Praise for *Socrates Meets*

"How Peter Kreeft finds the time to write so many helpful books is beyond me. How he manages to fill them with such sensible wisdom is known to God alone. The *Socrates Meets* series is just further proof that we are witnessing something special."

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"Peter Kreeft's writing exhibits wit and erudition, but these qualities alone would not be enough to pull off the ambition of these texts: to explore major historical thinkers by putting each in dialogue with Socrates. A flexible and generous interpreter, Kreeft's imagined conversations allow each thinker to speak for himself, while inviting the reader to participate in the dialectical questioning that draws out the ideas, appreciating their motivations and historical context, and, as often as not, putting them under gentle but critical scrutiny. Kreeft is above all a sensitive reader of texts, and he has composed works that invite new readers to learn how to think alongside, and in critical engagement with, many of modernity's most influential minds."

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"In this brilliant series, Peter Kreeft, like a modern-day Virgil, guides us into corners of purgatory where the father of philosophy, Socrates, instigates conversations with eight of the most provocative minds in Western history. We are in Kreeft's debt for reminding us that philosophy is not essentially a college or university subject, a strange if not grotesque discipline we undergo in pursuit of a degree, but live mind encountering live mind in live conversation in pursuit of truth—and that the most fruitful conversations are often with the live minds of the dead. The humor and plainspokenness of this series make it ideal for beginning students of philosophy, whether in formal courses or in independent study, but the intellectual vigor of these dialogues will remind even the most seasoned thinkers that a bracing engagement with

Socratic questioning is the best way to shake up the complacency that too often obstructs the quest for wisdom."

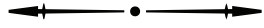
—**Daniel McInerny**, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy, Christendom College, and author of *Beauty & Imitation: A Philosophical Reflection on the Arts*

"Among the most formative influences on my development as a philosopher has been Peter Kreeft. When I first encountered his work when I was in college I could not believe that someone could make philosophy so accessible and so alive. Although I never took a formal class from Professor Kreeft, I have been a student of his for many decades. Through *The Unaborted Socrates* I was persuaded to embrace a sanctity of life ethic; through *The Best Things In Life* I was taught how to think about virtue, vice, intrinsic goodness, and practical Thomism (though the genius of Kreeft is that he never explicitly tells you he's doing that). Later, when I was journeying back to the Church, it was Kreeft's explication of the *Catechism* and his commentary on Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* that helped me to see how Catholicism made sense and that much of what I believed as a lapsed-Catholic Evangelical was an inheritance from Rome and not something I had discovered by exercising my rational powers on Scripture alone. I thought I had hit a triple, but Kreeft showed me that I had been born at third base. What you will encounter in this series of cross-examinations of the world's most important modern philosophers is Kreeft at his best. Through the character of Socrates and his famous interlocutors, you are introduced to some of the most influential and difficult thought in the history of philosophy, but in a way that requires no prior philosophical background. In the hands of this master teacher, you will come to appreciate both the strengths and the weaknesses of these towering figures and how the intellectual tradition of the Church ought to engage them."

—**Francis J. Beckwith**, Professor of Philosophy and Associate Director of Graduate Studies in Philosophy, Baylor University

SOCRATES MEETS HUME

SOCRATES MEETS HUME



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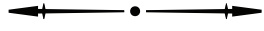

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Preface

This book is one in a series of Socratic explorations of some of the Great Books. Books in this series are intended to be short, clear, and nontechnical, thus fully understandable by beginners. They also introduce (or review) the basic questions in the fundamental divisions of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, anthropology, ethics, logic, and method. They are designed both for classroom use and for educational do-it-yourselfers. The *Socrates Meets* books can be read and understood completely on their own, but each is best appreciated after reading the little classic it engages in dialogue.

The setting—Socrates and the author of the Great Book meeting in the afterlife—need not deter readers who do not believe there is an afterlife. For although the two characters and their philosophies are historically real, their conversation, of course, is not and requires a "willing suspension of disbelief." There is no reason the skeptic cannot extend this literary belief also to the setting.

Introduction

Hume is the most formidable, serious, difficult-to-refute skeptic in the history of human thought.

I will never forget my first exposure to him, in a seminar on modern philosophy at Calvin College taught by William Harry Jellema, who was the best teacher I ever had but who, like Socrates, never wrote a book. All ten of us in the seminar were philosophy majors and friends. We had to read Hume over vacation week. We took this great skeptic very seriously, because we were more concerned with finding the truth than with finding an A, and Hume deeply disturbed us because we could not refute his arguments, yet we could not accept his skeptical conclusions. For if we did, what would become of philosophy? What would become of science and common sense and religion and morality and education and human knowledge in general? The whole process of liberation from the cave of ignorance would be merely another cave.

