The Mind as a Kind of Theatre:
A Critical Study of Buddhist influence in David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*

Master Thesis
Global and Colonial History
Leiden University

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19 July 2017

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Introduction

When David Hume published his literary debut *A Treatise of Human Nature* in 1738, it could hardly be called a success. It was largely ignored by both the public and the press, and the initial printing of a thousand copies never sold out during his own lifetime. The few reviews that did get published were largely negative. The book's reception must have been a great disappointment to the young Hume, whose desperation even drove him as far as to write an elaborate anonymous review of his own work. He would later write how the book 'fell dead-born from the press, failing to elicit even a murder from the zealots.' It was only after Hume's death that the *Treatise* began to be recognised as one of the great philosophical works. Today, it is not only widely regarded as the greatest achievement of Hume's philosophical career, but also as one of the most important works in Western philosophy.

Hume's *Treatise* has since become known for its highly original exploration of the mind-body problem. In contrast to earlier philosophers like Descartes, Hume argued objects – and therefore the human *self* – do not exist independently. Rather, what we subconsciously observe as objects is in fact a *bundle* of perceptions. In other words, Hume saw any given object as an ever changing collection of properties acquired during a lifetime of individual experience and observation.

However, from the 1960s onwards, scholars began to question the originality of Hume's *bundle theory*. There was a growing awareness of the remarkable similarity between Hume's philosophical explorations and the Buddhist idea of the *not-self*, which holds that the independent self is nothing but a fiction, consisting of the five aggregates known as the *skandhas*: those elements that constitute the sentient being. As early as 1969, Nolan Jacobsen posited 'the possibility of Oriental influence in Hume's philosophy'.[1] Moreover, the philosopher and psychologist James Giles has more recently challenged the long-held view of Hume as a proponent of bundle theory. Instead, he asserts that Hume argued for the elimination of the self altogether.[2] If this interpretation is accurate, this would signify an even greater convergence with

[1] Nolan Pliny Jacobsen, 'The Possibility of Oriental Influence in Hume's Philosophy', *Philosophy East and West*, 19 (1) 17-37 (1969).
[2] James Giles, *No Self to be Found: The Search for Personal Identity*, Lanham: University Press of America (1997).

the Buddhist concept of the not-self.

Yet despite the similarities between the philosophy of Hume and Buddhist thought, scholars have struggled to find any concrete evidence linking the two. Either it must have been a case of independent convergence or there may have been a more general influence of Buddhist thought on eighteenth century enlightenment philosophy. There was little reason to believe otherwise. Even after centuries of contact with Buddhist populations, eighteenth century Europeans were still largely unfamiliar with Buddhist thought. Buddhism had all but died out in India, Japan was in the middle of a period of centuries-long isolation, whereas Europeans who travelled to China were more interested in the Taoïst and Confucian traditions of the Chinese court.[3] There was of course sustained contact between Europeans and Buddhist populations in Asia, but this does not automatically imply the transfer of profound philosophical knowledge and understanding. Whatever knowledge of Buddhism Europeans had was little more than superficial, and, according to tradition, not until the nineteenth century did European intellectuals become fully acquainted with Buddhist philosophy. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in particular have been noted for their fascination with Buddhism and the influence of Buddhist philosophy on their own ideas, as have the theosophists, who in turn exerted great influence over European thinkers and artists of the late nineteenth century.

However, recent studies have challenged that long-held narrative. In a 2009 article, psychologist and Hume scholar Alison Gopnik claimed to have found a credible historical link connecting David Hume to Buddhist thought.[4] This link is the Jesuit Royal College of La Flèche in Anjou, France. Hume had lived in La Flèche between 1735 – 1737 as a young man, shortly before the publication of *A Treatise of Human Nature*. In fact, he wrote his *Treatise* at La Flèche. It was in this highly intellectual environment that Hume could have become one of the first European intellectuals to gain a thorough philosophical understanding of Buddhism. Gopnik argues that at least one Jesuit at La Flèche, the sophisticated and well-traveled Charles Francois Dolu, would have obtained

[3] The disappearance of Buddhism from India coincided with the fall of the Pala dynasty in the 12th century and the subsequent Muslim invasions, but the exact causes for Buddhism's disappearance from the subcontinent remain a matter of dispute. See: Dilip Kumar Barua, 'The Causes of the Decline of Buddhism in the Indo-Bangladesh Sub-continent', *Society for the Study of Pali and Buddhist Culture* 12 (13) (1999), pp. 13-31; Grigory Solomonovich Pomerants, 'The Decline of Buddhism in Medieval India', *Diogenes* 24 (96) (1976), pp. 38-66.

[4] Alison Gopnik, 'Could David Hume Have Known about Buddhism? Charles Francois Dolu, the Royal College of La Flèche, and the Global Jesuit Intellectual Network', *Hume Studies* 35 (1&2), 2009, pp. 5-28.

knowledge of Theravada Buddhism through his missionary efforts in Siam. Dolu stayed at La Flèche from 1723 – 1740, meaning his stay overlapped with that of Hume. Moreover, Dolu had spoken at some length to Ippolito Desideri, an Italian Jesuit who in 1727 spent two weeks at La Flèche. Desideri was one of the few Europeans to have visited Tibet, and it was Desideri who, during his stay there from 1716 – 1721, became the first European with extensive knowledge of both the Tibetan language and Tibetan Buddhism. Ippolito Desideri's book on Tibet is now recognised as the most accurate and detailed European account of Buddhism before the twentieth century. Unfortunately, it was never published, and was not rediscovered until the late nineteenth century, nearly two hundred years later.[5]

If Alison Gopnik is right and Hume did acquire knowledge of Buddhist philosophy through the Jesuits of La Flèche the implications would be enormous, not just for Hume scholarship, but for our perceptions of the Enlightenment itself. It would imply the existence of a far stronger East-West transfer of knowledge and ideas in early modern times than previously thought. Indeed, a growing number of scholars now recognises the mutual influence between European and Asian schools of thought in early modern times.[6] Jesuit missionaries served as highly educated agents of exchange between Europe and Asia. Both Charles Francois Dolu and Ippolito Desideri were, in the words of Gopnik, part of 'a network of philosophically, culturally, and scientifically knowledgeable Jesuits, with connections to both La Flèche and Asia."[7]

Though fascinating, Gopnik's study still leaves the reader with many questions. Refraining from making grandiose statements, she rightly concludes that we may never know the definitive answer as to whether Hume was influenced by Buddhism. Instead, she merely explores the historical possibility of Buddhist influence on Hume during his stay at La Flèche. This is both her strength and her weakness. On the one hand, it shields her from harsh criticism, but on the other hand, she never fully determines the *plausibility* of said

[5] For the most recent and complete translation of Desideri's account, see: *Mission to Tibet: The Extraordinary Eighteenth-Century Account of Father Ippolito Desideri S.J.*, transl. Michael Sweet, ed. Leonard Zwilling (Boston 2010).

[6] As early as 1950 Raymond Schwab recognised the importance of the 'Orient' in European literary and intellectual life in the 18th and 19th centuries. For the English translation, see: Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, transl. Gene Petterson-King and Victor Reinking (New York 1984); For a recent study on the influence of Chinese Buddhism on French Enlightenment thought, see: Jeffrey D. Burson, 'Unlikely Tales of Fo and Ignatius: Rethinking the Radical Enlightenment through French Appropriation of Chinese Buddhism', *French Historical Studies*, 38 (3), 2015, pp. 391-420.

[7] Gopnik, 'David Hume', p.6.

influence on Hume. Moreover, Gopnik's analysis of Hume in relation to Theravada and Tibetan Buddhism suffers from the human tendency to stress the similarities between two different objects or ideas, rather than their fundamental differences, especially when they are so far separated by time and space. Most importantly, however, because Gopnik's ultimate goal is to establish a Hume-Buddhist connection, she never really explores other possible influences on Hume in any detail. She does state Hume was 'clearly influenced by a general European skeptical tradition that had many features in common with Buddhism',[8] but that is still a vague statement at best. It is almost as if the influence of the general European skeptical tradition on Hume's philosophy is deliberately downplayed in order to strengthen her own Buddhist hypothesis.

In fact, many of the Humean ideas that, according to Gopnik, so strongly resemble Buddhist thought are also prevalent in the 'European skeptical tradition'. Interestingly, one of these European schools, the ancient Greek Pyrrhonian school of philosophy, named after the obscure Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360 BC – c. 270 BC) has also been linked to Buddhism,[9] and some scholars even argue that Pyrrhonism is in fact a Greek reinvention of Buddhism, imported from Asia by the ancient Greeks following Alexander the Great's conquests.[10] While most Pyrrhonian texts have either been lost or destroyed, Pyrrhonism survived through the writings of Sextus Empiricus (c. 160 – c. 210 CE). Sextus Empiricus' work *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* in turn was rediscovered in the 16th century after having disappeared from European intellectual life for over a millennium. Henricus Stephanus published an influential Latin translation of the *Outlines* in 1562, which was quickly followed by Gentian Hervet's Latin translation of Sextus Empiricus' complete works in 1569. The Greek original was finally published in 1621 by Petrus and Jacobus Chouet, decades after the publication of the Latin translation. Sextus Empiricus was widely read in Europe during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, and by French intellectuals in particular. Prominent thinkers who studied the works include Michel de Montaigne, Descartes, Blaise Pascal, Pierre-Daniel Huet and François de La Mothe Le Vayer. Yet it was David Hume who would arguably go on to become

[8] Ibid., p.19.
[9] On the philosophical similarities between Madhyamaka Buddhism and Pyrrhonism, see: Thomas McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York 2002) pp. 800-871.
[10] For authors making historical claims, see: Adrian Kuzminski, *Pyrrhonism: How the Greeks Reinvented Buddhism* (Lanham 2010); Christopher I. Beckwith, *Greek Buddha: Pyrrho's Encounter with Buddhism in Central Asia* (Princeton/Oxford 2015).

the most famous critic of Pyrrhonism.

Unfortunately, the parallels between Hume, Buddhism, and Pyrrhonian skepticism are rarely studied together. Comparative studies on Hume and Buddhism, Hume and Pyrrhonism, and Buddhism and Pyrrhonian skepticism do exist, but all of these remain largely isolated fields of study. The precise nature of their relation is still something of a mystery. This study aims to unify these different comparative approaches by analysing both the possible Buddhist and the apparent Pyrrhonian influences in Hume's *Treatise*. However, rather than merely establishing the possibility of Buddhist or Pyrrhonian influences on Hume, the goal is to determine the likelihood of such an influence, both through comparative philosophical analysis and through historical arguments. While it is certainly not the first study to investigate the possible influence of Buddhist and Pyrrhonian thought on Hume, it is one of the first to take into account the La Flèche connection as discovered by Gopnik.[11] Until now, historians have by and large ignored the subject, whereas philosophers are generally more interested in studying the philosophical similarities between Hume's writings and Buddhist thought than in historical arguments.[12] Given the fact that Hume was both a philosopher and a historian—he was primarily known as a historian during his lifetime—this may seem ironic, but it is true that history and philosophy are two fundamentally different academic disciplines. Specialists in both fields tend to focus on whatever they are most familiar with, whereas the generally disciplinary orientation of most scholarly journals forms another barrier against interdisciplinary research. However, to be able to study possible Buddhist influence on Hume, such an interdisciplinary approach is virtually required. It is impossible to read Hume without a certain degree of philosophical understanding, whereas without the historical context one can do little more than compare the philosophical similarities and differences between Hume's writings and other schools of philosophy.

This becomes even more difficult when one takes into account that historical, and philosophical analysis in particular, rely to a great extent on interpretation. Hume scholarship is no different in that regard. Throughout

[11] Jay Garfield has recently commented on Gopnik's study, but his treatment of the La Flèche connection, which he quickly dismisses, is unsatisfying, see: Jay Garfield, *Hume as a Western Mādhyamika: The Case from Ethics* (2015).

