

Review of: "Why naturalists must give up deduction, or return to Hume"

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What I have to say are mainly just some observations about aspects of the debate the paper addresses. In addition, while I do not address directly the issue of whether naturalism can sustain deduction in its own terms my remarks are meant to be relevant to that issue through what they say about analyticity, demonstration, and the *a priori*. I hope that by situating the issue in the larger context of a Positivist Hume and a Naturalistic Hume the discussion will include some helpful considerations.

It seems fairly clear that there is the Positivist Humean and there is the Naturalist Humean, and from the perspective of each, the other is at risk of serious misinterpretations of the historical Hume. If one is insistent on the Positivist Hume being the 'real' Hume, and understands Positivism along the lines it was articulated in the twentieth-century then there might be significant impediments to a fully naturalized conception of Hume's philosophy. (Unless perhaps one explicates Positivism as compatible with pragmatic, strategic decisions in the manner of Carnap in "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology." Perhaps deduction is susceptible to similar treatment.) I suppose that, with regard to explicating 'relations of ideas' there are few plausible rivals to analyticity though it was largely left to later thinkers to provide an account of analyticity. I take it that what Hume meant by demonstration was knowledge that involves valid inference from premises that are fully evident or known with certainty to express necessary truths; and that his chief objection to Rationalism is that it claims to show that there is substantive demonstrative knowledge—and that is not possible, according to Hume. Thus, it is not difficult to see why Hume's notion of relations of ideas was developed in terms of analyticity. However, when Hume speaks of certainty he sometimes explicates it in terms of conceivability—by which he sometimes seems to mean something quasi-phenomenological rather than purely formal. (He also seems to say that even necessity and metaphysical impossibility have their source or ground in the mind—again, perhaps in a quasi-phenomenological sense?)

All I mean here is that there might be a point in looking very carefully at how Hume explicates and illustrates necessity, certainty, and demonstration because they might not map smoothly onto later Positivist analyticity in some respects, and that might be relevant to the central issue of the paper.

If there is some slippage in the mapping that might create an opportunity for a broadly naturalistic interpretation of Hume, and it is not difficult to see why Hume has also been interpreted as having elaborated a broadly naturalistic epistemology, given that, in his view, "Nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever." (*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*) Even with respect to what Hume regards as intuitive and demonstrative certainty he seems to allow a role for how our minds work in regard to what *feels* certain and how things

seem to us. For Hume necessity, even when it is being explicated with regard to certainty is often described (especially in the *Treatise*) in ways that involve determinations of the mind and what is conceivable...perhaps in ways that are amenable to a naturalistic reading. Is it possible that some of the same considerations that apply to the debate about analyticity and the *a priori* apply to the issue of deduction?

It could be part of a naturalistic conception that we make a distinction between definitions and factual judgments, for example; and that on the one hand we group arithmetical truths, proofs of geometrical theorems together... and on the other hand assertions of fact, and we would include definitions among the former rather than the latter. There are a couple of questions to ask here. Are definitions problematic in a way that arithmetic and geometrical truths are not? If we are not endorsing a Positivist analytic/synthetic doctrine why would definitions be problematic? (Without the analytic/synthetic doctrine definitions are not in some sort of limbo between strict analyticity and synthetic *a posteriori* status.) Is deduction denied to a naturalistic view? Part of what makes the question difficult is that naturalism has considerable plasticity. As Barry Stroud noted in his APA Presidential address in 1996*—‘The Charm of Naturalism’—‘If the naturalist does or must accept logical and mathematical truths in order to have a conception of the world, what becomes of the idea that those propositions do not express anything that holds in the natural world? What is the conception of nature that is said to exclude them?’ [p. 53] He goes on to say that if accepting logical and mathematical truths still counts as naturalism ‘it will be a more open-minded or more expansive naturalism’[p. 53] more expansive that is, than say, a physicalist version. He then asks, ‘what, if anything, turns on making that distinction’ i. e., [p. 53] the one between what is part of nature and what isn’t?

I can see why an interpreter of Hume would be reluctant to accept a naturalistic interpretation of his thought given how centrally the distinction between Relations of Ideas and Matters of Fact figures in it. But at the same time Hume puts a great deal of weight on how, in fact, our minds work, on what is conceivable to us, and even though he regards various kinds of claims as metaphysically impossible it is part of his view that necessity and impossibility are both grounded in how our minds work rather than reading any formal or other structure off of the world—or even applying one to it on the basis of fully *a priori* considerations. That might seem an important opening for a naturalistic account, one that involves explaining how creatures with the sorts of capabilities and propensities that we have could come to be and make their way in the world. Perhaps there is a reading of Hume that, given what he says about the role of the *determinations* of our minds in accepting certainties and in regarding something as necessary, perhaps that is amenable to a quasi-conventional treatment that is congenial to naturalism. Ultimately, perhaps Hume’s view is such that belief and knowledge have to do with how we come to believe and claim to know rather than what we *ought* to believe and claim to know in a more Rationalist sense, one comfortable with objective, mind-independent normativity. I am not endorsing a naturalist reading of Hume but it seems to me that a carefully elaborated naturalism is a possibility worth taking seriously, even if it involves specifying some elements that are not found directly in Hume’s philosophy, (elements regarding mathematics and logic, for example). That is true, as well, of the Positivist interpretation of it. The Positivism that is widely regarded as traceable to Hume or that regards Hume as a heroic figure does indeed owe a great deal to him, but it is not merely a refinement of Hume’s thought. It involves elements and explanations that do not have their source—at least do not have it explicitly and *clearly*—in Hume’s philosophy.

I hope that these observations are helpful in at least some respects. They do not address deduction directly but deduction needs to be understood in the context of Hume's thought overall and with regard to that, it seems that there are resources especially attractive to positivism and to naturalism while, of course, we can't have it both ways.

- Barry Stroud, 'The Charm of Naturalism,' *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 70, No. 2, November 1996, pp. 43-55.