Wittgenstein, Hume and Naturalism[1]

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According to Bernard Williams Wittgenstein's opposition to scientific naturalism led him to reject explanation of phenomena as a philosophical goal. Williams claims that this rejection was driven by a distinctive conception of the subject matter of philosophy as "exclusively *a priori*". I suggest that Wittgenstein's opposition is directed against a particular form of explanation understood as central to a 'scientific attitude'. Wittgenstein also regarded the subject matter of philosophy as incorporating "the phenomena of every-day" and he was careful to emphasize the importance of identifying and considering our actual practices and experiences in providing insight into the nature of meaning and understanding. To provide an alternative to Williams's view this chapter compares Wittgenstein's naturalism to Hume's. Humean naturalism is sometimes assumed to have paved the way for scientism. Yet, for Hume, "the cautious observation of human life" was central to philosophical method, central to the "science of human nature". There are important differences between Hume and Wittgenstein. But recognizing the elements arguably shared by them can provide a better way to characterize Wittgenstein's naturalism. This helps clarify the role Wittgenstein gave to human practice and experience and demonstrates that his attitude to the subject matter of philosophy was not 'exclusively *a priori*'.

Introduction

One of the many things that makes Wittgenstein's philosophical work distinctive is the sustained interest in the nature of philosophy itself. This interest is expressed throughout his writings from the earliest notes and drafts of the *Tractatus* to his remarks up to the late 1940's and including the months before he died. It is unusual to find a person for whom the character of philosophy received so much attention and over such a sustained period of time. Throughout his writings, albeit in different ways, Wittgenstein insisted on the independence of philosophy from science. And that insistence has been taken as evidence that he was an anti-naturalist. That would follow, however, only if naturalism is a view about how philosophy should privilege science. But that understanding of naturalism is contestable. Clarifying Wittgenstein's relation to naturalism is not easy but one way is to consider how his work aligns with the naturalism of Hume. Initially this may seem a questionable strategy since the two appear to differ substantially over basic philosophical commitments and are seemingly quite opposed to one another on questions of methodology. But a comparison with Hume is illuminating in a number of ways.

For some it is not obvious that Wittgenstein is any kind of naturalist at all, let alone one who shares that view with a figure often interpreted to have championed

[1] Forthcoming in *Wittgenstein and Naturalism*, Cahill and Raleigh eds. (Routledge).

what is now known as scientism. And there are broader issues too. If Hacker is right Hume "made almost every epistemological and metaphysical mistake Wittgenstein could think of".[2] There are indeed many ways that Hume's work contrasts with Wittgenstein's but there are deep affinities too. These affinities can be overlooked because of a tendency to misread Hume's naturalism as a forerunner to what now counts as scientific naturalism and, relatedly, to construe Wittgenstein's suspicions with regard to the use of scientific method in philosophy to express an anti-naturalism. Against this last idea, Strawson writes of how the resemblances between them and the 'echoes' of Hume in Wittgenstein's work are more striking than the differences.[3] And I think in the context of clarifying Wittgenstein's naturalism the affinities are particularly instructive as are the lessons for how we might characterize contemporary philosophical naturalism more broadly.

Pears describes Wittgenstein's naturalism as inspired by a conception of philosophical method which consists in portraying what we find in daily life;[4] an echo, I take it, of Hume's conception of naturalistic method as grounded in the "cautious observation of human life" and of characterizing the features of our lives "as they appear in the common course of the world".[5] There is (almost) no opposition to the idea that Hume is a naturalist although there are significant differences over which kind of naturalism is most relevant. As indicated, one approach is to portray him as paving the way for scientism and thus as quite inconsistent with Wittgenstein's anti-scientism. But there are other kinds of naturalism in Hume, those that have been interpreted as more 'liberal' and at least non-scientistic in the sense developed by a number of contemporary authors.[6]

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[2] P.M.S Hacker Hacker, P.M.S. *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), 218. See also O. Hanfling "Hume and Wittgenstein," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures* 9, (1975): 47.

[3] P.F. Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* (London: Methuen & Co., 1985): 14. For others that emphasize the affinities between Hume and Wittgenstein see, for example, P. Jones, "Strains in Hume and Wittgenstein," in *Hume: A Re-evaluation*, ed. Donald W. Livingstone and James T. King (New York: Fordham University Press 1976): 191-209; B. Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[4] D. Pears, "Wittgenstein's Naturalism," *The Monist*, 78, no.3 (1995): 411.