We shared our anguish with the professor when classes resumed, but instead of "telling us the answers," he simply sent us back to Hume again, with the reminder to remember our logic. If we did not accept Hume's conclusion, we had to find either an ambiguously used term, or a false premise, expressed or implied, or a logical fallacy. It was not sufficient simply to say we disagreed with his conclusion; we had to refute his argument.

That is the process you are invited to participate in, with the aid of Socrates.

No one *wants* to be a skeptic; no one is happy as a skeptic, except the unpleasant type who just want to shock and upset people. Happy skeptics are dishonest; unhappy skeptics are honest. (The same is true of atheists. Only idiots, masochists,

or immoralists *want* to be atheists. Contrast Sartre, the happy hypocritical atheist, with Camus, the unhappy, honest atheist.) Hume is an unhappy skeptic, an honest skeptic, and he demands and deserves to be taken very seriously and answered very carefully.

He also deserves this because of his continuing, enormous influence on English-speaking philosophy today. Hume's immediate thought-child was the extreme, dogmatic, reductionistic form of analytic philosophy that called itself "logical positivism," as summarized in A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*. This is no longer in vogue, but softer, modified versions of it are, and they all go back to Hume, especially his reduction of all objects of human reason to "matters of fact" and "relations of ideas." These are approximately what Kant later called "synthetic *a posteriori* propositions" and "analytic *a priori* propositions." But please don't close this book and run when you see these verbal monsters. Hume uses a minimum of such technical terms and gives clear, commonsense definitions of each of them. Hume may be disturbing, and he may be disturbed, and he may even be dull sometimes (I tried to omit all the dull passages), but he is always clear.

Hume is also very important because of his influence on Kant and because of the influence of both Hume and Kant on all subsequent philosophy. Kant says it was Hume who woke him from his "dogmatic slumber." And by his "Copernican revolution in philosophy," which was his answer to Hume, Kant divided the history of Western philosophy in two (the pre-Kantian and the post-Kantian) almost as Christ divided history into BC and AD.

Hume's philosophy, like that of Locke and Berkeley before him, is an empiricist critique of the rationalism of Descartes, "the father of modern philosophy." Hume's skeptical conclusions were the logical consequences of Locke's empiricist starting point. They were conclusions that Locke did not draw because they were too radical. By his relationship to both his successors and his predecessors, Hume holds a crucial position in the history of Western

philosophy, that "great conversation" that began with Socrates and is still going on.

The typical, three-stage, bare-bones summary of classical modern philosophy is this: Descartes' rationalism versus Hume's empiricism versus Kant's idealism. All three are theories in *epistemology*. Most of the philosophy in that astonishingly rich two-hundred-year period between the publication of Descartes' *Discourse on Method* in 1637 and the death of Hegel in 1831, the period of classical modern philosophy, was concerned with epistemology. "Epistemology" means "theory of knowledge." (What is knowledge? How do we know? How does it work? How *should* it work?) It is probably the trickiest and most purely theoretical division of philosophy. Yet it is foundational, for any position you take in epistemology will always have consequences for, and make a great deal of difference to, all the rest of your philosophy: your metaphysics, cosmology, philosophical theology, anthropology, ethics, and political philosophy.

Philosophers frequently write two versions of their thoughts, one long and the other short. Inevitably, the short book becomes the classic, the book that is well known and loved, while the longer one becomes the subject of advanced and abstruse doctoral dissertations. Descartes wrote the simple *Discourse on Method* as well as the more difficult *Meditations*. Kant wrote the relatively simple and short *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* as well as the formidable and long *Critique of Pure Reason*. He also wrote the short and simple *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* as well as the long and complex *Critique of Practical Reason*. Similarly, Hume wrote the short *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* as well as the longer *Treatise on Human Nature*.

Like his readers, he preferred his shorter work. In fact, he explicitly called his earlier, longer book "that juvenile work" in the preface to the posthumous 1777 edition of the later one (the *Enquiry*), adding, "Henceforth, the Author desires that the

following pieces may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles."

This book is a short Socratic critique of Hume's short classic, the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, in the form of a Socratic dialogue between the two philosophers who meet after death.

In quoting Hume's words, I have altered some of the punctuation, since eighteenth-century English style multiplied commas in a way that appears bewildering and confusing to twenty-first-century readers.

This is not a scholarly work. There are more exact, more technical, and more severely logical critiques of Hume, but I have deliberately used none of these professional secondary sources but only my own more "amateur," spontaneous, original ones, which I think are more simple and natural and commonsensical.