[12] For a recent study that mentions Gopnik's claim but ignores the historical argument, see: Yumiko Inukai, 'The World of the Vulgar and the Ignorant Hume and Nagarjuna on the Substantiality and Independence of Objects', *Res Philosophica*, 92 (3), 2015, pp. 621-651.

history, Hume's *Treatise* has been subject to various, often opposed, interpretations that can roughly be divided into two distinct categories. Hume is either seen as a radical skeptic or, in contrast, as a naturalistic philosopher.[13] His earliest Scottish critics in the late 18th century universally viewed Hume as a 'destructive', systematic skeptic, bent on destroying our common sense beliefs in causality, the independent existence of objects, and the belief in the independent self. Such readings place Hume firmly within the British Locke-Berkeley tradition of British empiricism, and these skeptical interpretations of Hume remained dominant until well into the 20th century. In fact, despite having lost much of its credibility, the view of Hume as a radical skeptical empiricist is still championed by many to this day.[14] From the 1940s onwards, however, scholars increasingly began to stress the naturalistic, rather than the skeptical nature of Hume's *Treatise*. In this view, Hume's *Treatise* must be read as an exploration of human nature, in which Hume ultimately concludes feeling, and not reason, reigns supreme. After all, *belief* is the result of the sensitive, rather than the rational part of our nature. In this naturalistic interpretation of Hume, he is no longer the destructive, radical skeptic of old, but a moral philosopher who was deeply influenced by both Francis Hutcheson and Newtonian physics. A more recent interpretation argues it would be a mistake to view Hume as either a committed skeptic or a naturalist. Instead, Hume's *Treatise* is seen as an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into the philosophy of morality, which would paradoxically make Hume both a skeptic and a naturalist.[15] From this perspective, Hume aspired to become the 'Newton of the Moral Sciences'.[16]

Whereas the study of Hume's philosophy is problematic, the study of Buddhist philosophy is arguably even more gruelling. Buddhism has a rich and ancient tradition, consisting of many different schools of thought that at times directly oppose one another. Buddhist ideas have been recorded within a vast

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[13] Norman Kemp Smith was arguably the first scholar to recognize the skepticist/naturalist dichotomy, and it is still widely recognised to this day, see: Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London 1941); For a more recent overview of this dichotomy, see: Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion* (Oxford 2008) pp. 1-10.

[14] Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise* pp. 1-10.

[15] See: John Arthur Passmore, *Hume's Intentions* (Duckworth 1980).

[16] For a more detailed overview of the debate on the nature of Hume's skepticism, see: Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, pp. 1-10; In their respective biographies of Hume, both Mossner and most recently Harris portray Hume as a kind of moderate skeptic, with Mossner famously describing Hume as *le bon David*, a mild-mannered, compassionate, gentleman who eschewed radical skepticism, See: Mossner: *The Life of David Hume,* p. 4; James A. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge University Press 2015), pp. 94-121.

range of texts, many of which have been written at different times at in different place, varying from the orthodox Pali Canon to the texts that the monk Saicho brought back to Japan in the early eighth century, founding the Japanese school of Tendai Buddhism in the process. As a result, it is virtually impossible to study Hume in relation to the entirety of Buddhist philosophy. The whole body of texts is simply too vast and complex. The main focus in this study will therefore be on the Madhyamaka school of Buddhism, founded by the monk Nāgārjuna (c. 150 – 250 CE).[17] The reason for this is that the Madhyamaka school, out of all the many different Buddhist traditions, is commonly seen as having by far the strongest affinities with Hume's philosophical ideas. The Pyrrhonian texts, on the other hand, are arguably far easier to study, for the simple reason that only Sextus Empiricus' account has survived.[18] Any other Pyrrhonian texts, which must almost certainly have existed, are lost to us. This was no different during Hume's own time.

The aim of this study is not to dwell on the degree of Hume's skepticism, and whether Hume was a Pyrrhonist, as Richard Popkin has advocated throughout his life, or a moderate, 'mitigated' skeptic.[19] Nor is it the aim of this study to analyse Hume's role as a moral philosopher. Rather, it looks at how Hume's philosophy relates to key concepts from both Buddhist thought and Pyrrhonism, and how Hume may have come into contact with them as a young man. The first chapter focuses on Hume's denial of the existence of independent objects and the self, which is where Hume's ideas apparently converge with those from Buddhist thought, and the Madhyamaka school in particular. This first chapter is, in other words, a brief philosophical inquiry. This is then followed by an analysis of the circumstances during Hume's stay in La Flèche. The third chapter focuses on Hume's debt to Pierre Bayle, one of the monumental figures of the Enlightenment, and how Bayle may have been the link between Hume and Buddhism. Lastly, The fourth and final chapter analyses Pyrrhonism's relation to both Hume and Buddhism. While it is impossible to know for certain whether Hume took concepts from Buddhist or Pyrrhonian philosophy while writing his *Treatise* at La Flèche, a marriage of a philosophical

[17] Madyamaka's main text is the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way), written by Nāgārjuna. This study uses Jay Garfields 1995 translation, see: Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, transl. ed. Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (Oxford 1995).

[18] Cicero, one of the earliest sources on Pyrrho, does mention Pyrrho, but the accuracy of his account is questionable.

[19] See: Richard Henry Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (Indianapolis 1993).

and a historical approach is still the best, if not the only way to the determine the likelihood of said influences on Hume.

Hume: A Western Madhyamaka?

Scholars have long noted the remarkable similarities between Hume's philosophical explorations, first introduced in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, and certain aspects of Buddhist philosophy. More specifically, Hume's observations on the nature of the object, the self, and causation appear to have much in common with Buddhist thought, and the parallels between Hume and these ancient philosophical traditions are striking. As early as 1916, the Belgian Indologist Louis de La Vallée-Poussin (1869 – 1939) noted how the 'the theory concocted by the yellow-garbed [Buddhist] monks of yore agrees closely with one of the modern theories of the soul, the theory of Hume and Taine and many scientists.'[20] According to La Vallée-Poussin, the great similarity between the 'yellow-garbed monks of yore' and Hume could be found in their perceptions of the self. Or rather, their conclusion that there is in fact no self as we perceive it. There are no permanent feelings, no thinking entity, no unity, but rather an endless flow of feelings, emotions, and states of consciousness. The independent self is merely a fiction. All we can truly perceive are natural phenomena, feelings, wishes or wills, ideas, states of consciousness, and the body, which, like our feelings, is not a static entity, but a living thing that grows, and decays over time.[21]

This is what Buddhists traditionally call *Śūnyatā*, a Sanskrit term which can perhaps best be translated as *emptiness* into English.[22] It is arguably one of the central philosophical concepts in Buddhism, but at the same time also one of the most difficult to understand, and its meaning can vary significantly depending on the doctrinal context. In early Theravada Buddhism it was commonly used to describe *anātman* (Sanskrit) or *anattā* (Pali): the not-self nature of the *skandhas*, known as the five aggregates of sensory experience in English.[23] In the Pali canon these are form (matter), sensation (feeling), perception, mental formations, and consciousness, and it is through these five aggregates that the sentient being manifests itself. In the Theravada tradition, the world is empty in the sense that it is empty of self or anything related to the

[20] Louis de La Vallée-Poussin, *The Way to Nirvana: Six Lectures on Ancient Buddhism as a Discipline of Salvation, 1916* (Cambridge 1917), pp. 38-39.
[21] Ibid., pp. 38-39
[22] *Openness*, *spaciousness*, *voidness* and *vacuity* are just some other commonly seen translations.
[23] No-self (rather than not-self) is another often seen translation of *anattā*, but not-self is the more accurate translation from the original Pali according to Bronkhorst. See: Johannes Bronkhorst, *Buddhist Teaching in India* (2009), p. 124.

self. At the same time, *emptiness* also refers to state of consciousness that can only be attained through intense concentration. Only by reaching this mental state does the individual realise the world is free of self. There is nothing besides what already exists in the present.[24]

There are indeed clear similarities between the concept of the not-self nature of sensory experience as recorded in the Pali canon, and Hume's own position in *A Treatise of Human Nature*. According to Hume, there are some philosophers who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our self. However, there is nothing in our sensory experience that would actually validate such a belief. We are never truly aware of our self, only of a continuous flow of perceptions, each replacing one another in rapid succession. Hume attempts to prove his position by using thought experiments. For example, in Volume I. of the *Treatise*, he writes:

> When I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.[25]

He goes on, famously stating:

> The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos'd.[26]

However, while *emptiness* in the earliest Buddhist texts refers to a world free of self, Hume's idea of *emptiness* is more far-reaching. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*,

[24] See: *The Collection of the Middle-Length Savings (Majjhima Nikaya)*, transl. I. B. Horner (London 1957) vol. 1, sec. 233.
[25] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London 1739), p. 252.
[26] Ibid., p. 253.

Hume not only denies the existence of the self, he also claims the existence of *substance* can not be derived from the senses.[27] After all, we can see colour, hear sound, we can use our sense of taste and smell, but we cannot sense substance. While for an atomist atoms are what make up substance, in Hume's world substances consist of impressions and ideas, and our impressions of a substance, in turn, are derived solely from the qualities we attribute to that particular substance. Hume illustrates this in Volume I. of the *Treatise* by using the example of gold:

> Thus our idea of gold may at first be a yellow colour, weight, malleableness, fusibility; but upon the discovery of its dissolubility in *aqua regia*, we join that to the other qualities, and suppose it to belong to the substance as much as if its idea had from the beginning made a part of the compound one.[28]

In other words, when thinking of gold, humans have a natural tendency to also think about its colour, weight, malleableness, fusibility or one of gold's many other properties. Hume, however, argues that none of these traits are *inherent* in the gold itself. Rather, the piece of gold is a *collection* of its properties, and while we can sense these individual properties, the collection of traits that we call gold is merely a product of the imagination.[29] To use Hume's own words again, 'the term of unity is merely a fictitious denomination, which the mind may apply to any quantity of objects it collects together.'[30]

While Hume's radical skepticism diverges significantly from Theravada tradition, his view on the independent existence of objects shows striking similarities with another school of Buddhism: Madhyamaka.[31] Founded by the great Buddhist reformer Nāgārjuna (c. 150 – 250 CE), it is one of the two main schools within the Buddhist Mahāyāna tradition,[32] and the one that has arguably

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[27] Hume's views on substance in fact precede his views on personal identity in the Treatise. As a result, Hume's views on substance and personal identity are often treated separately in philosophical analysis of his work. Nevertheless, there is a strong case for interpreting Hume's ideas on personal identity as the logical result of his views on substance. See also: Nathan Robert Cox, *Substance and Skepticism in Hume's Treatise* (Kansas 2011).

[28] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 16

[29] Hume does not seem to take into account the role of language.

[30] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 30.

[31] Literally: Middlemost. A Madhyamaka is an individual who takes the 'middlemost' way in philosophy.

[32] Literally: the Great Vehicle. Mahāyāna Buddhism is nowadays the largest and most diverse of the three major branches of Buddhism, with over 50% of practitioners adhering to one of the many schools of Mahāyāna thought.

developed the most skeptical worldview. In an attempt to oppose the essentialism of the early Buddhist Abhidharma texts (third century BC), Nāgārjuna further developed the concept of *Śūnyata*.[33] According to Nāgārjuna, worldly objects are not just free of self: they are inherently empty. *Dharmas* or 'things', do exist, but, paradoxically, only in the sense that there is nothing innate in them. They lack any kind of substance or *essence* (Sanskrit: *svabhāva*). But even that emptiness is in itself empty, since, like all other phenomena, emptiness has no inherent existence. It does not even exist on the metaphysical level, that is, the 'world' beyond the capacities of human sensory experience. Rather, emptiness simply manifests itself in all natural phenomena.

The Madhyamaka world view can further be explained by how it distinguishes between two fundamental levels of truth, known as *two truths doctrine* (*satyadvayavibhāga)*. On the one hand there is the *conventional* truth (*loka-samvriti-satya)*, sometimes also known as commonsensical or relative truth. This first level of truth is the directly perceivable or phenomenal world, and, according to Nāgārjuna, it is the only reality that actually exists. It is here where all phenomena manifest themselves. However, the conventional truth conceals a second level of truth, which Nāgārjuna calls the *ultimate* truth (*paramarthika satya)*. This ultimate truth is the realisation that everything is empty, even emptiness itself. Paradoxically, Nāgārjuna's ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth.[34]

Nāgārjuna's argument rests on the Buddhist concept of *dependent origination* (*Pratītyasamutpāda)*. In *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24:18, the key text of the Madhyamaka school, he writes:

> Whatever is dependently co-arisen
> That is explained to be emptiness.
> That, being a dependent designation
> Is itself the middle way.
> Something that is not dependently arisen
> Such a thing does not exist.
> Therefore a non-empty thing

[33] Joseph Wasler, *Nagarjuna in Context* (New York 2005), pp.. 225-263
[34] Mark Siderits, "On the Soteriological Significance of Emptiness", *Contemporary Buddhism* 4 (1) (2003), p. 11.

Does not exist.[35]

By this he means that every 'thing' (*dharma)* does not exist independently, but depends on other 'things'. After all, if 'things' had any innate substance or essence, they must always have existed and will continue to exist for eternity, something that is incompatible with the conventional truth. No, Nāgārjuna argues, every single 'thing' only exists because it has been caused by something else. And because everything is dependently originated and has no inherent essence, everything must be empty. Therefore, dependent origination can be equated with emptiness.[36]

What makes the similarities between Hume and Nāgārjuna so striking, is that despite being separated by vast distances of space and time, they both essentially use the same thought process to reach the same conclusion. Moreover, the two philosophers do not deny the existence of substance entirely. While Hume does vehemently disagree with the commonly held idea of innate substance, he does, like Nāgārjuna, accept the existence of objects on the conventional level, in other words, in the directly perceivable world. But when one attempts to look beyond human sensory experience, one merely finds emptiness. In the end, both Hume and Nāgārjuna reach the same conclusion: the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth beyond the perceivable world.