[5] D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978): xix. Doubtless there are other 'naturalisms' in Hume that would fit uneasily with this kind, those that motivate Hacker's remark above for example. There has been a tendency to underplay the diversity of Hume's view in this regard.

[6] See for example, the essays in M. de Caro, and D. Macarthur, eds. *Naturalism in Question*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004 and M. de Caro, and D. Macarthur, eds. *Naturalism and Normativity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

Despite other changes during the development of Wittgenstein's thought a theme that persists is the insistence that philosophy and science are distinct. That view is taken to expresses a clear anti-naturalism. According to Flanagan, for example, Wittgenstein is anti-naturalist because he denies that philosophy is more or less related to any of the natural sciences: psychology, and Darwinism, for example, are taken by Wittgenstein to be both equally independent of philosophy and there is no sense that philosophy can be informed at all by any of the natural sciences.[7] Flanagan chooses to use Quine's view as the arbiter of what counts as naturalism, at least for the purposes of characterizing Wittgenstein as an anti-naturalist.[8] But Quine's view need not be taken as the arbiter and there are a number of reasons – some of them Humean – to resist doing so. Despite Quine's appeal to Hume as a forerunner of the "epistemological enterprise in [its] new psychological setting"[9] the latter would not, I think, easily recognize the idea that epistemology studies "a physical human subject".[10] The principal subject matter of what Hume calls "the science of human nature"[11] is not a physical human subject but *persons*; not transitions between experiential input in the form of "patterns of irradiation in assorted frequencies" and conceptual output in the form of descriptions of the world and its history as Quine puts it.[12] Hume's naturalism encompasses more than a psychological characterization of belief-formation.

In the next section I consider Bernard Williams's remarks about how Wittgenstein rejected explanation and conceived the subject matter of philosophy as exclusively *a priori*. I suggest that Wittgenstein had a nuanced view about what explanation can provide and, in the following section, develop how that is related to experience and belief. I then sketch the implications for ways that we can understand philosophical naturalism.

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[7] O. Flanagan, "Varieties of Naturalism," in *The Oxford Companion to Religion and Science* ed. Philip Clayton and Zachary Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 432.
[8] Flanagan also suggests that Wittgenstein's 'anti-naturalism' is allegedly inferior to other versions, O.K. Bouwsma's for example, because Wittgenstein merely stipulates anti-naturalism and does not argue for it. I have discussed Wittgenstein's relation to scientism in B. Smith, "Wittgenstein, Naturalism and Scientism", in *Wittgenstein and Scientism*, ed. Jonathan Beale and Ian James Kidd, (London: Routledge, 2017 forthcoming).
[9] W.V.O. Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized", in *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology*, ed. Sven Bernecker and Fred Dretske, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 274.
[10] Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized", 273.
[11] Hume, *Treatise*, xvii.
[12] Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized", 274.

The Subject Matter of Philosophy and the *a priori*

The scientistic naturalism to which Wittgenstein is opposed involves, amongst other things, a "smug and unexamined assurance that what wants explanation is obvious, and that scientific tools are immediately applicable" as Goldfarb puts it.[13] But in the course of exposing that assurance Wittgenstein's view allegedly incorporates a problematic opposition to explanation as such; problematic since it seems to embody a dogmatic scepticism about the value of any empirical investigation in the context of clarifying and responding to philosophical problems. And this assumes a distinctive view about the subject matter of philosophy. A related interpretation is proposed by Bernard Williams who suggests that according to Wittgenstein "philosophy had nothing to do with explanations – not merely scientific explanations ... but any explanations at all". As a result Wittgenstein regarded the subject matter of philosophy as being "exclusively *a priori*".[14] But the view that philosophy's subject matter is *a priori* in the sense Williams intends cannot, it seems to me, be easily accommodated by Wittgenstein's naturalism. To show why involves considering what it is about explanation, particularly empirical explanation, that Wittgenstein opposed.