I have also compressed some of Socrates' arguments, rather than always having him use his famous "Socratic method" of long, careful, step-by-step questioning, when I thought the latter would become too tedious or artificial. My apologies to the real Socrates.

1

Hume Introduced

SOCRATES: David Hume! Is that you?

HUME: I . . . I think so.

SOCRATES: You're not certain?

HUME: I always was skeptical of that little word "certain."

SOCRATES: In fact, you were even skeptical of that other little word "I."

HUME: True. I denied the existence of a substantial self.

SOCRATES: Whom am I addressing, then? Or should I say, "*Hume* am I addressing?" Is it at least a Humean being? A secular Humeanist, perhaps?

HUME: I suppose you are Socrates, and this is my purgatory, and I am to be tortured with puns.

SOCRATES: How perceptive you are! The first two of your three suppositions are right. But I am not your torturer but your teacher, and my instruments will not be puns but probes, questions.

HUME: I seem to have no choice but to accept my fate. I think this will prove to be the most interesting dream I have ever had.

SOCRATES: It does not matter for now whether you believe this is a dream or reality, as long as you are willing to continue our conversation.

HUME: I hope I can remember it when I wake. Perhaps I will write it up and publish it as a book.

SOCRATES: But you are already in a book, which is being written by another even as we speak.

HUME: God, you mean?

SOCRATES: Goodness, no! Just a philosophy professor in the twenty-first century. We are characters in his book.

HUME: Oh, dear. As bad as all that, is it?

SOCRATES: Why are you so upset?

HUME: I distrust philosophy professors. Neither of *us* ever occupied that position, you know, Socrates, as most philosophers did. And I think we have other things in common too, notably your famous Socratic doubts.

SOCRATES: I did not begin with doubts, but with questions.

HUME: What is the difference?

SOCRATES: Questions hope to find answers.

HUME: Of course they do. What is your point?

SOCRATES: Your thought ended in skepticism; mine did not.

HUME: Ah, I see. But you *began* there, with doubts and questions. So we are spiritually akin there.

SOCRATES: In a sense, yes.

HUME: And because of that common skepticism, we were both misunderstood and feared by our contemporaries. We both upset people by questioning their thoughtless or confused prejudices, and they condemned us as their enemies, when in fact we both only wanted to be their friends by delivering them from superstitions and ignorance. Is that not so?

SOCRATES: Again I must answer: in a sense, yes.

HUME: You are here with me now for that reason, are you not? To be my friend rather than my enemy or my censor?

SOCRATES: Oh, yes. Unlike my disciple Plato in the *Republic*, I was suspicious of the censorship of ideas, just as you were, for I was the victim of it even more than you were. You were only denied a teaching position because of your ideas, but I was denied my life.

HUME: I am greatly relieved. I have read your dialogues with the Sophists, and I feared you were here to confound and refute me as you did them.

SOCRATES: Oh, I did not say that I was not here for that purpose. I only said I was not here to censor you. I did not say I was not here as your critic.

HUME: Oh. So you are not a friendly teacher after all.

SOCRATES: But I am. Is there any better proof of friendship—and of good teaching—than to subject all our ideas to critique? Is that not what you did? Were you not the great opponent of dogmatic systems of all kinds?

HUME: I was indeed.

SOCRATES: Then you will not object to being subjected to the same kind of critique yourself.

HUME: I have no fear. I am not a dogmatic system builder, like those rationalists Descartes and Spinoza and Leibniz.

SOCRATES: That remains to be seen.

HUME: Oh . . .

SOCRATES: Your face shows some fear, though you say you have none.

HUME: I do have some fear. I fear that you will play the part of Descartes, the dogmatic rationalist, and I will play the part of Montaigne, the skeptic that Descartes tried to answer. You see, the three of us—you, Descartes, and myself—all were confronted with skeptics, you with the Sophists, Descartes with Montaigne, and myself with Pierre Bayle. But you and Descartes tried to refute your skeptics, whereas I learned from mine. So it seems we are on fundamentally different sides.

SOCRATES: If you don't mind my saying so, I am somewhat skeptical of your categories of skepticism versus dogmatism. I do not think we should begin by setting up these two sides, the skeptic and the dogmatist, and choosing sides at the beginning.

HUME: Why not?

SOCRATES: Because even if there are these two "sides," surely both "sides," if they are honest, have in common something more important than what separates them.

HUME: What is that? They seem to have nothing in common. They contradict each other. One side says we can know the truth with certainty, and the other side says we cannot.

SOCRATES: The common premise is that both sides honestly *seek* the truth.

HUME: Oh. But honest seeking is only the bare precondition for philosophizing.

SOCRATES: That precondition may be the most important thing of all. Tell me, do you feel more united with a dishonest skeptic or with an honest dogmatist?