Still, the apparent similarities between Hume and Nāgārjuna are not undisputed. Edward Conze, an Anglo-German scholar known for his pioneering translations of Buddhist texts, argues that in our search for parallels between different philosophical traditions we often overlook their fundamental differences.[37] Scholars are often so desperate to find affinities between different thinkers, either because of the desire to confirm their own hypothesis, or because they feel the need to impress their colleagues, they lose sight of everything else in the process. Conze makes the argument that while 'Hume's denial of self seems to literally agree with the *anattā* [not-self] doctrine [. . .] 'Hume reduced self-hood to the level of the sub-personal, [whereas] the

[35] Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, transl. ed. Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (Oxford 1995), p. 304.
[36] Geshe Sonam Rinchen. *How Karma Works: The Twelve Links of Dependent Arising* (Ithaca, New York 2006), p. 21.
[37] For Conze's full argument, see: Edward Conze, 'Spurious Parallels to Buddhist Philosophy,' *Philosophy East and West* 13 (2) (1963), pp. 105–115.

Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* invites us to search for the super-personal.'[38] In other words, whereas the Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* leads to a positive quest for liberation, Hume eschewed any search for the transcendental. Instead, he turned to a form of nihilism, which Buddhism rejects. Thus, while Hume and Buddhist theory are in agreement in their denial of the substantial self, their respective attitudes towards the positive self stand in contrast to each other. Conze's critique is both valid and important, but the fact that Hume and Nāgārjuna deny the self for wholly different reasons does not refute the claim that Hume was influenced by Buddhist ideas. After all, being influenced by someone does not automatically imply sharing the same goals and methods. In fact, that would be highly unusual, not only because it is possible to be critical of previous ideas but still be influenced by those same ideas, but also because even where there is agreement ideas tend to change with every subsequent interpretation. Since there is little reason to assume that Hume ever read original Buddhist texts, philosopher Yumiko Inukai makes the argument that exactly *because* Hume's ultimate goal, that is, knowledge, differs from the Buddhist end goal, liberation, their shared denial of the substantial self becomes all the more striking.[39]

Thus, while Hume is certainly not a Madhyamaka in the literal sense, one could argue that his denial of substance forms a Western counterpart to Madhyamaka Buddhism. Others have reached the same conclusion. For example, Jay Garfield recalls how his experience from 'teaching Hume at Tibetan universities in India is that Tibetan scholars instantly recognize him as 'a kind of Madhyamaka."[40] And for good reason: as the the Indian Madhyamaka scholar Tirupattur Ramaseshayyer Venkatachala Murthi once remarked, 'the denial of substance is the foundation of Buddhism down the ages.'[41]

[38] Conze, 'Spurious Parallels', pp. 113-114.
[39] Inukai, 'The World of the Vulgar', pp. 621-622.
[40] Jay Garfield, *Hume as a Western Mādhyamika: The Case from Ethics* (2015), p. 1
[41] Tirupattur Ramaseshayyer Venkatachala Murthi, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (London 1960), pp. 26-27.

The Mystery of the La Flèche Period (1734-1737)

Even today, nearly 300 years after it was first published, and despite having become part of the 'Western philosophical canon', Hume's *Treatise* is still shrouded in mystery. Much of that mystery has to do with Hume's personal circumstances at the time. The *Treatise* was his first major work, and when Hume began working on it he was still only a 25 year old student. He had no steady income, no learned profession, and was virtually unknown to the wider world. The unfortunate result of that obscurity is that we still know only very little about Hume's early life. We know he travelled to La Flèche in Anjou, France at the age of 25 in 1735, where he stayed until 1737, and we know that he was in a precarious financial situation, but other than that we know very little about the years he spent in France as a young man.

While many of Hume's later letters have been preserved and widely published, letters from his early years are virtually non-existent. Even if they do exist, they have not yet been discovered, and likely never will be. Only four letters from his time in France have survived, and only a single letter from his time at La Flèche, which, other than mentioning the civility of the people and the prestige of the local Jesuit College, does not reveal much else. Much of what we do know about Hume's life during this period stems from later accounts, and even these provide us with only very little information. Not even the fact that Descartes, who became the target of much of Hume's criticism, graduated from La Flèche a century earlier is ever mentioned by Hume in his writings, his personal letters included.[42] In any case, he seems to have had fond memories of his time in France. In his rather brief autobiography *My Own Life*, written just months before his death in 1776, he mentions 'passing three years very agreeably in that country [France].'[43]

Our best source of information is a single letter, written decades after Hume's departure from La Flèche. In this letter, dated 1762, Hume responds to George Campbell (1719 – 1796), a prominent Scottish minister, philosopher, and professor of divinity, who disagreed with Hume's attack on miracles. Hume writes:

[42] John Hill Burton, *Life and Correspondence of David Hume, Volume I* (Edinburgh 1846), p. 58 .
[43] David Hume, *My Own Life*, April 18 1776.

> It may perhaps amuse you to learn the first hint, which suggested to me that argument which you have so strenuously attacked. I was walking in the cloisters of the Jesuits' College of La Flêche, a town in which I passed two years of my youth, and engaged in a conversation with a Jesuit of some parts and learning, who was relating to me, and urging some nonsensical miracle performed lately in their convent, when I was tempted to dispute against him; and as my head was full of the topics of my Treatise of Human Nature, which I was at that time composing, this argument immediately occurred to me, and I thought it very much gravelled my companion; but at last he observed to me, that it was impossible for that argument to have any solidity, because it operated equally against the Gospel as the Catholic miracles;—which observation I thought proper to admit as a sufficient answer. I believe you will allow, that the freedom at least of this reasoning makes it somewhat extraordinary to have been the produce of a convent of Jesuits, though perhaps you may think the sophistry of it savours plainly of the place of its birth.[44]

From this letter, we know Hume appears to have engaged in conversation with at least one Jesuit 'of some parts and learning' at La Flèche, or rather, we know that he *claims* to have engaged in conversation with a Jesuit of some parts and learning. The general tone of the letter can only be described as dismissive, but that may be, as Gopnik argues, because he was writing to a Protestant minister who disputed Hume's argument against miracles in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748).[45] By using a Jesuit as an example, Hume cunningly forced the Protestant Campbell to either defend a Catholic Jesuit or dismiss his own argument.

Gopnik then asks herself: 'Who did Hume talk to? Who might be candidates for the Jesuit "of some parts and learning"?' She notes there were 34 official Jesuit fathers at La Flèche in 1734, and 40 in 1737, out of which 8 were ex-missionaries, and an even greater number of students, servants and assistants. The most most interesting individual, she concludes, was an elderly ex-missionary named Charles François Dolu (1655 – 1740). Dolu was one of only

[44] Dated 7th January, 1762, and written in relation to a copy of Campbell's "Dissertation on Miracles," sent to him by Dr. Blair.
[45] Gopnik, 'Could David Hume Have Known', pp. 8-9.

fourteen Jesuits who travelled to Siam, and shortly after taking is vows as spiritual coadjutor in 1687 he joined the French embassy to the Siamese King Narai. Unfortunately for the French mission in Siam, however, the pro-French King Narai was overthrown only a year later in an anti-foreign coup supported by the Dutch. Contacts with the French were severed, and after the expulsion of all Europeans from Siam Dolu fled to Pondicherry, the French headquarters in India, where he remained until around 1710. In 1713 he accompanied the Duchess of Alba to Spain, before ultimately retiring to La Flèche in 1723, where he remained until his death in 1740.

So why Dolu? According to Gopnik, Dolu was intelligent, knowledgeable, and gregarious. He was interested in science and natural history, composed music, worked closely with other Jesuits, some of whom were distinguished mathematicians and astronomers, and in 1715 even became a member of the Academie de Lyons, a group of intellectuals centered around Seigneur François Bottu de la Barmondière Saint Fonds (1675 – 1739), a French nobleman. During his stay in Pondicherry, Dolu also worked closely together with Jean Venance Bouchet, the superior of the French mission in India, who was noted for adopting Hindu dress and vegetarianism. Moreover, Dolu was involved in the Malabar rites controversy, a debate between the Jesuits and the more orthodox Cupuchins over the incorporation of native religious customs into Christian missionary rites.[46] Considering Dolu's apparent open-mindedness, and above all, wit, Gopnik concludes that 'it is difficult not to believe that they [Hume and Dolu] would have enjoyed each other's conversation during Hume's crucial two years at La Flèche.'[47]

Indeed, Hume was himself known as a gregarious, warm, open-minded and intellectually curious person throughout his life, and would likely have gotten along with someone of a similar disposition. In his classic biography of David Hume, Ernest Campbell Mossner writes:

> The French learned to call him *le bon David*, but the epithet cannot be readily translated into one English word. To call Hume *good* would be misleading, for he was certainly no saint. In many ways, however, he *was* good: he was humane, charitable, pacific, tolerant, and encouraging of others, morally sincere and intellectually honest. He

[46] Ibid., pp. 10-13.
[47] Ibid., p. 13.

> was always a loyal friend. He was, however, somewhat inclined to be jealous – jealous of his own reputation, jealous of the integrity of friendship, jealous of the prestige of his native country. Intellectually a citizen of the world, he was emotionally a Scot of Scots. He was, moreover, a worldly man who thoroughly enjoyed the good things of life – food and drink, wit, conversation, rational discourse.[48]

So, can we therefore assume Hume did indeed engage in conversation with Charles Francois Dolu, one of the oldest, most learned, and wide-travelled Jesuits at the Royal Jesuit College of La Flèche? The short answer is 'no', we cannot. First of all, Gopnik's entire argument is based on the assumption that Hume's letter to Campbell is truthful. However, we cannot simply assume that it is. Not only was the letter written decades after Hume's experiences as a student in France; he was also writing with a specific goal in mind, that is, to place Campbell in the uncomfortable position of either having to defend a Jesuit or agree with Hume's argument against 'nonsensical miracles'. On the one hand Gopnik accepts Hume's claim that he engaged in conversation with a Jesuit, but on the other hand she doubts the sincerity of his dismissive attitude towards Jesuits. Hume may just as well have invented the story to reinforce his own position in relation to Campbell.

Even if we accept that the conversation did take place, we still do not know whether the conversation was just an isolated event, or whether Hume frequently intermingled with the Jesuits of La Flèche. While it is true that Hume lived only a short walk away from the Jesuit college and almost certainly made use of its extensive library of some 40,000 books,[49] it is important to note that he never lived on the actual college grounds, nor was he ever part of the college. In short, we know almost nothing about the frequency or the nature of his interactions with the Jesuits. Dolu was certainly an interesting individual, but it seems arbitrary to select him as 'the most likely candidate'. Assuming that Hume and Dolu did indeed engage in frequent conversation, we still do not have a single clue about the nature of their conversations. Did they discuss Buddhism? We simply do not know. Although Dolu left behind letters,[50] he makes no

[48] Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Oxford 1980), p. 4.
[49] Gopnik, 'Could David Hume Have Known', p. 8.
[50] See: 'Lettre du Père Dolu, Missionaire de la Compagnie de Jésus, au Père le Gobien de la même Compagine', in ***Lettres édifiantes et curieuses: Mémoires des Indes, Vol. 10*, pp. 138-142.**

mention of Buddhist doctrine in his writings, and while he undoubtedly learned about Buddhism, we do not know how intricate his knowledge of Buddhism really was. Remember, Dolu spent only a year in Siam before the French missionaries were expelled. Learning new languages within such a short timespan is hard enough, let alone the many complexities of Buddhism, even with the valuable help of French colleagues like Jean Venance Bouchet.

However, Gopnik argues that Dolu had another major source of information on Buddhism. That source was Father Ippoliti Desideri, a Tuscan Jesuit who spent five years of his life in Tibet between 1716 – 1721. Not only was Desideri the first European to master the Tibetan language; he also took extensive notes on Tibetan religion and culture, which he eventually compiled in a monumental series of manuscripts. Desideri spent much of his five years in Tibet in some of the country's great mountain monasteries, where he composed works in literary Tibetan. In a typically Jesuit manner he attempted to refute Buddhist concepts such as rebirth and emptiness, which he considered to be at odds with the two minimum requirements of Christian faith—belief in God and belief in providence—while accepting parts of Buddhist moral philosophy that were deemed to be compatible.[51] Unfortunately, although Desideri's manuscripts were arguably the most comprehensive and accurate descriptions of Tibet and Buddhism before the 20th century, he was banned from publishing his manuscripts by the Propaganda order, and they disappeared into the Jesuit archives in Rome and a private collection until their sudden rediscovery in the late 19th century.[52]

What connects Desideri to Dolu is the fact that the two learned men met each other at La Flèche in 1727 when the former spent some time in France during his journey back to Rome from Pondicherry.[53] Desideri writes:

> 'On the 31st (August) around noon I arrived at our Royal College at La Flèche. There I received the particular attention of the rector, the

[51] Trent Pomplun, *Jesuit on the Roof of the World*: *Ippolito Desideri's Mission to Tibet* **(New York 2010), p. 12.**
[52] Pomplun, *Desideri's Mission*, pp. 3-4.
[53] Gopnik, 'Could David Hume Have Known', p. 14, translated from Luciano Petech, *I Missionary*, Volume 7, p. 94: '31 del medesimo mese doppo il mezzo de giorno arrivai al nostro Real Collegio della citta della Flèche, Quivi speciali ricevei i favori dal R.P. Rettore, dal R.P . Procurator, dal R. P. Tolu e da qualche altro di quei RR PP. A 4 di Septembre partij dalla Flèche.'