Wittgenstein famously suggests that what it takes to frame our subject matter in the right way is 'description' since explanation, a core component in the scientific attitude, is to be done away with.[15] Description is a process through which we remind ourselves of the familiar ordinary practical contexts within which meaning, understanding, word-use, concept application, and so on, are embedded and inextricably entwined with our agency. According to Wittgenstein it is this familiarity that makes our subject matter potentially hard to get into focus: "One cannot notice something because it is in front of one. Our subject matter is there if only we remove the prejudice that obscures it".[16] Our 'disquietudes' are not properly understood let alone addressed by providing explanations that attempt to reach behind the phenomena, as it were. Rather they are addressed through achieving the right kind of

[13] W. Goldfarb, "Wittgenstein, Mind, and Scientism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 86, no.11 (1989): 367.
[14] B. Williams, "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline." *Philosophy* 75, (2000): 493. See also Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, 283 n.23.
[15] PI §109.
[16] PI §340.

perspective on what is already there as it is constituted in the midst of our practical existence. So in that sense we are reminded of what we are already familiar with and understand since our practices – our lives – are partly made by such understanding. This is unlike a different, more 'scientific', subject matter which is not already partly constituted by our practices and thus illuminating it cannot be achieved by "description alone".[17] It is the failure to differentiate the subject matter in each case that results in a tendency to treat our philosophical questions as if they were scientific in structure, and thus admit of explanations that, when successful, identify new and perhaps quite unfamiliar facts. The scientific attitude, one that embodies a certain kind of explanatory urge, assumes that we need to look past the manifest subject matter to something more basic "as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena".[18]

The *a priori* in Williams's sense concerns a subject matter that contains potential objects of understanding that are fully intelligible independently of all experience. But adverting to what is intelligible in this sense is *a priori* in a problematic way. It is possible to employ this use of *a priori*, as Williams does, but it arguably encompasses too much. For example, this *a priori* would also capture a significant part of how Hume characterizes his basic methodological approach and thus it brings into question its suggested relevance in the specific case of Wittgenstein. I will come back to this in the next section. But the opposition between explanation and description is not best read, I think, as expressing scepticism about explanation as such, as if our subject matter is strangely inexplicable whilst being at the same time describable. The scepticism about explanation is directed to a particular kind of attitude toward inquiry not a rejection of the idea that the features under question can be explained at all.

Wittgenstein does not provide much explicit detail as to which kinds of explanation his critical remarks are directed against and to which they are not. At any rate, the idea that he was somehow simply anti-explanation is not obviously right. It would be peculiarly un-Wittgensteinian to suppose that there is something illegitimate in the very idea of explanation; un-Wittgensteinian partly because that would itself rely on a form of essentialism about concepts and our forms of understanding that he clearly rejected. Just as there are many things we call 'games', "there are all sorts of

[17] PI §109.
[18] PI §90.

things we call "explanation of meaning"".[19] So we ought to be mindful of the complex status of explanation, a complexity that might be overlooked if one considers only those remarks that appear to dismiss the value of explanation outright.

In *The Big Typescript*, for example, and in subsequent work, Wittgenstein often explores the relation between explanation and understanding, particularly the way that explanation 'correlates' with understanding as he puts it. In some cases explanation can potentially exorcize *mis*understanding and hence is used in a different way to how explanation is often referred to in the *Philosophical Investigations*.[20] In the latter work explanation takes a more specific and a particularly empirical shape and, to that extent, it was deemed misleading in the context of addressing philosophical problems. Despite some inevitable vagueness, Wittgenstein had a specific form of explanation as the principal target of his criticism and in a way that was connected with his proposals that an alternative attitude, description, would faithfully preserve our subject matter. But preservation is, I take it, an activity that can often demand a good deal of work, one that involves "clearing misunderstandings away"[21] and so the preservation in question is more like the conservation of a living dynamic natural environment, not like preserving an object in a form of suspended animation such as a cryogenic stasis. That can seem a peripheral point but it highlights how the wider context of Wittgenstein's scepticism about explanation does not imply a dogmatic refusal to seek ways to change and advance our understanding.