HUME: Why do you ask that?

SOCRATES: Because if you are more united with the dishonest skeptic, then it is your ideological agreement about your skeptical conclusion that matters the most to you. And if that is so, I think you are really a dogmatist. If, on the other hand, you are more one with the honest dogmatist, who is skeptical of skepticism, than with the dishonest believer in skepticism, then I think that you and I are at one on the very deepest level.

HUME: I think you are right, Socrates. But I am surprised to hear you say that.

SOCRATES: Why?

HUME: Because when you philosophized back in ancient Athens, if Plato's accounts are correct, you always put the reason above the will, but now you seem to be putting the will above the reason. You were not a voluntarist, but now you seem to be one: you seem to be presupposing the primacy of the will over the mind. For honesty is a choice of the will. It is the will to truth, the will to follow the argument wherever it goes. The choice to be honest and to *seek* the truth is made in the will, or the heart, while the claim to *find* the truth is made in the mind, or the head.

SOCRATES: Whether my own views on the relation between the mind and the will have changed since I lived on earth is not important now. We are not here to watch a contest between Hume and Socrates, but between Hume and Truth.

HUME: So your point is that even if you are a dogmatist and I am a skeptic, we are allied in honesty.

SOCRATES: Yes. But I do not say I am a dogmatist. Surely one can be neither a skeptic nor a dogmatist.

HUME: How? Either you claim certainty, like the dogmatists, or you do not, like the skeptics. Either there is or there is not certainty. Those are the only two options, logically. How can there be a third one? What escapes the either/or of dogmatism versus skepticism?

SOCRATES: Questioning!

HUME: What do you mean?

SOCRATES: I mean that skeptics do not question, once they have accepted skepticism, for they have despaired of finding the truth with certainty. And dogmatists do not question, because they

think they already have the truth with certainty. True philosophers, it seems to me, are between these two. They are "lovers of wisdom," and they question, because they believe that wisdom exists and can be found, unlike the skeptics. But they question also because they believe that they do not yet have that wisdom yet, and there they are unlike the dogmatists.

HUME: I am not that kind of simple and absolute skeptic, Socrates. I believe we can know truth. I just don't think we can know it with certainty, only with probability. So I am a moderate or mitigated skeptic. I am not a dogmatic skeptic.

SOCRATES: I see. So you do not claim to know that you cannot know.

HUME: Of course not. That is a self-contradiction.

SOCRATES: So you are skeptical even about your skepticism.

HUME: Yes. I am open to questions at all times, about anything, including questions about my skepticism. I do not say it is true that there is no truth, or that I am certain that no one is certain. I leave these questions open for further investigation.

SOCRATES: Good. For that is why we are here: for further investigation of these questions.

HUME: I put my arguments for skepticism in more carefully considered words when I wrote my book, and I will try to remember these arguments for you now. Unless I can actually read my own words. I don't suppose you have my book here?

SOCRATES: We do indeed. You will find a copy in your hand, and another in mine.

HUME: Why, here it is indeed! This *must* be a dream. For otherwise, it is a miracle.

SOCRATES: Is *that* your famous argument against miracles? If so, it sounds very dogmatic rather than skeptical.

HUME: Of course not. I was just wondering where the books came from.

SOCRATES: They came from need and necessity. This is the place where you get whatever you need.

HUME: How does that happen?

SOCRATES: That happens simply because that is the nature of this place, just as rain happens to fall on thirsty plants to supply their need in the other world simply because that is the nature of that place.

HUME: Is it then indeed a miracle?

SOCRATES: That depends on how you define the term. It comes from what is natural to this world rather than from what is supernatural to it, so I would not call that a miracle here. Although it would surely be labeled a miracle on earth.

HUME: You know, of course, my skepticism of miracles.

SOCRATES: I know. And we will deal with your critique of miracles later. But for now it is enough that you understand that I am here as your rain, to supply your need. That is why I will subject your book to a critical questioning. It is my way of teaching, and teaching is to a mind what rain is to a plant.

HUME: I do not understand this new world, but I will accept my role in it—as long as neither you nor I but the argument is the master in our conversations. I am most willing to follow the lead of reason.

SOCRATES: Good! Then I invite you to climb aboard and see where the river of reason takes our boats.

2

The Point of Departure

HUME: Where shall we begin?

SOCRATES: Let me make a radical suggestion: that we begin at the beginning.

HUME: You are ironic, as usual.

SOCRATES: No, I am not. I mean it literally. "Radical" means "concerning roots," and that is why the most radical thing we could do would be to begin at the beginning. For if the root rots, the plant dies; and if you tear a plant up by its root, the whole plant is torn up. But if it is only a leaf or a flower that rots, or is torn off, the rest of the plant can still be healthy.