> procurator, Père Tolu [Dolu] and several other of the reverend fathers. On the 4th I left La Flèche.'

As Gopnik notes, it is noteworthy that Desideri specifically mentions Dolu, but not the other fathers. Indeed, Desideri and Dolu seem to have had several things in common: both knew Jean Venance Bouchet, the superior of the French mission in Pondicherry, both had experienced their own respective struggles with the more orthodox Capuchins over native religious rites, and they both shared a deep commitment to the evangelization of Asia.[54] Moreover, Desideri likely carried with him a fairly complete manuscript of the groundbreaking book on Tibet he was working on.[55] He could quickly have copied his manuscript at La Flèche, which had its own printing press, or sent a revised version to La Flèche when he got back to Rome.

While such a thought is certainly fascinating, there is nevertheless too little evidence to claim that Desideri shared some of his unique knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism with Dolu. Desideri spent only several days at La Flèche during a long—and likely exhausting—journey from Pondicherry. Although he probably mentioned his experiences in Tibet to some of the Jesuits, it is—contrary to what Gopnik claims—far from certain that Desideri discussed Buddhist doctrine with Dolu during his short stay at La Flèche. Even his statement that when he 'returned through France and Italy to Tuscany and Rome' he 'was strongly urged by many men of letters, by gentlemen and by important personages to write down in proper order all' he 'had told them at different times'[56] only tells us very little. Desideri made not just a stop at La Flèche; he also stopped at several other Jesuit establishments in France, namely in Vannes and Rennes. He was then detained in Mans for several days, before arriving in Paris on September 12th, where he remained until the 28th.[57] In Paris he met with other Jesuits, but also aristocrats, the Tuscan ambassador, the papal nuncio, Cardinal de Fleury, gave his blessings to two royal princesses, and was even admitted to the presence of King Louis XV himself.[58] Unfortunately, since Desideri never wrote down the content of his conversations in France, the

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[54] Ibid., p. 15.
[55] *Mission to Tibet: The Extraordinary Eighteenth-Century Account of Father Ippolito Desideri S.J.*, transl. Michael Sweet, ed. Leonard Zwilling (Boston 2010), pp. 81-82.
[56] Gopnik, 'Could David Hume Have Known', pp. 15-16.
[57] Sweet, Zwilling, *Mission to Tibet*, pp. 74-76.
[58] Ibid., pp. 74-76.

answer as to which of these 'men of letters, gentlemen, and important personages' urged him to 'write down in proper all he had told them at different times' remains a mystery.

All we know for certain is that Dolu took Desideri in his care in August 1727 and that Desideri specifically mentions Dolu. And while he may well have provided the Jesuits at La Flèche with a copy of his manuscript, this—let alone the notion that Hume would have had access to such a copy—remains pure speculation. No French copy has ever been discovered, and until one emerges it seems unlikely that either Dolu or Hume ever had access to a copy of Desideri's manuscript.

Even Gopnik concedes that it is 'is more likely [. . .] that Hume would have heard about Desideri's discoveries through conversation.'[59] More likely, perhaps, but still far from certain. Remember, Hume arrived in France only in 1737, a full decade after Desideri enjoyed the Jesuits' hospitality at La Flèche. Even the fact that, besides Dolu, eleven other fathers who had been present during Desideri's visit were still there when Hume came to La Flèche in 1737 tells us almost nothing. It rests on the assumption that Hume spoke at some length with Jesuits who would have remembered Desideri, that these Jesuits had received considerable information from Desideri on Tibet and on Tibetan Buddhism more specifically during a period of just several days, and that they would have been particularly eager to share this information with Hume.

One can also wonder why Desideri is even necessary as a source when Dolu was apparently already knowledgeable on Buddhist philosophy. The answer probably lies in the general doctrinal differences between Theravada Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. As we have seen, Hume's philosophy of substance shows considerably more convergence with Madhyamaka than with Theravada Buddhism, where the notion of not-self is not as clearly articulated. Tibetan Buddhism, in turn, was heavily influenced by the philosophy of the earlier Madhyamaka reformers. Not only does the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by the great reformer Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) incorporate Madhyamaka notions of emptiness and dependent arising,[60] but Desideri also closely followed Tsongkhapa's philosophy when he was writing his manuscripts on Tibetan religion. Although he struggled to grasp the concept of emptiness at

[59] Gopnik, 'Could David Hume Have Known', p 18.
[60] Tsongkhapa's explanation of Madhyamaka has in fact become standard in the West, see: Karl Brunnhölzl, *The Center of the Sunlit Sky: Madhyamaka in the Kagyu Tradition* (2004), p.17.

first, *Śūnyatā* being 'so abstruse a concept that he could not find a teacher at Sera to explain it to him', he eventually used Gelug logic and terminology to defend his own Christian theology.[61]

Another major issue with Gopnik's hypothesis is that Hume never mentions Buddhism in any of his writings, or at least those that have survived. Gopnik attributes this to source amnesia. She states that 'even if Hume was influenced by ideas that came from Buddhism through discussions with Dolu, he probably would not have tracked or remembered exactly which foreign culture, India, China or Siam, was the original source of these ideas, or perhaps even that they had come from that source at all.'[62] While source amnesia is indeed not unknown, common even, Gopnik's reasoning here runs counter to the rest of her argument. Her entire case rests on the idea that Dolu was a learned, wide-travelled Jesuit who would have loved to share his unique experiences as a missionary in Asia, as well as what he learned from Desideri about Tibet with Hume. It seems highly unlikely that Dolu would have shared Buddhist doctrine, which was widely associated with atheism at the time and condemned by even the most tolerant of Jesuits,[63] without explicitly mentioning the source. If anything, exotic sources like Siam and Tibet—or simply Asia—would have been particularly memorable to a young student like Hume.

[61] Sweet, Zwilling, *Mission to Tibet*, p. 63.
[62] Gopnik, 'Could David Hume Have Known', p 19.
[63] Thierry Meynard, 'Chinese Buddhism and the Threat of Atheism in Seventeenth-Century Europe', *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 31 (2011), p. 13.

Pierre Bayle: The Crucial Link?

If Hume was at all influenced by Buddhist ideas, the most likely sources are not Dolu or Desideri, but texts from earlier authors that Hume was almost certainly familiar with. In an early letter to his friend Michael Ramsay, dated August 26th 1737, Hume writes that 'to comprehend the metaphysical parts of the *Treatise*', which he had almost finished writing at that point, Ramsay should read Malebranche's *Search after Truth*, Berkeley's *Principles*, Descartes' *Meditations*, and 'some of the more metaphysical articles of Bailes [Bayle's] Dictionary; such as those [of] Zeno and Spinoza'.[64] Since Hume specifically mentions Malebranche, Berkeley, Descartes, and Spinoza, it is safe to assume that these were all important influences on Hume's *Treatise*. However, in relation to his potential borrowing of Buddhist ideas, the fact that Hume specifically mentions Bayle is particularly interesting: Bayle wrote extensively on Buddhism.

Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) was one of the major figures of the European Enlightenment, whose enormous *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Historical and Critical Dictionary) was one of the most popular and widely read works of the eighteenth century.[65] A Huguenot who spent most of his life as a French refugee in the Dutch Republic, Bayle was a notorious skeptic who was willing to openly question philosophical and theological dogma. Voltaire once quipped: 'the greatest master of the art of reasoning that ever wrote, Bayle, great and wise, all systems overthrows'.[66] And Jonathan Israel writes that 'No one else, not even Locke, was a staple of so many libraries or had so wide a general influence, his writings being everywhere acknowledged to be a prime cause of the time of skepticism, atheism and materialism sweeping the west of the continent.'[67]

Like many other European intellectuals of the eighteenth century, Hume was a keen reader of Bayle's *Dictionary*, and although the degree of Bayle's influence is a matter of debate, it is obvious that he was a major influence on Hume. Of course, one could argue that since Hume's letter to his friend Michael Ramsay was written in 1737, when the *Treatise* was nearly complete, Hume may only have begun to read Bayle when the he had already written down the

[64] Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, p. 357; Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, pp. 104; 626-7.
[65] The first edition appeared in 1697. A second, enlarged edition was published five years later in 1702.
[66] Cited from Richard Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (Indianapolis 1993), p. 158.
[67] Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (New York 2006), p. 87.

majority of his ideas. However, in Hume's so-called *Early Memoranda*, about half of the entries—sixteen in total—directly deal with Bayle.[68] From these memoranda we know that Hume started reading him as early as 1732, years before he began his studies in France.

Moreover, there are significant textual similarities with Bayle in the *Treatise*. In his discussion of space and vacuum, for example, Hume closely follows Bayle's argument from the latter's entry on Zenon of Elea, and he accepts Bayle's three possible theories regarding the way that time and space might be constituted.[69] However, while Bayle points to contradictions in all of these three theories, Hume rejects two and argues that one may in fact be possible. In his discussion of vacuum he even uses the same metaphor: that of a chamber filled with air from which all the air is released.[70]

Hume also clearly took ideas from Bayle's Spinoza article on the metaphysics of substance and personal identity. Like other authors of his day, Hume begins by insulting Spinozism before discussing Spinoza's ideas.[71] He then describes the 'fundamental atheism of the doctrine of Spinoza', that is, the doctrine of the simplicity of the universe, before reaching his most famous statement:

> I believe this brief exposition of the principles of that famous atheist [Spinoza] will be sufficient for the present purpose, and that without entering farther into these gloomy and obscure regions, I shall be able to shew, that this hideous hypothesis is almost the same with that of the immateriality of the soul, which has become so popular.[72]

The argument that follows is then once again directly lifted from Bayle's *Dictionary*. A reference to Bayle's Spinoza entry on page 243 of the *Treatise* seems to confirm this.[73] While Hume may seem hostile towards Spinoza's views, Richard Popkin points out that Hume is in fact *not* attacking Spinoza here, but the theologians who—ironically, in light of Spinoza's supposed atheism—share virtually the same ideas on the immateriality of the soul as Spinoza. 'If his view

[68] See: Mossner, 'Hume's Early Memoranda, 1729-1740: The Complete Text', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9 (4) (1948), pp. 492-518.
[69] See: Hume: *Treatise*, pp. 26-27, 39-40; Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, transl. Richard Popkin (Indianapolis/Cambridge 1991), pp. 350-388.
[70] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 54.
[71] Ibid., p. 240.
[72] Ibid., p. 241.
[73] See Hume, *Treatise*, note 47, p. 243.

[Spinoza's] was the hideous hypothesis, what was theirs supposed to be?'[74]

Bayle's Spinoza entry also happens to be the longest entry in his entire *Dictionary*. Bayle opens the article by stating that Spinoza 'was a systematic atheist who employed a totally new method, though the basis of his theory was the same as that of several other ancient and modern philosophers, both European and Oriental', and writes that Spinoza is the first who boiled down atheism to a system.[75] Crucially, Bayle explicitly connects Spinozism to both ancient European and Oriental philosophy. Regarding the latter, it is noteworthy that he almost immediately refers to remark D of the article 'Japan' and to remark B of his Spinoza entry titled 'What I shall say . . . about the theology of a Chinese sect'. Both remarks are in fact enormous footnotes describing Chinese and Japanese Buddhism respectively. Starting with remark B on Chinese Buddhism, he begins by describing the founder of the religion:

> The name of that sect is *Foe Kiao* [Chinese: *fojiao*, Buddhism]. It was established by royal authority among the Chinese in the year 65 of the Christian era. Its first founder was the son of the king *In Fan Vam*, and was at first called *Xe* or *Xe Kia* [Chinese: *Shejia*, Shakyamuni Buddha], and then, when he was thirty years old, *Foe*, that is to say, 'not man.'[76]

Bayle is, of course, wrong here. Buddhism was far older than he believed it to be, and it was founded not in China, but in India. At the time, even the most learned Europeans were unaware of Buddhism's true origin. Bayle was no exception. Two decades after the publication of Bayle's *Dictionary*, Ippolito Desideri was in fact one of the first Europeans to realise that the roots of (Tibetan) Buddhism lay in India.[77] Inaccuracies aside, Bayle then goes on to describe the story of Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment and the story of his deathbed confession:

> He, having retired into the desert when he reached his nineteenth year and having put himself under the discipline of four Gymnosophists in order to learn philosophy from them, remained under their instruction until he was thirty years old, when, rising one morning before daybreak and contemplating the planet Venus, the mere sight of it gave him at once a perfect knowledge of the first

[74] Richard Henry Popkin, 'Hume and Spinoza', *Hume Studies 5* (2) (1979), p. 65-93.
[75] Bayle, *Dictionary*, p. 288.
[76] Ibid, p. 288.
[77] Pomplun, *Desideri's Mission*, p 78.

