#### Donald Ainslie: Hume’s True Scepticism. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 286. £40.00 (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-959386-6

Through the years, many answers have been offered to Kemp Smith’s famous question regarding the relation between Hume’s scepticism and his naturalism. In this book, Ainslie offers a novel take on this issue. Ainslie argues that philosophy, involving as it does a close investigation of the mind itself, leads to a reflective interference, that is, a temporary disruption of one’s mental faculties that arises from using these faculties to investigate their own operations. False philosophy, which includes excessive scepticism, is the natural result of this reflective interference, when its influence is not recognised. Hume instead endorses true scepticism, which recognises the fundamental limitation of philosophy in this regard, and understands that philosophy must be silent regarding certain fundamental questions; philosophy is thus ‘domesticated’ (2). Hume continues upon his naturalistic project by resting content with the deliverances of his faculties, recognising that doing so does not require any further justifications for them.

Ainslie’s answer to Kemp Smith has two distinctions: first, as noted above, it is a novel and intriguing thesis; second, Ainslie’s answer truly integrates and does justice to both these aspects of Hume’s philosophy. It can be difficult to offer an answer to Kemp Smith that doesn’t reduce either scepticism or naturalism to a supporting role. On Ainslie’s view, scepticism is an inevitable product of the naturalistic project. Yet, Hume’s scepticism is such that it leaves ample room for the naturalistic project to continue, albeit in a more diffident manner.

Ainslie defends his thesis by means of a detailed and comprehensive examination of Hume’s treatment of scepticism in the *Treatise*, focusing on Book 1 Part 4 and the Appendix. Chapter 1 opens with an examination of Hume’s scepticism with regard to reason (THN 1.4.1), and finds that the iterative process of reflection that culminates in excessive scepticism is problematic because it involves reflective interference. Unlike its rationalistic competitors, Hume’s sentimentalist theory of belief explains why we do not in fact believe the sceptical conclusion. The moral is that we do not need reason’s reflective endorsement in order to rely on our beliefs. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 offer a sustained examination of Hume’s scepticism with regard to the senses (THN 1.4.2). Chapter 2 investigates the vulgar conception of the external world, and finds that this viewpoint is not a higher-order one regarding the status of our perceptions, but that of a first-order immersion which takes what is presented to have distinct and continued existence. Chapter 3 explores the associative mechanisms behind the vulgar view, and finds that to be vulgarly immersed is simply to be aware of perceptions in the right way (i.e. in accordance with the appropriate associative relations). Notably, Ainslie sets out on Hume’s behalf a detailed and nuanced developmental story regarding the formation of the vulgar view. Chapter 4 is key, and examines the philosophical responses to the vulgar view. Importantly, Ainslie argues that when introspecting, philosophers treat perceptions as having continued existence in the same way that the vulgar view the external world – in other words, even philosophers are ‘vulgar with respect to the mind’ (133). This problematises any philosophical dismissals of the vulgar view of objects, because this would simultaneously implicate the philosophical dismissals themselves.

Chapter 5 examines Hume’s treatment of the ancient philosophy (that is, substance ontology), with THN 1.4.3 addressing this topic with regard to the external world, and THN 1.4.5 the internal world (i.e. the topic of souls). The general mistake of substance metaphysics is that it attempts to provide an extra-mental foundations for our beliefs regarding ordinary objects by positing substances. In doing so, it attempts to conceive of ‘non-perceptual objects’ – that is, non-vulgar objects – but this falls into contradiction, since we can only characterise objects in vulgar terms; the ancient philosophers can only obscure this contradiction by means of empty words such as ‘faculty’ and ‘occult quality’.

Chapter 6 turns towards Hume’s treatment of the modern philosophy: with regard to the external world in THN 1.4.4, and the internal world in THN 1.4.6. Ainslie sees these sections as going hand-in-hand – Hume’s rejection of the primary/secondary quality distinction reinforces his argument against Locke’s view of consciousness. In general, the mistake that the modern philosophers make is in assuming that philosophy owes us an explanation for our beliefs regarding the external world, while taking us to have privileged access to our mental states, which Ainslie argues we lack in any meaningful sense.

Chapter 7 takes on THN 1.4.7, and explores Hume’s turn towards true scepticism. Ainslie offers a sustained dismissal of sceptical, naturalist, and dialectical interpretations of THN 1.4.7. Ainslie instead sees Hume as recognising the limits of philosophy: due to reflective interference, philosophy cannot say anything regarding the question of whether our cognitive capabilities are fundamentally justified. Thus, philosophy can neither repudiate nor justify our basic cognitive capabilities, which leaves open space for Hume’s naturalistic project to continue, albeit without fundamental endorsement from philosophy. Philosophy is entirely optional, and must reign in its grand ambitions, instead proceeding with due modesty. Chapter 8 concludes by explaining Hume’s notorious problem regarding personal identity in the Appendix, which Ainslie argues arises from reflection. Philosophers attempt to account for the unity of our perceptions in a single mind by means of introspective reflection, but cannot integrate the reflective perceptions themselves into this unified bundle.

As with any interesting and substantive interpretive thesis, there are bound to be points of contention. In particular, I have a few issues with the particulars of Ainslie’s treatment of Hume’s account of mental transparency, as well as Hume’s endorsement of the reliability of introspection (e.g. EHU 2.2). There is also recourse to reply to Ainslie’s criticisms of readings that turn on the Title Principle (233). But these interpretive scuffles should hardly detract from one’s appreciation of a fine piece of scholarship, and perhaps even add to it. All in all, Ainslie’s book is of tremendous scholarly worth, being valuable both in its own right as a novel and well-defended thesis, and also more instrumentally in offering a sustained analysis of Book 1 Part 4. It comes with my highest recommendation.

 Hsueh Qu

 *National University of Singapore*