sources of authority; he also criticizes ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism along these lines. The Pyrrhonians left their participants “vulnerable” because in rejecting the authority of dogmatism, they failed to submit to *any* authority (PMD 9). Pyrrhonism itself, according to Livingston, becomes a form of “melancholy” because it must endure the “possibility” that some form of dogmatism might be acceptable and is therefore not resolute (PMD 166-167). Pyrrhonism is flawed, says Livingston, because it is not secure.

What Livingston has missed is that, as a skeptic, Hume accepts precisely that vulnerability. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Treatise* I iv. Hume portrays himself there metaphorically as striking out on a less-than-sturdy ship in dangerous seas (an image especially forceful in light of his severe seasickness and the rugged seas off Scotland and Hume's proneness to severe seasickness): “Methinks I am like a man, who having struck on many shoals, and having narrowly escap'd ship-wreck in passing a small frith, has yet the temerity to put out to sea in the same leaky weather-beaten vessel” (T 263).

Otto Neurath would advance a similar image centuries later. It is a depiction of profound vulnerability.

Contrary to Livingston, Hume embraces the contingency, or, as I have described it elsewhere, the fragility of common life in many aspects of his philosophical work—even in the way he thinks that complex ideas may be broken down into simple ones. Hume's concepts of "nature" and "custom" do indicate foci of stability and security. But his skepticism has taught him that these concepts, like any other matter of theory and practice, are vulnerable. Indeed, Hume describes his work as a collection of theories which "if not true...might at least be satisfactory," and he claims that he is skeptical in "all the incidents of life" (T 270). His skeptical posture towards theory generally, including that of custom, tradition, and nature, is evident.

Dogmatic philosophers generally work to eradicate the sort of vulnerability intrinsic to skepticism. It is the peculiar delirium characteristic of dogmatic traditionalists to try to replace the authority apparently threatened by skeptical philosophy with the authority of custom and tradition. Hume does not succumb to this form of delirious dogmatism. On the back of one of his memoranda Hume copied a quote from Epicharmus: "Keep sober and remember to be skeptical." Contrary to the rendering presented in Livingston's text, Hume does just that.

NOTES

1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edition revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978). Hereafter abbreviated as "T," with page numbers inserted parenthetically in the text.

2 Citing T 524 and *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* in David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd edition revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 199. Hereafter abbreviated as "EPM," with page numbers inserted parenthetically in the text.

3 Letter of 13 February 1749 to Charles Erskine, Lord Tinwald in *The Letters of David Hume*, edited by J.Y.T. Greig, 2 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), I 112.

4 Citing David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, edited by Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987), 159.