> principle, so that being full of divine inspiration, or rather of pride and madness, he undertook to instruct men, represented himself as a god, and attracted eighty thousand disciples. . . . At the age of seventy-nine, finding himself near death, he told his disciples that, for the forty years he had preached to the world, he had not told the truth to them; that he had concealed it under a veil of metaphors and figures of speech; but that it was time to tell it to them. 'It is,' he said, 'that there is nothing to seek, nor anything to put one's hopes on, except the nothingness and the vacuum that is the principle of all things.[78]

He states how Buddha Shakyamuni 'divided his doctrine into two parts, one exterior, which is the one that is publicly preached and taught to the people, the other interior, which is carefully hidden from the common people and made known only to initiates.'[79] This true doctrine is emptiness, nothingness, a vacuum (*Śūnyatā)* and the most difficult to understand. He explains:

> They say that our parents came forth from this vacuum and that they returned there after death; that it is the same with all men, who are changed back into this principle by death; that we, all the elements, and all the creatures make up part of that vacuum that thus there is but one and the same substance, which is different in particular beings only by the shapes and qualities or interior configuration, somewhat like water, which is always essentially water, though it takes the form of snow, hail rain or ice.[80]

Bayle is struck by the similarities between the unity of substance taught by this 'Chinese sect', and Spinoza's monist philosophy on substance. '. . .Spinoza has not been so absurd', he concludes.[81] It is a striking comment, and reveals that Bayle describes the 'Sect of Foe' for two specific purposes. First and most obviously, his lengthy description serves to show that Spinoza's monism was at least in part shaped by doctrines from ancient China: the fact that the footnote on the 'Sect of Foe' is right at the start of the Spinoza entry is no coincidence. Secondly and most importantly, Bayle subjects Spinoza to a kind of relativism.

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[78] Bayle, *Dictionary*, pp. 288-289.
[79] Ibid., p. 290.
[80] Ibid., p. 290-291.
[81] Ibid., p. 291.

Bayle uses his remarks on China to show the reader that Spinoza's 'hideous hypothesis' has some validity after all. Since Spinozism was widely considered to be atheistic at the time, one could even argue that Bayle is implicitly promoting atheism.[82]

Bayle's interest in China was no coincidence either. It followed in the wake of the rise of Quietism in France in the 1670s and 1680s, a religious revival movement associated with Miguel de Molinos that was condemned as heretical by Pope Innocent XI in 1687 because it was accused of elevating withdrawal from worldly interests and passive meditation over pious action and unity with God. When European intellectuals became aware that similar societies in China appeared to 'empty the mind of thoughts'[83] a wave of writings on China and 'Chinese quietism' followed. Bayle happily joined the fray. In the Spinoza entry he writes:

> Note in passing that the followers of *Foe* taught quietism; for they say that all those who seek true happiness ought to allow themselves to be so absorbed in profound meditations that they make no use of their intellect, but, by a complete insensibility, sink into the rest and inaction of the first principle, which is the true means of perfectly resembling it and partaking of happiness. They assert also that after one has reached this state of quietude, he should follow the ordinary course of his life outwardly and teach others the commonly received doctrine.[84]

Around the same time, Catholic religious orders quarrelled over the compatibility of Christianity with Chinese religious rites.[85] The battle was ultimately decided at Paris' prestigious Sorbonne in 1700, where, like in the other controversies over native rites, the conservative camp prevailed: Chinese

[82] This is the position Jonathan Israel maintains. Israel argues that Bayle was one of several radical Enlightenment thinkers who used the comparison between Spinozist and Chinese 'atheism' to implicitly promote Enlightenment atheism, see: Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, pp. 645-46; However, Israel's view of Bayle as a covert atheist has been contested, and others see him as a skeptical fideist instead, see: Simon Kow, 'Enlightenment Universalism: Bayle and Montesqieu on China', *The European Legacy* 15 (3) (2014), pp. 347-358 and Jeffrey Burson, 'Unlikely Tales of Fo and Ignatius: Rethinking the Radical Enlightenment through French Appropriation of Chinese Buddhism', *French Historical Studies* 38 (3), 2015, pp. 391-420.

[83] Most Buddhist schools teach that 'emptying the mind of thoughts' is a pitfall that should be avoided during meditation.

[84] Bayle, Dictionary, p. 291.

[85] Burson, 'Unlikely Tales of Fo', p. 392.

religion was judged to be incompatible with the Christian faith.[86] The implications of this decision were enormous. It meant that China, the most populous state in the world, had been 'atheist' for thousands of years. Unintendedly, China, where seemingly virtuous 'atheist' societies had existed for millennia, became an object of interest for the scholarly journals of radical editors such Pierre Bayle and the Swiss theologian Jean Le Clerc.[87]

Probably because the Spinoza entry was already the longest article in the entire *Dictionary*, Bayle decided to add a separate entry on Japan, which he immediately refers to in the first paragraph of the Spinoza entry. Even more so than his section on Chinese Buddhism, the section on Japanese Buddhism stresses the contrast between 'inner' and 'outer' doctrine. He notes that those who rely on appearances acknowledge a hereafter, whereas those who look inwards do not accept any heaven or hell 'and teach notions which are very similar to the ideas of Spinoza', going even further than the Epicureans.[88] Regarding the practice of Japanese monks, he writes:

> They neglect what is exterior and apply themselves exclusively to meditation. They thoroughly reject all discipline consisting of words and are only attached to the exercise they call *Soquxin Qoqubut*,[89] that is, the heart. They confirm that there is only a single principle of all things and that this principle is found everywhere; that the heart of man and the inner nature of other beings does not differ at all from this principle; and that all beings return to this common principle when they are destroyed. They add that it exists from eternity and is unique, limpid and luminous. It can neither grow nor diminish, has no form, does not reason, and lives in idleness and perfect rest.[90]

Bayle then explains the 'inner' doctrine in greater detail:

1. There is only one single principle of all things; and this principle is sovereignly perfect and wise yet does not understand anything and is not

[86] Urs App, *The Cult of Emptiness*: *The Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy* (Rorschach/Kyoto 2012). 225-227.
[87] App, *The Cult of Emptiness*, p. 225; Thijs Weststeijn, 'Spinoza Sinicus, An Asian Paragraph in the History of the Radical Enlightenment', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68 (4) (2007), pp. 537-561.
[88] Bayle, *Political Writings*, transl. ed. Sally L. Jenkinson (Los Angeles 2000), p. 129.
[89] This almost certainly refers to the Japanese *soku-shin-ze-butsu* (the heart itself is the Buddha or more literally: this very mind is Buddha mind). The Japanese phrase is in turn a translation from a Chinese phrase attributed to the Zen Master Mazu Daoyi (709-788).
[90] Bayle, *Dictionary* (Rotterdam 1702), p. 1628, cited in App, *The Cult of Emptiness*, p. 232.

at all concerned about the affairs of this world since it remains fully at rest and, like a person strongly focused on something, leaves all others alone.
2. This principle is in all particular things and communicates its essence to them, so that they form the same thing as it and return to it when they end.
3. The heart of man is not at all different from this common principle of all beings. When men die, their hearts perish and are consumed; but the first principle that in the first gave them life still remains in them. As a result there are neither paradise nor hell, and neither recompense nor punishment after this life.
4. Man can in this world elevate himself to the condition and the supreme majesty of the first principle, given that through meditation he can know it perfectly and thus attain the sovereign tranquility that this principle enjoys. Herin lies all the good man can acquire and until he has reached it through meditation and through perfect knowledge, he is agitated in perpetual unease, passing from one hell into another, unable to find quietude anywhere.[91]

For his texts on Asian religion Bayle relied on a variety sources from seventeenth-century China as well as sources from Vietnam, Siam, Tibet, and India.[92] The oldest and arguably most important sources, however, originated from Japan, where sixteenth-century Jesuits like Francisco Xavier and his successors first discovered Buddhist ideas. The decades-long presence in Japan provided Europeans with the first translations and interpretations of Buddhist (Zen) doctrine. Flawed as these interpretations were, Jesuit knowledge of Japanese Buddhism slowly but gradually increased over time. For example, by 1558, the Jesuit superior of Asian missions Belchior Nunes Barreto appears to have been the first European to realise that the religion of Japan is also present in China and Pegu (Burma). In a letter to Diego Laynez, the Superior General of his order, he writes:

[91] Bayle, *Dictionary*, p. 1629, cited in App, *The Cult of Emptiness*, pp. 232-233.
[92] App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia 2010), p. 11.

> This is the pseudo-theology of Xaqua[93] and Amida[94] which also reigns all over China and Pegu[95] where this pest, to the best of my knowledge, came from. These are the devil's tricks [doli diaboli], this is the science that the bonzes and the nobles discuss in their schools [in suis gynnasiis], and this is the kind of demonic deception of the prevalent sect that they call 'sect of meditators.[96]

The letter also reveals the general attitude towards other religions that was almost universally shared among Jesuit missionaries for centuries. On the one hand, Jesuits were learned, highly educated men, willing to learn as much as they could about foreign religions, but on the other hand non-Christian doctrines were usually condemned in the strongest terms. Even the most accurate Jesuit accounts ultimately served to show the theological superiority of the Catholic faith over the fundamental errors of the pagan religions.

The most influential of these early Jesuit reports was a catechism based on a series of lecture manuscripts by the Italian Jesuit Alessandro Valignano (1539 – 1606), who intended to use them for the education of both Japanese and European students in the newly opened seminaries and Jesuit colleges in Kyoto. Like the Jesuits that preceded him, Valignano relied heavily on Japanese converts who were able to provide him with translations of Zen doctrine that Europeans could understand.[97] While Valignano's lectures were clearly not intended for a European audience, the catechism was nevertheless published without his knowledge in Lisbon in 1586 under the title *Catechismus christianae fidei*.[98] Its importance to Oriental studies lies in the fact that it provides one of the first comprehensive critiques of Buddhism. The Swiss historian Urs App (2012), who has reconstructed much of the Jesuits' early contact with Buddhism, regards Valignano's cathechism as 'the record of the West's earliest encounter with Buddhist philosophy.'[99] It formed the basis for successive missionary efforts

[93] From the Japanese *Shaka*, derived from the Sanskrit *Śākya*, the ancient tribe of the historical Gautama Buddha.
[94] The Japanese term for Amitābha Buddha, the principal Buddha of Pure Land Buddhism, one of the largest branches of Mahāyāna Buddhism.
[95] Southern Burma
[96] App, *The Cult of Emptiness*, p. 42.
[97] J. F. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits: Alessandro Valignano in Sixteenth-Century Japan* (London 1993), pp. 179-186.
[98] App, *The Cult of Emptiness*, pp. 51-60; Mia M. Mochizuki, 'The Diaspora of a Jesuit Press: Mimetic Imitation on the World Stage, in Dietz, Morton, Roggen, Stronks & van Vaeck (eds.), *Illustrated Religious Texts in the North of Europe, 1500-1800* (Farnham 2014), p. 117.
[99] App, *The Cult of Emptiness*, p. 60.

in Asia. For example, Matteo Ricci's catechism *Tiānzhǔ Shíyì* (*The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven)*, which argues that Christianity and Confucianism are not opposed to each other, was heavily indebted to the earlier work of Valignano and his Japanese collaborators.[100] Moreover, because the *Catechismus christianae fidei* was inadvertently published in Lisbon for a European audience, its influence extended beyond just the Jesuit colleges around Asia. Indeed, App sees the accidental publication of Valignano's catechism as one of the turning points in the history of European intellectual interest in Asia: 'Republished as part of Possevino's *Bibliotheca selecta* (1603), Valignano's *Catechismus* became a textbook for generations of missionaries as well as young Europeans studying at Jesuit colleges. [. . .] Thus, relatively obscure mission materials from faraway Japan burrowed their way into European public consciousness and ended up furnishing major building blocks for the invention of 'Oriental philosophy."[101]

According to App, Bayle, who had studied at a Jesuit college in Toulouse in his youth, based his description of 'inner' and 'outer' doctrine in the 'Japan' entry largely on Valignano's much older catechism, whereas the information in the 'Sect of Foe' footnote from the Spinoza entry is largely borrowed from Philippe Couplet's (1623 – 1693) *Confucius sinarum philosophus* (1687).[102] The *Confucius sinarum philosophus* primarily deals with Chinese Confucianism, but its introduction contains a section on Buddhism that was long thought to be written by the Sicilian Jesuit Prospero Intorcetta (1626 – 1696). However, on the basis of a previously overlooked handwritten remark in the manuscript that Couplet omitted from the printed version of the *Confucius sinarum philosophus*, App argues that Intorcetta relied on yet another source: the Portuguese João Rodrigues (1561 or 1562 – 1633 or 1634), who was one of the leading European experts on Japan and China, and, having lived in Japan for thirty years, one of the few Jesuits who was knowledgeable on Buddhism at all.[103] Unbeknownst to himself, or anyone else for that matter, it appears that Bayle's section on the 'Sect of Foe' was largely based on Rodrigues' writings from the 1620s rather than those of Intorcetta from the 1660s. Thus, the popular *Confucius sinarum philosophus* provided European intellectuals like Bayle with a biased, simplified, and considerably flawed European interpretation of the Buddha's deathbed

[100] Thierry Meynard, 'The Overlooked Connection between Ricci's Tianzhu shiyi and Valignano's Catechismus Japonensis,' *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 40 (2) (2013), pp. 303-322.
[101] App, *The Cult of Emptiness*, p. 57.
[102] Ibid., p. 231.
[103] Ibid., 138-144.

confession of 'inner' and 'outer' doctrines that had its roots in Sino-Japanese Zen Buddhism.