A key theme in the *Philosophical Investigations* is resistance to the idea that grasp of the meaning of a concept amounts to possessing the right kind of mental state, a state that constitutes knowing how to extend a series of numbers according to a learned formulation, say. Wittgenstein's suggestive remark in this context that the grammar (in his sense) of 'know' is related to that of 'can' and 'is able to'[22] points to the essentially practical character of what understanding amounts to, an understanding that is not locatable inside a person's head or across instances of past behavior. The investigations of rule following involve a dialectic centered on the differing perspectives of instructor and learner in order to reveal the character of understanding, in particular the kind of practical context-bound mastery a person comes to take on,

[19] BT 59.
[20] BT 17.
[21] PI §90.
[22] PI §150.

an ability that exhibits a change in the "way of looking at things".[23] This change is grounded in a capacity to compare cases and examples and is reflected in what we come to know through a grammatical investigation: "the kind of understanding that consists in 'seeing connexions'".[24]

The connections here are not the ones posited by rival empirical explanations, connections that purportedly underpin the phenomena in question: the connections and our sensitivity to them *constitute* the phenomena when regarded by a clear view enabled by a grammatical investigation. In the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* Wittgenstein writes that in the face of disquietudes "[p]hilosophical dissatisfaction disappears by our seeing *more*".[25] So the question of development or in some sense a change of view on our subject matter is not in question. What is problematic is to attempt a change of view by using explanations of the sort typically employed in scientific practice and illicitly borrowed for philosophical purposes. So there are forms of activity, particularly being able to compare cases, to catch on to patterns and form awareness of how examples are related, that Wittgenstein thinks are crucial and irreducible components in what constitutes understanding but resist, at least in the relevant sense, explanation.

For Pears, there is no reason for Wittgenstein, or anyone else, to rule out *a priori* from our investigations the value of empirical findings, at least from our responses to the problems that we have discovered even if they arise from the misunderstanding of language.[26] This is a similar idea to Williams's. Both Pears and Williams regard Wittgenstein's suspicions about the 'scientific way of thinking' to dogmatically rule out the very idea that the accumulation of facts and empirical explanations could ever contribute to our understanding. But Williams also notes that there are kinds of explanation that Wittgenstein embraced, "philosophical explanations", which are distinctive since these are "like elucidations or reminders".[27]

I am suggesting that there is more to Wittgenstein's apparent animus towards explanation than unconditional rejection and also that there is a dynamic role for the kinds of explanation that Wittgenstein acknowledged. A 'philosophical explanation' or an elucidation can, I think, be more than a simple reminder but involve a process of

[23] PI §144.
[24] PI §122.
[25] RFM II 85. Wittgenstein's emphasis.
[26] Pears, "Wittgenstein's Naturalism", 423.
[27] Williams, "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline", 493.

coming to a new kind of understanding even if that is not one grounded in awareness of new facts lying behind the phenomena in question. In my view, elucidatory or philosophical explanations in Williams's sense are also forms of naturalistic explanation but in which there is no place for an alleged *explanans* that underpins what otherwise "lies open to view".[28] Elucidatory explanations are normative to the extent that they help to make phenomena intelligible by contextualizing them in amongst our lived experiences which constitute their "original home".[29]

At one point in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein characterizes the way in which potential explanations of meaning must make use of language "full-blown".[30] That is, language, as the etymology suggests, as fully developed, as in blossom as it were. Competence with providing and receiving normative explanations requires immersion in and familiarity with a 'language-game'. Wittgenstein emphasizes here, as elsewhere, that what comes to be embodied as a form of agency rooted in enculturation reflects how (some) "explanation has its foundation in training".[31] Again, a contrast would be with the scientistic "causal point of view"[32] that cannot make intelligible the normative *possibilities* of meaning that run through our understanding that is exhibited in ordinary life.[33] Wittgenstein's non-reductive naturalism, just as Hume's, conceives our subject matter as irreducibly situated in socially articulated practical contexts and risks irreparable distortion if detached from them. That the subject matter of philosophy includes the taken for granted conditions of human life presupposed by the explicit activities of reflecting on what we ordinarily do is, in some sense, to characterize that subject matter as *a priori*, as available for thought independently from experience. But until that sense is clarified we risk missing the other ways that Wittgenstein's thought regarded experience as inalienable to the project of clarifying the subject matter of philosophy and of illuminating how meaning and understanding permeate our lives.

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[28] PI §126.
[29] PI §116. For Hanfling these are 'manifest explanations' in contrast to the explanations of science that have 'hidden' facts as their target. See O. Hanfling, *Wittgenstein and the Human Form of Life* (London: Routledge, 2002): 93.
[30] PI §120.
[31] Z §419.
[32] CV 37.
[33] PI §90.