HUME: The point of your analogy is . . . ?

SOCRATES: That your philosophy depends only partially on any of its later, derivative leaves or branches, but totally on its roots, its first assumptions and starting points. So the most radical thing we can do is to find these and examine them.

HUME: I disagree. That is true only of deductive, rationalistic systems of philosophy, like Descartes' or Spinoza's or Leibniz's. All three tried to imitate the method of geometry. I am an empiricist, not a rationalist; and that means not only that I believe that all

human knowledge begins with and depends on sense experience rather than on pure reason or "innate ideas," but also that my *method* will be empirical: I will reason from particulars known in sense experience, inductively, rather than from abstract general ideas, deductively.

SOCRATES: That is precisely one of the questions I want to investigate at the outset.

HUME: You mean whether we should philosophize by induction from experience rather than by deduction from general principles?

SOCRATES: No, whether *you do*.

HUME: Of course I do. As I told you, I am an empiricist, not a rationalist.

SOCRATES: And I am Socrates, and I have this bothersome habit of questioning everything, including your claim about yourself. That favorite maxim of mine, "Know thyself"—if we all did that easily and automatically, and infallibly, we wouldn't need to inquire, would we?

HUME: I suppose not. Inquire away, then.

SOCRATES: I am inquiring about two things: your starting point and your method. Are they both empirical, as you claim?

HUME: I see you opening my book. I should explain that you will not find my starting point in section 1, which is just an introduction, an explanation of the kind of philosophy I intend to do. You will find it instead at the beginning of section 2, where I say that the origin of all our ideas is experience, that all our ideas are derived from sense impressions. That is my empiricism.

SOCRATES: Yes, it is. And from that starting point you derive many conclusions—skeptical conclusions about abstract ideas, and about causality, and about certainty, and later about miracles and about many other things, such as free will, and life after death, and the compatibility between faith and reason.

HUME: Indeed I do.

SOCRATES: But that process, by which you derive these conclusions—is that not deduction?

HUME: Oh, of course.

SOCRATES: Then your *method* is just as rationalistic as that of Descartes and the rationalists; it is only your *starting point* that is different.

HUME: No, for my starting point changes everything, including my method. I do not claim to deduce new truths with certainty, as the rationalists do. I only *arrange* my thoughts deductively, but I do not *derive* them deductively. I derive them inductively, from experience. An empiricist does not reject deductive reasoning; he just puts it in its place, as a servant of experience rather than its lord. As Hobbes said, thoughts are the "scouts" for the senses.

SOCRATES: I understand.

HUME: I think perhaps you *don't* understand, Socrates. Please let me explain what I intend to do before you examine my doing it. That's why I put section 1 first. If you really want to begin at my beginning, that is where you should begin, rather than jumping immediately to section 2, where I state my empiricist premise about the origin of all our ideas.

SOCRATES: That is the premise from which you derive your conclusions, is it not?

HUME: It is.

SOCRATES: So we should begin there, should we not?

HUME: You say that because you are a rationalist; you are so rationalistic that all you care about is the deductive logical system. I know your method, Socrates. You will examine my premise, defining its terms and asking whether it is true and if so, *why* it is true, and then you will investigate whether my answer to *that* question (the question about why the premise for my premise is true) is not my *real* first premise. And then you will investigate whether all my conclusions follow with logical necessity from my premises. That is exactly what a rationalist would worry about: defining terms, proving premises, and examining the logic of arguments. But I am not a rationalist, so that is not my primary concern.

SOCRATES: What is logic to you, then?

HUME: Logic to me is simply the way I arrange the coins of my thoughts. Two more important questions are where these thoughts in fact come from, and, second, where they go to in my hands—that is, what I want to do with them, for what purpose I am considering them and using them.

SOCRATES: So that is why you want to begin with your introduction: because *those* questions are dealt with there.

HUME: Exactly. You see, I fear that you will misinterpret the whole point of my philosophy if you do not understand my intentions for it.

SOCRATES: I accept your correction. Let us defer the question of your empiricist premise, then, and begin with your introduction, your first section.

HUME: Thank you.

SOCRATES: Here is what seems to me to be the gist of what you say in section 1. It is about the relation between philosophy and life.