Since Hume had almost certainly read Bayle's article on Spinoza by 1732, it seems only natural to assume that Hume must also have been familiar with the article's description of the Buddha's life, the contrast between 'inner' and 'outer' doctrine, and the supposed shared monism between Buddhism and Spinozism.[104] Yet closer scrutiny of Hume's letters and early memoranda reveals that this is far from certain. Bayle only added his remarks on China in the Spinoza entry as well as the entire 'Japan' article in the second edition of the *Dictionary* (1702), whereas the initial first edition (1697) makes no mention of either the 'Sect of Foe' of the 'inner' doctrine of the Japanese monks.[105] Rather, using François Bernier's (1620-1688) earlier writings on the existence of a pan-Asian philosophy, Bayle compares Spinoza to philosophical ideas from India and Persia. In other words, the second edition of the *Dictionary* expands the notion that Asian religion was rife with Spinozism and quietism to the entirety of the continent.

Most scholars seem to overlook this crucial difference between the two editions of the *Dictionary*. When Bayle's Spinoza article is mentioned in relation to Hume, they refer to either the 1697 or the 1702 edition, as if the two versions are interchangeable.[106] The distinction is important because Hume never explicitly mentions which edition of Bayle's *Dictionary* he used in either his letters or his memoranda.[107] For example, in his 1737 letter to Michael Ramsay he writes that in order to understand the *Treatise*, Ramsay should read 'some of the more metaphysical articles of Bailes [Bayle's] Dictionary; such as those [of] Zeno and Spinoza',[108] but he never specifies which edition his friend Ramsay should read. At least Hume is consistent in his bibliographical sloppiness. When Hume in his *Treatise* refers to Bayle's Spinoza entry the footnote only states: 'See

[104] See: Mossner, 'Hume's Early Memoranda', p. 494.
[105] For a more specific comparison of the two editions, see: App, *The Cult of Emptiness*, p. 228-229.
[106] For example, Mossner cites the 1697 edition, see: Mossner, 'Hume's Early Memoranda', p. 498; Jeffrey Burson likewise refers to the 1697 edition, see: Burson, 'Unlikely Tales of Fo', p. 417; Zuzana Parusnikvá refers to the 1702 edition instead, see: Zuzana Parusniková uses the 1702 edition, see: Zuzana Parusniková, *David Hume, Sceptic* (Prague 2016), p. 72; Jonardon Ganieri even makes the controversial claim that Hume's *Treatise* was directly inspired by Bayle's sections on Buddhism in the 1702 edition of the *Dictionary*, see: Jonardon Ganieri, *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (New York 2007) pp. 228-31.
[107] See: Mossner, 'Hume's Early Memoranda', pp. 492-518; Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, pp. 104; 626-7.
[108] Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, pp. 104; 626-7.

Bayle's dictionary, article of *Spinoza*.'[109]

There are therefore three distinct possibilities: The first is that when Hume was composing the *Treatise* he was only familiar with the initial 1697 edition of Bayle's *Dictionary*; the second possibility is that he had read the 1702 edition instead; the third and final possibility is that Hume was familiar with both the first and second editions. Until someone discovers which edition(s) Hume was using in the early 1730s it could be any of these three possibilities whereas only the last two suggest that Hume was almost certainly familiar with Bayle's section on the 'Sect of Foe', and possibly the 'Japan' article. In short, it is impossible to conclude for certain whether Hume had read Bayle's descriptions of Buddhism when he published the *Treatise* in 1738.

Finally, while Hume may well have read Bayle's descriptions of Buddhism, they are so far removed from both the philosophy of Nāgārjuna and Hume's own ideas that we must ask ourselves: is the Buddhism as described in Bayle still Buddhism? Rather than being an accurate depiction of Buddhist philosophy, the Buddhism in Bayle's *Dictionary* reflects the Jesuits' initial biased accounts of Buddhism as an atheist sect, and, based on these accounts, Bayle's own interpretation of Buddhism as a kind of ancient proto-Spinozist sect covering nearly all of the Asian continent. The Spinoza and Japan entries alone do certainly not explain Hume's views on substance and the self. Still, there is yet another way in which Hume may have been influenced by Buddhism, albeit indirectly and without his knowledge: through the writings of Sextus Empiricus.

[109] See: Hume, *Treatise*, Book 1, note 47.

Pyrrhonian Appearances

While Hume's views on personal identity and substance have often been compared to similar ideas in Buddhism, both Hume and Buddhism respectively have also been linked to Pyrrhonism, an ancient school Greek philosophy believed to have been founded by the enigmatic Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360 BC – c. 270 BC). Although no writings of Pyrrho of Elis survived antiquity—he reportedly wrote poetry while on expedition with Alexander the Great—Pyrrhonian skepticism was kept alive through the works of Sextus Empiricus (c. 160 – c. 210 CE), who attributed the founding of the school to Pyrrho. Sextus, in turn, was rediscovered during the early modern period and widely read during Hume's youth.

Several authors have also pointed out the striking similarities between Madhyamaka and ancient Pyrrhonian ideas, and some even claim that Pyrrhonism is in fact an ancient 'import' of Buddhism from Asia to Greece.[110] These claims are particularly interesting in the light of Hume's presumed borrowing of Buddhist ideas, since Hume established himself as one of the foremost critics of Pyrrhonism during his lifetime. If Pyrrhonism was indeed imported from India in the wake of Alexander the Great's conquests, long before the Jesuits ever came into contact with Buddhist societies, this suggests that Hume may inadvertently have come into contact with what had originally been Buddhist ideas through Pyrrhonism. All of this will be discussed below, but let us start with Hume's connection to Pyrrhonism first.

Hume critiques Pyrrhonism at length in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), one of his other major works, and generally considered to be a revision of his earlier *Treatise*. In the *Enquiry* he explicitly warns against extreme, dogmatic skepticism which, rather than providing philosophical clarity, merely leads to a kind of nihilism. He writes:

> For here is the chief and most confounding objection to *excessive* scepticism, that no durable good can ever result from it; while it

[110] On the philosophical similarities between Madhyamaka Buddhism and Pyrrhonism, see: Thomas McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York 2002) pp. 800-871; For authors making historical claims, see: Adrian Kuzminski, *Pyrrhonism: How the Greeks Reinvented Buddhism* (Lanham 2010); Christopher I. Beckwith, *Greek Buddha: Pyrrho's Encounter with Buddhism in Central Asia* (Princeton/Oxford 2015).

> remains in its full force and vigour. We need only ask such a sceptic, *What his meaning is? And what he proposes by all these curious researches?*[111]

This excessive skepticism is, of course, Pyrrhonism, which he then compares, unfavourably, to other forms of skepticism:

> A Copernican or Ptolemaic, who supports each his different system of astronomy, may hope to produce a conviction, which will remain constant and durable, with his audience. A Stoic or Epicurean displays principles, which may not only be durable, but which have an effect on conduct and behaviour. But a Pyrrhonian cannot expect, that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind: Or if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge any thing, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence.[112]

Here, Hume essentially gives each form of skepticism[113] a moral character: A Stoic or Epicurean displays principles 'which have an effect on conduct and behaviour'; the philosophy of a Pyrrhonian, on the other hand, will never be beneficial to society. Hume's criticism of Pyrrhonism was so influential that his interpretation of it effectively became the standard explanation of Pyrrhonism in 'Western philosophy'.[114] Pyrrhonian skepticism and philosophical nihilism became virtually synonymous. Indeed, Hume seems to identify more with a 'mitigated' form of skepticism that once prevailed in Plato's Academy, often referred to as academic skepticism, than with the 'excessive' skepticism of Pyrrho. This distinction between excessive Pyrrhonian skepticism and mitigated academic skepticism appears to have little basis in reality, however, and Hume's idea of radical or extreme skepticism seems to have more in common with the kind Descartes describes in his first *Meditation* or the skepticism of Bayle than

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[111] Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) in Hume, *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (London 1777), pp. 159-160.
[112] *Hume*, *Enquiry*, pp. 159-160.
[113] The Stoics were in fact the main opponents of ancient skepticism.
[114] Kuzminski, *Pyrrhonism*, pp. 28-31.

with the kind of ancient Greek skepticism that is commonly attributed to Pyrrho of Elis, which makes one wonder whether Hume had a proper understanding of ancient Greek philosophy at all.[115]

While Hume had almost certainly read Sextus himself when he was writing the *Enquiry* in the 1740s, it is doubtful whether he had done so when he was still composing the earlier *Treatise*.[116] At the same time, Hume does cite Pyrrho of Elis in his early memoranda, suggesting that he must at least have known about Pyrrho since 1731 at the latest, well before he began working on the *Treatise*.[117] He would also almost certainly have read Bayle's lengthy article on Pyrrho in the *Dictionary*, which states that 'the art of disputing about all things and always suspending one's judgment is most commonly called 'Pyrrhonism."[118] Exactly how familiar Hume was with Sextus' original texts in the early 1730s is still something of a mystery, however. Richard Popkin, who as a student in the 1940s was the first to point out Hume's debt to Sextus Empiricus, suggests Fabricius' 1718 *Opera Graece et Latine* as the most likely source for Hume's early familiarity with Sextus.[119] Besides Fabricius' text, which became the basis for nearly every other subsequent edition of Sextus, Hume also had access to other books on Pyrrhonism, such as the Swiss mathematician Claude Huart's translation of Sextus *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Thomas Stanley's *History of Philosophy*, which included both biographies of the ancient Pyrrhonian philosophers and an English translation of Sextus' *Outlines*, and possibly Hervet's edition of *Adversus Mathematicos* (1569).[120]

Another explanation is that Hume may have attempted to understand Sextus' original texts before he published the *Treatise*, but that he was simply too insecure about his understanding of Greek to cite Sextus. In his autobiography he writes:

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[115] Peter Loptson, 'Hume and Ancient Philosophy', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20 (4) (2012), p. 756; Peter Fosl points out that in both the second *Enquiry* and the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* Hume was citing from the then-outdated Chouet brothers edition of Sextus (1621), which suggests that Hume was not citing from Sextus' texts themselves, see: Peter S. Fosl 'Skepticism and the Possibility of Nature', in *Pyrrhonism in Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Diego E. Machuca (Dordrecht/Heidelberg/London/New York 2011).

[116] Julia Annas argues that while Hume did indeed read Sextus subsequently, he had probably not yet done so when he published his *Treatise*, see: Julia, Annas 'Hume and Ancient Scepticism', in *Ancient Scepticism and the Sceptical Tradition,* ed. Juha Sihvola (Acta Philosophica Fennica, vol. 66 (Helsinki 2000)), p. 271.

[117] See: Mossner, 'Hume's Early Memoranda', p. 497.

[118] Bayle, *Dictionary*, p. 194.

[119] Richard Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (Indianapolis 1993), p. 139.

[120] Fosl, 'Skepticism and the Possibility of Nature', p. 148.

> In 1742 , I print at Edinburgh, the first part of my Essays. The work was favorably received, and soon made me entirely forget my former disappointment.[121] I continued with my mother and brother in the country, and in that time recovered the knowledge of the Greek language, which I had too much neglected in my early youth.[122]

It is not unconceivable and even likely that Hume used the time spent at his family estate following the unfortunate publication of the *Treatise* to improve his knowledge of the Greek language. This would then allow him to better understand Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. Nevertheless, even then it is doubtful whether Hume ever acquired a proper understanding of Pyrrhonism at all. Committed modern-day Pyrrhonists like Kuzminski (2008) do certainly not seem to think he did.[123]

Although Hume never mentions Pyrrho, Sextus Empiricus, or Pyrrhonism explicitly in the *Treatise*, possibly because he thought his Greek was lacking, it is evident that he had by then already formed the basic notion of Pyrrhonism that he put forward more explicitly in his *Enquiry*. In the *Treatise*, Hume frequently mentions an 'extravagant' or 'total' skepticism, contrasting it with a more 'moderate' form of academic skepticism.[124] Moreover, in an abstract in which he reflects on the *Treatise* he states that 'Philosophy wou'd render us entirely Pyrrhonian, were not nature too strong for it,' confirming that he explicitly made the distinction between 'excessive' Pyrrhonian skepticism and 'mitigated' academic skepticism as early as 1740.[125]

Lastly, there are some remarkable philosophical similarities between Sextus' *Outlines* and Hume's *Treatise*.[126] The most obvious example of this is the so-called 'problem of induction', which Hume considered to be unsolvable. It has since become one of the fundamental questions within Western philosophy, and the one that Hume has become most famous for. The problem of induction concerns, as the name suggests, the justification for using inductive methods, where, to use Hume's own words, 'instances of which we have had no experience

[121] The *Treatise* 'fell dead-born from the press'.
[122] Hume, *My Own Life*, p. 2.
[123] See: Kuzminski, *Pyrrhonism*, pp. 28-7.
[124] Hume, *Treatise*, pp. 183-184, 214, 228, 268, 272,
[125] Hume, *An Abstract of a late Philosophical Performance, entitled A Treatise of Human Nature, &c. Wherein the chief Arguraent and Design of the Book, which has met with such Opposition, and been represented in so terrifying a Light, is further illustrated and explain'd (*London 1740).
[126] See: Jan Palkoska, 'Are Humean Beliefs Pyrrhonian Appearances? Hume's Critique of Pyrrhonism Revisited', *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 10 (2) (2012), pp. 183-98.

resemble those of which we have had experience'.[127] It is, in other words, a problem concerning causality. For example, we expect the Sun to rise tomorrow, but we cannot really know that. And yet we assume it will because our past experience has been that the Sun rises every day. Hume argues that this assumption is not based on reason, but on the natural human instincts: 'Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel'.[128] The paradox is that our causal beliefs, which are based solely on custom and experience, are actually the only beliefs that are reliable.