Hume and Wittgenstein on Experience and Belief

In §97 of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein writes that, like other words such as 'language' and 'world', if the term 'experience' is to have a use "it must be as humble a one as that of the words "table", "lamp", "door"". This suggests that we understand 'experience' to be 'full-blown' in the sense suggested in the previous section. That is, that in referring to experience and its role in meaning and understanding we need not use it in a narrow, peculiarly epistemological sense, even if philosophers have characteristically done so in a way that Wittgenstein found objectionable. By the epistemological sense of experience I mean, roughly, the idea of experience as playing a grounding or foundational role in our understanding. The discussion of what it is to grasp and follow a rule is again helpful. This epistemic sense of experience mistakenly portrays what it is to grasp a rule as an experience – a "special experience" – internal to the mind of a person in the midst of training, an experience that supposedly marks the transition between unsuccessful and successful grasp of a rule.[34] But experience understood in an ordinary and 'humble' sense refers to a more general, socially articulated meaning that reconnects with the dimension of our practical embodied agency. So when he writes at §655 that "[t]he question is not one of explaining a language-game by means of our experiences, but of noting a language-game" what is problematic is the aspiration to use experience as somehow an explanation or justification for outward behavior. Noting a language-game is an activity that takes in our experiences in a wider sense, that captures what we say, think or do in the course of ordinary life; a more phenomenological characterization of experience.[35]

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[34] PI §155.

[35] In 1974 M. O'C. Drury wrote of an exchange with Wittgenstein in which the latter described his work as "'phenomenology'". See M. O'C. Drury, "Conversations with Wittgenstein", in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. R. Rhees, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984): 116. See also Rhees's comment at x-xi. At the time in question (c.1930) Wittgenstein was working on notes that were later published as *Philosophical Remarks* in which he makes the connection between his work and phenomenology. In other places, *The Big Typescript* for example, Wittgenstein also suggests that a grammatical investigation is a form of phenomenological investigation. There have been a number of attempts to unravel the intriguing connection that Wittgenstein made with phenomenology. See, for example: T. N. Munson, "Wittgenstein's Phenomenology". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 23, no.1 (1962): 37-50; H. Spiegelberg, "The Puzzle of Wittgenstein's Phänomenologie". *American Philosophical Quarterly* 5. no.4 (1968): 244-56; N. F. Gier, *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology: A Comparative Study of the Later Wittgenstein, Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1981) and, more recently, R. Monk, "The Temptations of

Of course, the aim here is not to assess the complex connections between Wittgenstein and the phenomenological tradition but to gain a clearer view of the role of experience, in the way I am suggesting that it might understood, in relation to Hume's naturalism. Roughly, a widespread view is that Hume's ambition was to provide a scientifically respectable account of belief acquisition in the form of explaining the experiential foundation of our ideas in ways that avoid abstruse metaphysical assumptions. That is Hume's so-called explanatory aim to be realized through the 'experimental method' that he advocated. On the other hand, Hume aimed to clarify the normative or rational credentials of belief by assessing whether belief can be justified, principally by one of two routes: by sense experience ('the present testimony of sense') or by a form of conceptual analysis ('relations of ideas'). Notoriously many of our basic beliefs such as that the external world exists, that causal relations hold between objects, that objects exist when unperceived, cannot be justified and thus a form of scepticism follows. An influential interpretation holds that Hume's explanatory aim contains the resources to respond to, if not refute, scepticism: unavoidable psychological mechanisms inevitably lead to the formation of belief such that the search for independent rational justification is shown to be incoherent.[36] Nevertheless, Hume's view is that the process of belief acquisition leads to our beliefs becoming 'stable' in a way that reliably connects them to truth. Hume has a naturalistic theory of justification, then, since truth-oriented stability is explained as grounded in psychological dispositions.[37] And, according to Pears, had Hume known how the brain works his account would have moved "beyond psychology into neurology".[38] But it is questionable whether Hume's commitment to the 'experimental method' implies a naturalistic reduction in this sense.

Hume appealed to features of our experience which presupposed an interpersonal environment, claims to which he assumed the community would readily assent on the basis of reflection. Yet what 'experience' means for Hume is not straightforward, taking in experience that is introspectively accessible by an individual but also experience that cannot be made intelligible other than in social

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[36] For example N. Kemp Smith *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London: MacMillan, 1941).