> Moral philosophy, or the science of human nature, may be treated after two different manners. . . . The one considers man chiefly as born for action; and as influenced . . . by taste and sentiment; pursuing one object, and avoiding another, according to the value which these objects seem to possess. . . . This species of philosophers . . . pleases the imagination and engage the affections. . . .
>
> The other species of philosophers considers man in the light of a reasonable rather than an active being, and endeavours to form his understanding more than cultivate his manners. They regard human nature as a subject of speculation; and . . . examine it, in order to find those principles, which regulate our understanding. . . .
>
> It is certain that the easy and obvious philosophy will always, with the generality of mankind, have the preference above the accurate and abstruse; and by many will be recommended, not only as more agreeable, but more useful than the other. It enters more into common life. . . . On the contrary, the abstruse philosophy . . . vanishes when the philosopher leaves the shade, and comes into open day.

You say, then, that *speculative* philosophy is only a small part of human life, and most of life is concerned with the more practical matters of our desires, affections, and feelings rather than

abstract thought, general principles, or scientific explanations. Is that a fair summary of your point?

HUME: Yes.

SOCRATES: And you contrast not only these two different kinds of thinking, but also the two different kinds of people who pursue these two different kinds of thinking, when you say that "the mere philosopher is a character . . . little acceptable in the world, as being supposed to contribute nothing either to the advantage or pleasure of society; while he lives remote from communication with mankind, and is wrapped up in principles and notions equally remote from their comprehension."

And then your advice to the philosopher is to despise neither ordinary life nor speculative philosophy, but to embrace both. You say: "Be a philosopher; but amidst all your philosophy, be still a man."

HUME: I rather like that line, Socrates. Would you not call it a piece of wisdom?

SOCRATES: I would indeed.

HUME: So what do you question now?

SOCRATES: Whether you lived this wisdom, whether you practiced what you preached.

HUME: I neglected neither the constraints of philosophy nor the pleasures of ordinary life.

SOCRATES: But did you ever connect them? Did your philosophy inform your life? Did you not complain of the stark disconnect

between these two when you wrote, in book 1 of your longer work, the *Treatise on Human Nature*,

> But before I launch out into those immense depths of philosophy, which lie before me, I find myself inclined to stop a moment in my present station, and to ponder that voyage, which I have undertaken. . . .
>
> I am first affrighted and confounded with that forelorn solitude, in which I am placed in my philosophy, and fancy myself some strange uncouth monster, who not being able to mingle and unite in society, has been expelled all human commerce, and left utterly abandoned and disconsolate.

You write of your need to leave your philosophical work and play backgammon or checkers in order to regain a footing in the real world. If your philosophy did not give you that footing, what good is it? And how empirical, how true to experience can it be? Is it not as far removed from the daily experience of life in this world as any rationalistic system is? Is it not like Laputa, the philosophers' island in the sky in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*?

HUME: I *did* practice what I preached. I wrote, "Be a philosopher; but . . . be still a man." I did not write, "Be sure you connect the two happily." I thought you were here to investigate my thoughts, not my life, Socrates.

SOCRATES: That is true.

HUME: What fault do you find with my thought?

SOCRATES: The same fault you yourself admitted you found with your life: a lack of integration between your thought and your life.

HUME: That is the fault of my life, which you said you were not here to examine.

SOCRATES: But I think it may be the fault of your thought, which I *am* here to examine. Perhaps your thought is not livable.

HUME: What right do you have to come to that judgmental conclusion?

SOCRATES: The right of one who reads your books. For you yourself admit this judgment, in so many words. We shall examine some of those words shortly.

HUME: If I cannot live my philosophy, that is the fault of my life, not of my philosophy.

SOCRATES: Not if you are an empiricist, as you make yourself out to be.

HUME: Why do you say that?

SOCRATES: Because of your own definition of the rationalism you reject and the empiricism you embrace. Tell me, is this not the fundamental distinction between these two philosophies, that the rationalist believes in abstract principles that he has not derived from experience or tested by experience, and when experience seems to contradict them, he forces experience to conform to his theory rather than altering the theory to conform to his experience—is that not what you mean by a rationalist?

HUME: It is indeed. Surely you are not suggesting that I am guilty of the very philosophical sin I reject so strongly and famously?

SOCRATES: We shall see. And then would not the opposite kind of philosopher from the rationalist be the empiricist?

HUME: Yes.

SOCRATES: And would not the empiricist be one who tailors his philosophy to his experience rather than vice versa?

HUME: Yes . . .

SOCRATES: And is your life, as it is actually lived, part of your experience or part of your system of rational principles?

HUME: Part of my experience, of course.

SOCRATES: Then if you tailor your philosophy to your experience, you must tailor your philosophy to your life, to your lived experience.

HUME: Of course.

SOCRATES: But you said that your life told you that your philosophy was unlivable, that it prevented you from being a man as well as a philosopher.

HUME: I did admit that.