And yet, despite his strong association with the problem of induction in Western philosophy,[129] it was not Hume but Sextus who first formulated it. In the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* he states:

> It is also easy, I think, to dispose of their [the Dogmatist's] method of induction. They claim that the universal is established from the particulars by means of induction. If this is so, they will effect it by reviewing either all the particulars or only some of them. But if they review only some, their induction will be unreliable, since it is possible that some of the particulars omitted in the induction may contradict the universal.[130]

The difference between Hume's and Sextus' arguments lies in the fact that Hume comments on the circular reasoning of induction, whereas Sextus stresses the disparity between premises and conclusion instead. On the other hand, Hume may have lifted his argument from yet another argument by Sextus where the latter likewise argues against circular reasoning:[131]

> Those who profess to be able to judge the truth are bound to have a criterion of truth. Now, this criterion is either untested or tested. And if it is untested, how can it be trustworthy? No subject of dispute is without judging trustworthy. But if it is tested, then that which adjudges it is in turn either untested or tested. And if untested, it is

[127] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 89.
[128] Ibid., p. 183.
[129] The ancient Indian materialist school of Cārvāka posited the same problem.
[130] Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Book One, transl. Sanford G. Etheridge ed. Phillip P. Hallie, p. 105.
[131] For a more detailed discussion, see: Ruth Weintraub, 'What was Hume's Contribution to the Problem of Induction?', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 45 (181), pp. 460-470.

> untrustworthy, if tested, that which tests it is again either tested or not tested, and so on *ad infinitum*.[132]

Indeed, following Popkin, some philosophers argue that despite his apparent attack on Pyrrhonism in the *Enquiry*, Hume's skeptical arguments in Book I of the *Treatise* actually come very close to the Pyrrhonism that Sextus sets out in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*.[133] Beckwith (2015) even considers Hume to be the early modern spiritual successor to Sextus Empiricus,[134] writing that 'Hume was strongly influenced by Late Pyrrhonism, including the ideas of Sextus Empiricus.' That seems to be something of an overstatement, however. Given the current evidence, it is virtually impossible to answer how familiar with Pyrrhonism Hume really was. It appears that he understood central ideas from Sextus' *Outlines* and incorporated them into his own philosophy, yet he managed to incorrectly interpret Pyrrhonism as fundamentally nihilistic, effectively tarnishing the reputation of Pyrrhonian skepticism for centuries to come. Peter Loptson (2012) suggests Hume was a lover of ancient literature, but actually held ancient philosophy in very low regard.[135] If correct, it appears that Hume never made a genuine effort to understand Sextus beyond the superficial level, yet unwittingly became something of a Pyrrhonian skeptic in the process.

This might also explain why Hume's metaphysics resemble that of Madhyamaka Buddhism. Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka are often so similar, both in their ideas and in their respective terminologies, that they seem almost synonymous.[136] The clearest example of this is how Pyrrhonism and Madhymaka share very similar views regarding the fundamental nature of reality. In the *Outlines*, Sextus states time upon time again his skeptical position: 'I assert nothing', 'I assert no position', 'I suspend judgement'.'[137] Indeed, one might say that this suspension of judgement is the central tenet of Pyrrhonism.[138] It bears a striking resemblance to Nāgārjuna's 'thesislessness', a position that

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[132] Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, Book One, transl. Sanford G. Etheridge, ed. Phillip P. Hallie, p. 145-146.
[133] See: Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*; Palkoska, 'Are Humean Beliefs Pyrrhonian Appearances?', pp. 183-98.
[134] Beckwith, *Greek Buddha*, p. 166.
[135] Loptson, 'Hume and Ancient Philosophy', pp. 741-772.
[136] Garfield, 'Epoche and śūnyatā: Skepticism East and West', *Philosophy East and West* 40 (3) (1990), pp. 285-307.; McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, pp. 800-871, Georges Dreyfus, 'Madhyamaka and Classical Greek Skepticism', in The Cowherds, *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy* (New York 2011), pp. 1-21.
[137] Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines*, p. 33-4, 37, 41, 41-2, 54, 65, 72-3, 77, 82, 85, 89, 96, 109-10.
[138] Note: In Book I of the *Treatise* Hume mentions 'total suspense of judgement', see: Hume, *Treatise*, p. 184.

has often been criticised as contradictory by other schools of Buddhism.[139] When Nāgārjuna refuted the idea that 'things' have real essences, his opponents pointed out that he could only make that argument by relating it to some kind of independent standard or reality, which would in turn contradict his own argument. His opponents said that if everything is indeed empty of essence, as Nāgārjuna claimed, no 'things' could be said to exist at all, not even Buddhism itself. Nāgārjuna's infamous answer was that if he had a thesis, his opponents would be right, but since he does not have a thesis, he cannot contradict himself.[140]

While this might seem like a convenient way to get out of a dificult argument, the Madhyamakas say that although the way we perceive 'things' may be deeply incoherent, it makes no sense to attempt to think about how things really are, because we cannot form an idea about reality beyond our own ability to perceive it. Rather than being nihilistic, for the Madhymaka this realisation is liberating: since it makes no sense to think about how things really are, we should be content with how we perceive them, use common sense, and attempt to untangle the inconsistencies in our minds.[141]

Madhyamaka schools disagree on how Nāgārjuna's paradox should be interpreted,[142] but the realisation that we cannot (yet) make statements about how things really are is shared by the Pyrrhonian skeptics. When Sextus explains how the skeptic should live his skepticism he states:[143]

> . . .The question is whether it is in reality as it appears to be. Now, we cannot be entirely inactive when it comes to the observances of everyday life. Therefore, while living undogmatically, we pay due regard to appearances. This observance of the requirements of daily life seems to be fourfold, with the following particular heads: the guidance of nature, the compulsion of the feelings, the tradition of

[139] Dreyfus, 'Madhyamaka and Classical Greek Skepticism', p. 2.
[140] Garfield, 'Nāgārjuna Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way) Chapter 24: Examination of the Four Noble Truths', in eds. William Edelglass, Jay Garfield, *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential readings* (Cary, NC 2009), pp. 26-34.
[141] Dreyfus, 'Madhyamaka and Classical Greek Skepticism', p. 19.
[142] Note: these are post-sixth-century Tibetan schools. The Prāsangika school, following commentators such as Buddhapālita, Candrakīrti, and Tsongkhapa asserts that we cannot make statements with regards to the ultimate truth of reality. Bhāvyaviveka, the founder of the often criticised Śvātantrika school (by Tibetan commentators), argues that we have to to make such statements to solve Nāgārjuna's paradox. The latter Śvātantrika school is arguably closer to Greek academic skepticism than to Pyrrhonian skepticism.
[143] Dreyfus, 'Madhyamaka and Classical Greek Skepticism', p. 10.

> laws and customs, and the instruction of the arts. It is by the guidance of nature that we are naturally capable of sensation and thought. It is by the compulsion of the feelings that hunger leads us to food and thirst leads us to drink. It is by virtue of the tradition of laws and customs that in everyday life we accept piety as good and impiety as evil. And it is by virtue of the instruction of the arts we are not inactive in those arts we employ. All these statements, however, we make without prejudice.[144]

Rather than being nihilistic, for both the Madhyamaka and the Pyrrhonian skeptic their skepticism is positive, undogmatic, and above all, liberating. They feel no need to confirm or deny how things really are, do not attach themselves to things that are non-evident, and are content to live their lives as it comes to them.[145] Skepticism thus becomes a weapon against dogmatic beliefs, a means to achieve a life free of worry, and, ultimately, a way to attain state of mental tranquility (*ataraxia*). Hence, McEvilley concludes that 'it is hard to identify any significant difference between either the methods or the stated purposes of Pyrrhonist and Madhyamika dialectic.'[146]

Aside from the doctrinal overlap between Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism, McEvilley also notes several parallels in their respective terminologies. For example, the Greek term *adiaphora*, 'non-different from one another', is very similar to the Sanskrit *laks·an·a-s´u-nya*, 'empty of distinguishing marks', whereas *astathmeta*, 'unstable or without fixed essence,' is analogous to the Sanskrit *anitya*, 'impermanent' or 'without self-nature' The Greek term *anepikrita*, 'unable to be grasped by concepts', also has several parallels in Buddhism, such as *avya-kr.ta* (indeterminable), *anabhilapya* (inexpressible), and *atarka-vacara* (beyond logical argument).[147] At the same time, McEvilley (2002) questions the idea that there ever was a direct exchange of terms and ideas between Madhyamakas and Greek skepticism, and not without reason.

The fundamental problem with any attempt to study early Pyrrhonism is that while the later Pyrrhonists such as Sextus regarded Pyrrho as the founder of their school, we know almost nothing about Pyrrho's life. Sextus only mentions Pyrrho in passing, and earlier sources are either fragmentary or unreliable. His

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[144] Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines*, p. 40.
[145] Dreyfus, 'Madhyamaka and Classical Greek Skepticism', pp. 19-20; Kuzminski, *Pyrrhonism*, p. 26.
[146] McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, p. 864.
[147] McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, p. 805.

pupil Timon of Phlius (c. 320 BC – c. 230 BC), a celebrated composer of satirical poems, recorded the doctrines of Pyrrho, but unfortunately, nearly all of Timon's works are lost. The most valuable surviving record of Timon's philosophy is a much later text by Aristocles of Messene (late 1st c. BC), a follower of the Peripatetic school of philosophy who wrote down a summary of early Pyrrhonian doctrines. Other than that, the only other major early source is Antigonus of Carystus (3rd century BC), a Greek writer who often gets cited by our most important source of biographical information on Pyrrho, the third-century biographer Diogenes Laertius. Alas, Antigonus seems to have been working from an older Greek tradition where writing biographies and spreading sensationalist gossip are often two sides of the same coin. While much of his information on Pyrrho may well be accurate, his overall reliability as a source is questionable at best.[148]

So what do we know about Pyrrho's life? He appears to have been a poor and unknown painter who came under the influence of the philosopher Anaxarchus of Abdera. He then became a loyal follower of Anaxarchus, eventually accompanying him on Alexander the Great's expedition to India. In India, Pyrrho is reported to have encountered the so-called *gymnosophists*, 'naked philosophers' or 'naked wise men'. According to the third-century biographer Diogenes Laertius, this encounter 'led him to adopt a most noble philosophy . . . taking the form of agnosticism and suspension of judgement. He denied that anything was honourable or dishonourable, just or unjust. And so, universally, he held that there is nothing really existent, but custom and convention govern human action; for no single thing is in itself any more this than that.'[149] After his return to Greece, Pyrrho brought back with him the philosophy of these *gymnosophists* and became a celebrated ascetic, attracting numerous followers, Timon of Phlius being the most famous among them. They called themselves Pyrrhonians after the name of their teacher. Diogenes also reports that Pyrrho was so respected by his native city of Elis that he was made high priest, and that from then on the city exempted philosophers from taxation, whereas Athens apparently rewarded Pyrrho with citizenship for having slain the Thracian Cotys.[150] Indeed, it appears that Pyrrho did achieve a certain level of fame during his own lifetime, as the second-century Greek travel writer Pausanias

[148] Richard Bett, *Pyrrho, His Antecedents and His Legacy* (New York 2000), pp. 1-13.
[149] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, transl. Robert Drew Hicks (London 1925), Book IX, 61.
[150] Ibid., Book IX, 64-5.

remarks (6.24.5) seeing a statue of Pyrrho in Elis.[151]

The most crucial piece of information in Diogenes' account, is, of course, Pyrrho's reported encounter with the *gymnosophists*. Assuming that the encounter did in fact take place and that these 'naked wise men' were Buddhists, Pyrrho may indeed have introduced Buddhism to Greece, or at least his interpretation of it. Such an encounter would certainly not be unique. At least one of the *gymnosophists*, who was known as Kalanos to the Greeks, accompanied Alexander to Persis, where he ultimately committed suicide by self-immolation. This must have made quite an impression on the Greeks, because the self-immolation of Kalanos was recorded by several authors, including eyewitnesses, and reported by numerous later Greek and Roman authors, including Strabo, Diodorus, Cicero, Athenaeus, Aelian, and Curtius Rufus.[152] Remarkably, a letter by Kalanos to Alexander was also preserved by the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC – c. 50 AD), who describes Kalanos as being Indian by birth.[153] Of course, one cannot immediately assume that the letter is genuine, but since Philo is not known to have invented his sources, it does give credence to the story of Kalanos' self-immolation.