[37] For example L. Loeb *Stability and Justification in Hume's* Treatise, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[38] Pears, "Wittgenstein's Naturalism", 412.

contexts. The latter assumes a prior intersubjective understanding that could be made explicit by reflection. It is on the basis of prior understanding shared across communities, even humanity perhaps, that one might be persuaded of Hume's views about, say, the role of sentiment in ethics and of the role of perceptual anticipation in the context of causal inference. According to Hanfling, the psychology invoked by Hume is not that of empirical science but "introspective and in that sense *a priori*. He wants us to notice that certain things are as he says, not to learn it from him".[39] Under one light Hume's naturalism is a commitment to – even laying the foundations for – what is now known as scientism. Under another, it is a naturalism that consists in attending to our lived experiences and practice.[40] If the latter is right, then Hume's method whilst naturalistic is non-reductionist and more descriptive in a Wittgensteinian sense. What one comes to notice from such descriptions are forms of experience that constitute ordinary life and thus the subject matter of our investigation and the experimental method used to investigate it can be viewed as naturalistic but non-scientistic.

What Hume considered as 'experiments' and 'experimental reasoning' included diverse reflections on human life that often included considering historical events and practices:

> [R]ecords of wars, intrigues, factions, and revolutions are so many collections of experiments, by which the politician or moral philosopher fixes the principles of his science, in the same manner as the physician or natural philosopher becomes acquainted with the nature of plants, minerals, and other external objects, by the experiments which he forms concerning them.[41]

There is then a connection between philosophy and natural science in so far as we need to form understanding in light of experiments. But there is no suggestion of reducing what Hume's calls "the science of man"[42] or sometimes "the science of

[39] O. Hanfling, "Hume and Wittgenstein". *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures* 9, (1975): 51.
[40] For further discussion see B. Smith "Naturalism, Experience, and Hume's 'Science of Human Nature'". *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 24, no.3 (2016): 310-323.
[41] D. Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975): 83-84.
[42] Hume, *Treatise*, xv.

human nature"[43] to natural philosophy. In fact, quite the contrary. In the very last section of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein warns against the assumption that the existence of "experimental methods" in psychology contain the resources for solving the problems "which trouble us"; "problem and method pass each other by", he writes.[44] One might see a Humean view as the target yet doing so would assume a narrow conception of what Hume meant by experiment and experimental method. The science of man *qua* observation of ordinary life is basic and in fact presupposed by natural philosophy and other forms of enquiry: "[T]he science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences".[45]

Since the science of man in Hume's sense is not dealing with inanimate objects in the world that can be manipulated and placed in experimental settings at will in order to "observe the results", a different approach is needed. But in such an approach a form of observation is nevertheless still central. Hume writes:

> We must therefore glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world ... Where experiments of this kind are judiciously collected and compared, we may hope to establish on them a science, which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension.[46]

So, as we should expect, the philosophical study of human life and our practices is a different activity from observing how inanimate phenomena interact under the laws of physics. There is something distinctive about the source and object of the observations in the context of human life since what we are aiming at is an understanding of ourselves.

In Hume's treatment of causal belief one angle is a sceptical one: an impression of causation cannot be located as the experiential source of the relevant idea and, since denying a casual relation does not lead to a contradiction, the justificatory possibilities provided by Hume's two-fold distinction alluded to above

[43] Hume, *Treatise*, xvii.
[44] PI II, §xiv.
[45] Hume, *Treatise*, xvi.
[46] Hume, *Treatise*, xiii-xix.

are exhausted. But there is also a different angle, one that seeks to uncover a non-rational "determination to carry our thought from one object to another" embodying our practice of causal inference.[47] So one epistemic method of assessing causal inference is to "trace up" the origin of belief in the attempt to identify the relevant impression, a form of genetic analysis of ideas. An alternative approach illuminates our "natural instinct" for belief, as Hume put it;[48] an example of how "Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable necessity has determin'd us to judge, as well as to breathe and feel".[49] That insight is not part of a refutation of skepticism but rather describes what is presupposed by it.