SOCRATES: So why did you not alter your philosophical theories to fit your experience? Why did you not learn from your experience? Why did you not let your experience judge and test and refute your philosophy? Would not that have been the empiricist thing to do? On the contrary, you maintained your theories in the teeth of experience. Is that not a rationalist thing to do?

HUME: So you accuse me of being a rationalist!

SOCRATES: The definition seems to fit. And here is another definition of rationalism that seems to fit. Rationalism, as put forth in Descartes and Spinoza, insists on clear and distinct ideas . . .

HUME: That is true . . .

SOCRATES: But in experience, things are usually mixed, not pure.

HUME: Much of the time, yes. Where do you say I insist on clear and distinct ideas like a rationalist?

SOCRATES: Here at the very beginning of your book, in the distinction you draw between philosophy and life. These are so different to you that they look like two of Descartes' "clear and distinct ideas," like his famous distinction between the mind and the body, a dividing line that he drew with such absolute clarity that it made humanity fall off the wall and split into two pieces like Humpty Dumpty, and ever since Descartes, "all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again." Your division between philosophy and life seems to be very much like Descartes' division between mind and body: it is sharp and clear, and it is rationalistic rather than experiential. Hardly any other philosopher ever had such a disconnect between his philosophy and his life. Experience and history have shown many examples of the happy mingling of philosophy and life. I modestly put myself forward as Exhibit A of this happy mingling.

HUME: So you are faulting me for . . . what, exactly? For not being as *happy* as you?

SOCRATES: No, I am faulting you because your philosophy was

not empirical enough. I am faulting you for being a rationalist in empiricist's clothing.

HUME: You have not proved this; you have only stated it.

SOCRATES: That is true. It is only my suspicion, and I have not proved my suspicion yet. What I am doing now is only introducing myself and introducing what I intend to show you in this examination, just as in section 1 you introduce yourself and what you intend to show in your book.

HUME: So this is not your judgment but your suspicion—not your conclusion at the end of your investigation but your impression at the beginning.

SOCRATES: Yes.

HUME: Then since you do not yet claim to judge my philosophy, I will not claim to judge your judgment. We are both only beginning our investigation, not ending it.

SOCRATES: I thank you for being so reasonable. But I must share one other reason for my suspicion that you are a rationalist, which comes from the other major point in the first section of your book.

HUME: What is that?

SOCRATES: It is where you tell us what you hope to accomplish with your philosophy:

> But may we not hope, that philosophy, if cultivated with care . . . may . . . discover, at least in some degree, the secret springs and principles, by which the human mind is actuated

> in its operations? Astronomers had long contented themselves with proving, from the phenomena, the true motions, order, and magnitude of the heavenly bodies: Till a philosopher, at last, arose, who seems, from the happiest reasoning, to have also determined the laws and forces, by which the revolutions of the planets are governed and directed. The like has been performed with regard to other parts of nature. And there is no reason to despair of equal success in our enquiries concerning the mental powers and economy, if prosecuted with equal capacity and caution.

Here you make an analogy with Newton in explaining what your science of ideas intends to accomplish: as Newton reduced the complex phenomena of the behavior of all matter to a few explanatory principles, you reduce the complex phenomena of the behavior of all consciousness to a few explanatory principles. And that, too, seems more like a rationalist ideal than the empiricist one.

HUME: The analogy with Newton is apt, I believe. He discovered the three laws of motion, which govern the motion of matter, as well as gravity, a physical connection of association between particles of matter. And I discovered the three laws of association that govern the motion of thought, the laws of gravity between particles of thought, so to speak: a kind of mental gravity. I summarize these in section 3:

> Though it be too obvious to escape observation, that different ideas are connected together; I do not find that any philosopher has attempted to enumerate or class all the principles of association; a subject, however, that seems worthy of curiosity. To me, there appear to be only three principles of connexion among ideas, namely, *Resemblance*, *Contiguity* in time or place, and *Cause* or *Effect*.

> That these principles serve to connect ideas will not, I believe, be much doubted. A picture naturally leads our thoughts to the original: [This is an example of Resemblance.] The mention of one apartment in a building naturally introduces an enquiry or discourse concerning the others: [This is an example of Contiguity.] And if we think of a wound, we can scarcely forbear reflecting on the pain which follows it. [This is an example of Cause or Effect.]

SOCRATES: This is why I suspect you of rationalism, you see. I know you reject innate ideas and trace all ideas to sense impressions in your epistemology. That is your theory. But your practice in doing philosophy seems highly rationalistic: not only is it a deductive system but it is a simplistic, reductionistic one: the complexity of experience is reduced to a few simple abstract principles.

HUME: What you call reductionism is simply the goal of all science, Socrates. Science always seeks to explain the complex by the simple, the phenomena by the hypothesis, and the best hypothesis is expressed in a formula.