Hume writes that believing in the deliverances of sense-perception and our believing in an independent external world is a pre-rational natural instinct:

> It seems evident, that men are carried, by a natural instinct or prepossession, to repose faith in their senses; and that, without any reasoning, or even almost before the use of reason, we always suppose an external universe.[50]

This capacity for what commentators have called "natural belief"[51] is "antecedently implanted in the mind, and render'd unavoidable".[52] However, the "slightest philosophy" can destroy the "primary instincts of nature" and lead us to "embrace a new system" according to which mind and world are, from this new, detached perspective, irrecoverably alienated from one another.[53]

In Hume's presentation the term *belief* is consistently and deliberately employed to characterize this pre-rational natural instinct and that a principal aim of Book 1 of the *Treatise* is to demonstrate how "*belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures*".[54] This at least indicates, I think, that Hume's naturalism is not the imposition of a scientific way of thinking in an attempt to understand our practices. Rather it involves showing how the "maxims of common life" are apparently subverted by philosophical commitments driven by a

[47] Hume, *Treatise*, 165. See also Hanfling, "Hume and Wittgenstein", 59.
[48] Hume, *Enquiries*, 151.
[49] Hume, *Treatise*, 183.
[50] Hume, *Enquiries*, 151.
[51] Kemp Smith, *David Hume*, 114.
[52] Hume, *Treatise*, 183.
[53] Hume, *Enquiries*, 152.
[54] Hume, *Treatise*, 183.

particular and peculiarly philosophical style of questioning. Put in a Wittgensteinian light this subversion affects what is then regarded as acceptable responses to the questions that arise. These responses must take the form of explanations of the kind Wittgenstein is suspicious of.[55] Under a restrictive conception of what naturalism amounts to one might assume that Hume is imagining that the unavoidable character of belief in the external world, say, is a fact that can be respected only by reading into the view a kind of proto-Quineanism, an account of belief formation immunized from the fruitless endeavour of rational or normative assessment and which instead invokes sub-personal mechanical processes.[56] Yet what Hume is emphasizing, on the interpretation suggested here, is that belief-formation is a practical achievement that requires immersion in a social world and in common life. "[P]hilosophy.", writes Hume, "finds herself extremely embarrassed" by how toothless our reasoning is in the context of responding to skepticism, a skepticism that philosophy animated in the first place.[57] But it is a matter of contention, or at least it should be, what form Hume's naturalism adopts here as a response. The detached perspective of philosophical reflection and the skepticism it necessarily induces need not be countered by appealing to brute causal processes, as if that is the aspiration of Hume's science of man. Rather, the naturalism prioritizes the origin and role of belief in the context of ordinary life which, for Hume, is irreducibly interpersonal.

What we are given is not some reductive account of belief but a description and characterization of a relevant phenomenon, in this context the phenomenology of belief. According to Hanfling part of what Hume is doing here is to attend to the circumstances in which we acquire beliefs and call something, for example, a cause.[58] These are circumstances in which our natural belief is formed and need not require the operation of any explicit intellectual endorsement. These are also circumstances which are world-involving and interpersonal, not just the circumstances in a person's brain. To say that *a* caused *b* is an accomplishment not of reason, nor of any direct experience of a worldly cause but of custom which operates, unlike a brute causal process, against a background of training provided and regulated by other persons in the context of inhabiting a shared world. There are different kinds of belief that

[55] The 'must' here is a feeling symptomatic of the "causal point of view". See CV 37.
[56] See Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized".
[57] Hume, *Enquiries*, 152.
[58] Hanfling, "Hume and Wittgenstein", 58.

Wittgenstein discusses and one of them, famously, lies at the "foundation of well-founded belief" but is itself "not founded" as he describes it in *On Certainty*.[59] Such belief, it seems to me, is an 'echo' in Strawson's sense of Hume's description of the role of belief construed as natural instinct. According to Wittgenstein "believing is a natural act for humans"[60] and one that requires a taken for granted background of human life. Despite important differences between Hume and Wittgenstein there is a sense in which they are both concerned with what is presupposed by the activity of explicit reflection, what is needed in order for our reflection to have a subject matter in the first place. This, I have suggested, is constituted by our ordinary experience. Wittgenstein regarded the subject matter of philosophy as *a priori* in a sense that marks out empirical investigation as inappropriate for informing philosophical thought. But this idea does not encompass ordinary experience to which Wittgenstein assigned a fundamental role.

Concluding remarks: Naturalism and philosophy

Wittgenstein's naturalism can be articulated, as can Hume's, as a commitment to the philosophical importance of 'the everyday'.[61] For both Hume and Wittgenstein the everyday is the irreducible context which is presupposed by our questions, doubts, reasons and responses and inattentiveness to the taken for granted background of ordinary life can lead to a gross distortion of our subject matter. This background to our thought and action resists being accommodated from within a naturalistic outlook if that outlook is restricted to scientific naturalism. Hume wrote of the philosophical importance of "the gross earthy mixture" of common life, Wittgenstein the "rough ground" of day to day practice and the "phenomena of every-day".[62] And both insisted that we return to this subject matter, to return from the "fairy land"[63] of metaphysics or to recall language from the "holiday" on which it goes thereby generating philosophical problems.[64]

[59] OC §253.
[60] BT 575.
[61] See Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, 10.
[62] Hume, *Treatise*, 272. PI §107, §436.
[63] Hume, *Enquiries*, 72.
[64] PI §38.

Seen from the point of view of common life, from the perspective of embodied, interpersonal experience, philosophical problems (particularly skepticism) seem "so cold, strain'd, and ridiculous" as Hume put it.[65] But by this Hume was not suggesting that philosophy as such is thereby shown to be suspect. Rather, philosophy as well as many other aspects of our practices together such as having friends and family, working, relaxing, learning, creating, investigating, and so on, are part of what a flourishing human life consists in. This reflects how

> [N]ature has pointed out a mixed kind of life as most suitable to human race ... Indulge your passion for science, says she, but let your science be human, and such as may have a direct reference to action and society.[66]

After warning of the "pensive melancholy [and] endless uncertainty" that "abstruse thought and profound researches" will bring on, Hume ends here with the famous line: "Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man." Hume seemed to think that the mixed kind of life was one that somehow struck a balance between the different elements that constitute it and, whilst he did not think that each of us is equally suited to or even capable of pursuing philosophical thought, to be drawn to philosophical questions was a natural aspect of the human condition. According to Hume, reason, which inevitably leads to skeptical questions, is nevertheless employed "only because we cannot help it";[67] but even if this is right it leaves open the possibility that a liveable balance might be struck between philosophical inquiry and the fruitful participation in other activities. The mixed life that Hume imagined involved a domestication of reason and so of philosophy; a view not so easily accommodated by Wittgenstein.

According to Williams,

> Wittgenstein inherited from Kant a concern with the limits of understanding, from Frege and Russell an interest in the conditions of linguistic meaning, and

[65] Hume, *Treatise*, 214.
[66] Hume, *Enquiries*, 9.
[67] Hume, *Treatise*, 657.

> from himself a sense of philosophy as a quite peculiar and possibly pathological enterprise.[68]

Philosophy may be possibly pathological but not, I take it, because it is *philosophy* but because of a particular conception of its aims and methods or of a particular way of inhabiting a philosophical perspective. As discussed Wittgenstein was critical of the idea that scientific method is in any way appropriate for identifying and responding to philosophical problems. The way that naturalism is now often understood assumes the opposite view: that philosophy is or should be part of science in some sense. As I have emphasized, what motivates the view that Wittgenstein was anti-naturalist is the assimilation of naturalism to a scientific perspective. Whilst we need not countenance any such assimilation there is a danger here from the other direction as it were.

Wittgenstein regarded the scientific attitude as pervasive, as shaping our very conception of what explanation and understanding any phenomena consists in. But resisting that can also encourage the idea that the existence of a philosophical problem as such is already the product of a mistaken departure from ordinary life. To be sure, Wittgenstein saw the difficulties – logical, conceptual, psychological and moral – that arose from the misguided ways that explanation and understanding are sought. But that reflects how our understanding of thought and practice is under the sway of the scientific attitude. Dissolving the general authority that scientific naturalism has been granted should not threaten philosophy itself.

Williams portrays Wittgenstein's view of philosophy as a possibly pathological enterprise as connected to the way the latter is said to have conceived the subject matter of philosophy as exclusively *a priori*. I suggest that that is more or less right if understood as a point against assuming the supposed authority of empirical explanation. But it cannot easily accommodate the fact that a fundamental subject matter of philosophy is an impulse to understand ourselves as embodied practical agents. Wittgenstein's way of contributing to this ambition was to not to regard our subject matter as available empirically, yet neither did it assume that it was

[68] Williams, "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline", 493.

exclusively *a priori*. For Wittgenstein, as for Hume, the careful observation of human life is central to a compelling version of philosophical naturalism.[69]

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