SOCRATES: I grant that. But that is not pure empiricism.

HUME: Labels do not matter. Science remains science, whether it is called empirical or rational.

SOCRATES: Fine, but there is another aspect of your rationalism. It is your reductionism.

HUME: What do you mean by "reductionism"?

SOCRATES: I mean your penchant for claiming that *a* is *nothing but b*. I might call this your "nothing buttery." The upshot of

each point in your philosophy is to dispute ordinary thought, or common sense.

HUME: You did that too, Socrates, don't you remember?

SOCRATES: Ah, but you dispute it not for being too small, like a cave, but too big, like a fantasy. If you were Hamlet, you would not say to Horatio that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy." You would say there are *fewer*.

HUME: I cannot help coming to conclusions that are more skeptical than common sense. Common sense is naïve and credulous.

SOCRATES: But I mean by "reductionism" not only your skeptical *conclusions* but above all your *method*.

HUME: What do you fault about my method?

SOCRATES: As I said, it seems highly rationalistic.

HUME: And as *I* said, I am the enemy of the rationalists!

SOCRATES: As an epistemological theory, yes, but not as a method. Your method, like theirs, is to reduce the data to the explanation, the complex to the simple, the rich variety of experience to simple universal formulas.

HUME: But that is simply one of the features of the scientific method.

SOCRATES: Does that mean it should be one of the features of the philosophical method?

HUME: There is nothing absolutely true or false about a method, Socrates. A method is simply a tool, a practical means to the end of finding the truth. What we should argue about is the truth.

SOCRATES: I agree. But might it not be *true* that the scientific method is no more fitting for the philosopher than a nonscientific method is for a scientist?

HUME: And what method would you use to compare the scientific method with any other method?

SOCRATES: I would use the universal method of logic.

HUME: Fair enough.

SOCRATES: And I say that reductionism violates the laws of logic.

HUME: How?

SOCRATES: Because the formula for all reductionism is that "*s* is nothing but *p*," is this not true?

HUME: Yes.

SOCRATES: And does this not mean that there is nothing more in *s* than *p*, that there is no "*s*-that-is-more-than-*p*"?

HUME: It does. What is the problem with that?

SOCRATES: The problem is that that claims to know that there is no "*s*-that-is-more-than-*p*," does it not?

HUME: It does. I still don't see the problem.

SOCRATES: The problem is that that claims to know that there is *in all reality* no "*s*-that-is-more-than-*p*."

HUME: Yes. I still don't see—

SOCRATES: And *that* claim presupposes the knowledge of all reality.

HUME: Oh.

SOCRATES: Which is a claim only omniscience can make.

HUME: So you are saying that reductionism logically claims omniscience?

SOCRATES: Exactly. And that is precisely the arrogant dogmatism that you set out to destroy, the dragon you set out to slay. Are you sure you are not yourself a dragon?

HUME: What an absurd accusation!

SOCRATES: So you are not a rationalist dragon?

HUME: Indeed not.

SOCRATES: Are you sure?

HUME: I am.

SOCRATES: And I am *not* sure. Which of us is now the skeptic, and which of us the rationalist, claiming certainty?

HUME: I do not claim certainty. If my words seemed to claim that, I retract them.

SOCRATES: You are not certain, then, that certainty is impossible?

HUME: That is an old and well-known dilemma loved by rationalists. If I say I am *certain* of *this*, then I am not a skeptic. But if I say I am *not* certain that we cannot attain certainty, then I open the door to claims to certainty, to rationalism.

SOCRATES: And how do you answer this dilemma?

HUME: It is an unfair dilemma. If this dilemma is valid, no one can be a skeptic. But I am a skeptic. But mine is not the absolute skepticism that the dilemma reveals as self-contradictory, but a moderate or mitigated skepticism.

SOCRATES: And do you have moderate skepticism about this moderate skepticism of yours?

HUME: I do indeed, without self-contradiction.

SOCRATES: Then you are open to correction.

HUME: I am.

SOCRATES: Then we can proceed with good hope of learning something new. I think it is now time to investigate your starting point and assumption. But I think we should explore your historical starting point first, before we explore your logical starting point.

HUME: What do you mean by that?

SOCRATES: That we should look at where *you* began before we look at where your *arguments* begin. That we should look at the philosopher who influenced you the most historically before we

concentrate on your philosophy alone and ask where it begins logically.

HUME: That philosopher would be John Locke, I suppose. But why do you want to explore my relation to Locke before exploring my book? I thought we were here to explore my book.

SOCRATES: Because we can understand your book better if we place it in that historical context. We should know what went on in "the great conversation" just before you entered it.

HUME: Fine. Let us do so.