Although the *gymnosophists* have been reported in ancient sources as hailing from India, their identity has long been something of a mystery in Western scholarship. They have variously been identified as Jains, Brahmins, Buddhists, or followers of Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta, an Indian ascetic teacher who was a contemporary of Shakyamuni Buddha.[154] Based on a combination of historical and archaeological evidence, however, Georgios Halkias (2015) has more recently argued that the *gymnosophists* Alexander's expedition encountered in Gandhāra[155] were likely Buddhists.[156] According to Halkias, the claim that the *gymnosophists* were Jains is not corroborated by any archaeological evidence, as there are no signs indicating a Jain presence in Gandhāra or the surrounding areas.[157] Moreover, the Jain doctrine of nonviolence forbids them from handling fire, for fire is likely to harm or kill any surrounding insects. This makes it

[151] Pausanias, *Pausanias' Description of Greece*, Vol. 4, ed. transl. J.G. Frazer (New York 2012), p. 104.
[152] Bezalel Bar-Kochva, *The Image of the Jews in Greek Literature: The Hellenistic Period* (Berkeley 2010), pp. 60-61.
[153] Bar-Kochva, *The Image of the Jews*, p. 61.
[154] Evrard Flintoff, 'Pyrrho and India', *Phronesis* 25 (1), pp. 88-108.
[155] An ancient Indian kingdom in the northwestern region of modern-day Pakistan.
[156] Georgios Halkias, 'The Self-immolation of Kalanos and other Luminous Encounters Among Greeks and Indian Buddhists in the Hellenistic World', *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 8 (2015), pp. 163-168.
[157] Halkias, 'The Self-immolation of Kalanos', p. 166.

extremely unlikely that at least Kalanos, who is widely reported to have killed himself by self-immolation, was a Jain. In contrast, Buddhism has a longstanding tradition of ritualistic preoccupation with fire, cremation and self-immolation.

Halkias also doubts the idea that Kalanos was a follower of Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta. While Sañjaya encouraged skepticism, he did not share the ultimate Buddhist and Pyrrhonian goal of mental tranquility. Both Helkias and Kuzminski (2008) suggest that Sañjaya's use of fourfold negation (*catuṣkoṭi*), a logical argument which several centuries later became particularly associated with Madhyamaka school and closely parallels Pyrrhonism's *tetralemma*, was already widely employed by early Buddhists, and possibly by other Indian philosophical schools as well.[158]

Finally, while the great Gandhāran capital city Takshashila was a major center of both Hinduism and early Buddhism, Helkias doubts that Kalanos was a Hindu. As the Greeks came into contact with Indian ascetics, they eventually distinguished between the powerful *brachmanes*, and the *sarmanai*, wandering ascetics who, unlike the *brachmanes* did not tend to serve the interests of the ruling class.[159] Nearchos, Alexander's admiral and according to Helkias a reliable historian as well as the first to point out the *brachmanes*/non-*brachmanes* distiction, states that Kalanos belonged to the 'non-*brachmanes*'. Nearchos' statement and Kalanos' apparent reasons for serving Alexander[160] seem to suggest that Kalanos would have belonged to the *sarmanai* under the later Greek *brachmanes/sarmanai* division.[161] In short, while we cannot know for sure whether the *gymnosophists* Pyrrho reportedly encountered in India were Buddhists given the lack of concrete evidence, it is at least highly plausible.

If Pyrrho did come into contact with the *gymnosophists* like Diogenes Laertius claims, there is, of course, still the problem of communication. Since Greeks were highly dismissive of any languages other than Greek, Bett (2003) concludes that it is unlikely that there would have been any significant exchange of philosophical ideas between Greeks and Indians.[162] Bett certainly has a point, but at the same time it is important not to fall into the trap of making sweeping generalisations. Kingsley (1995), critical of such generalising statements by

[158] Ibid., p. 168; Kuzminski, *Pyrrhonism*, p. 45.
[159] Ibid., p. 169; Beckwith, *Greek Buddha*, pp. 102-104.
[160] Provision for the welfare of his children.
[161] Halkias, 'The Self-immolation of Kalanos', p. 172.
[162] Bett, *Pyrrho*, pp. 176-178.

classicists, states that while ancient Greeks did not maintain formal schools for language translation, Greeks did learn foreign languages on an ad hoc basis.[163] Pyrrho spent three years in Bactria and nearly two years in India, enough time to pick up a foreign language.[164]

Nevertheless, there are more problems still, and those problems concern interpretation. Since we we cannot simply assume that the early Pyrrhonism of Pyrrho and Timon of Phlius was the same as the Pyrrhonism set out by Sextus in the *Outlines*—Pyrrho had been dead for over four centuries when Sextus was alive—we have to rely on older, more incomplete sources. As mentioned before, the only other reliable source on Pyrrho's philosophy is a text by Aristocles in which he provides a summary of the philosophical ideas of Timon of Phlius. According to Aristocles' account, Timon states that in order to reach a state of happiness, one has to focus on three related questions: First of all, what is the nature of things? Second, depending on the answer to the first question, what should our attitude towards these things be? And finally, what will happen if we adopt, *adiaphora*, *astathmeta*, and *anepikrita*, the answers recommended by Pyrrho and Timon?[165]

The initial question 'what is the nature of things'? Is especially problematic because it can be interpreted in two very different ways. If the nature of things is *adiaphora*, 'non-different from one another', *astathmeta*, 'unstable or without fixed essence,' and *anepikrita*, 'unable to be grasped by concepts', does that mean they are as such in their very nature? Are things inherently undeterminable? Or does it mean that humans are simply incapable of determining the nature of things because of our limited sensory capabilities? The first interpretation would almost certainly have been condemned by Sextus as a form of dogmatism, whereas the second interpretation can be seen as related to the late Pyrrhonism of Sextus, although even here there is still some distance between the two. After all, saying that we are unable to determine the nature of things (Pyrrho/Timon) is different from saying that we have thus far been unable to determine the nature of things (Sextus). At the same time, it is important to remember that both interpretations still promise the same result:

[163] Peter Kingley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford 1995), p. 195.
[164] Halkias, 'The Self-immolation of Kalanos', p. 165.
[165] Bett, *Pyrrho*, pp. 14-36.

ataraxia or tranquility.[166]

Similarly to how the connection between Pyrrho and Sextus is difficult to reconstruct, the study of early Buddhism is problematic because the earliest texts date from the first century AD. These include the Gandhāran Buddhist texts and the much more well-known Pali Canon, which still forms the standard collection of scripture in the Theravada tradition. Rather than the word of Shakyamuna Buddha himself, these texts are the preserved teachings of a long succession of Buddhist teachers.[167] Undoubtedly, these teachings reflect the Buddha's original teachings at its core, but at the same time it is nearly impossible to accurately reconstruct early Gandhāran Buddhism from the Hellenistic period. One crucial difference between early Buddhism and early Pyrrhonism is that Buddhism was continually kept alive by a succession of Buddhist teachers, whereas, contrary to what Diogenes claims, Pyrrhonism seems to have disappeared until it was refounded by a certain Aenesidemus of Knossos in the first century B.C.[168]

Taking into account all the available evidence, as well as the serious issues that plague the hypothesis of a direct transfer of Buddhist ideas from India to Greece, it is once again impossible to determine with any degree of certainty whether Hume was influenced by Buddhist ideas, whether it be with or without his knowledge. Hume was clearly familiar with Sextus at a superficial level at least, and the philosophical convergence between late Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka is undeniable, but the historical evidence is scarce and full of uncertainties. Beckwith seems to accept Diogenes Laertius' account as fact, which is an untenable position. That does not mean Buddhism did not make its way to Greece—there was significant exchange of culture, architecture, and religion between India and the Hellenistic successor states after all—but to make that claim requires additional evidence. The only explicit historical source at this point in time is Diogenes Laertius' questionable biography of Pyrrho, written centuries after the latter's death.

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[166] Svavar Hrafn Svavarson, 'The Pyrrhonian Idea of a Good Life', in eds. Øyvind Rabbås, Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, Hallvard Fossheim, Miira Tuominen *The Quest for the Good Life: Ancient Philosophers on Happiness*, pp. 199-200.

[167] Robert Grombrich believes the Pali Canon must have been the word of a single person: Shakyamuni Buddha, see : Richard F. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism* (London 2006), p. 20.

[168] Svavarson, 'The Pyrrhonian Idea of a Good Life', p. 202.

Conclusion

The notion that Hume was somehow influenced by Buddhist ideas when he composed his *Treatise of Human Nature* is not a new one. For decades, philosophers, Buddhist scholars, psychologists, and others have noted the striking similarities between Humean and Buddhist philosophy on substance and the personal self. The parallels with Madhyamaka are particularly strong, and will likely continue to fascinate philosophers for decades to come. Of course, philosophical convergence alone is not enough evidence for Buddhist influence, which encouraged Alison Gopnik to find additional historical evidence. Gopnik's research on the Jesuit College of La Flèche shows that Hume may indeed have been in a position to absorb Buddhist ideas from La Flèche's learned Jesuit ex-missionaries firsthand, some of whom had travelled to Siam, India, and even remote Tibet.

At the same time, the circumstances surrounding the writing of the *Treatise* are so vague, and Gopnik's assumptions so specific, that with each successive assumption the likelihood that Hume learned about Buddhism firsthand decreases rapidly. We simply do not know what Hume's interactions with the Jesuits were like, other than that he claims to have discussed miracles once. Nor do we know how frequent such interactions were, or whether he spoke to the old and learned Father Charles Francois Dolu, an ex-missionary to Siam who may have received accurate information on Tibetan Buddhism from his Italian colleague Ippolito Desideri, although, again, this is far from certain.

Although Hume never mentions Buddhism in his writings, the *Treatise* was indebted to Pierre Bayle's massive *Dictionary*. Through the *Dictionary's* Spinoza and Japan entries, Hume may in fact have learned about Bayle's interpretation of Buddhist philosophy, which were in turn based on older Jesuit interpretations on Buddhism, primarily from Japan. However, Bayle relied on flawed Jesuit sources, and his attempt to connect 'ancient, virtuous Asian sects' to Spinozism reflects the rising 'threat of atheism' in Western Europe around the turn of the eighteenth century more than anything else. Moreover, it is uncertain whether Hume was familiar with the second 1702 edition, which included the newly added texts on Japan and the 'Sect of Foe', or just the 1697 edition that did not yet include them.

Finally, the fact that Hume was at least somewhat familiar with Sextus'

Empiricus *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* suggests that he may have been studying early Buddhist ideas that were imported to Greece and reinvented by Pyrrho and his followers; but again, this reading of Hume suffers from a great deal of uncertainty, not just because we are unsure precisely how familiar with Pyrrhonian skepticism Hume was, but also because the connection between early Pyrrhonism and the late Pyrrhonism of Sextus is shrouded in uncertainty. It is far from evident that Pyrrhonism was an import from India to Greece, complicated by an overall lack of reliable sources and by the fact that there are no Buddhist texts from as early as the third century B.C. Nevertheless, the apparent similarities between Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka Buddhism in particular are striking, and subsequent comparative research will undoubtedly shed more light on the exchange of ideas between Indian and Greek philosophers.

It was never the aim of this study to either prove or disprove the possible influence of Buddhism on David Hume. There is simply too little available evidence to make any such claims in certain terms. Rather, it aimed to combine historical analysis with philosophical analysis, incorporate Gopnik's findings into the debate, and discuss the claims of Kuzminski (2008) and Beckwith (2015) that Hume learned about Buddhist indirectly through Sextus Empiricus. It should therefore primarily be seen as an exercise in comparative analysis, where seemingly different ideas separated by vast distances of time and space may in fact share mutual connections, and may even end up influencing one another at different times in history in different places. Such an approach is certainly not guaranteed to be fruitful, but it does provide a fresh, and, when provided with enough evidence, potentially groundbreaking way to look at the history of ideas.

Recent research on the Western European discovery of Sino-Japanese Zen Buddhism by Urs Arpp, Thierry Meynard, and others has already revealed how flawed, much older Jesuit texts managed to inform popular intellectual opinion in late seventeenth and eighteenth century Western Europe. This discovery of Buddhism, as well as the rediscovery of Pyrrhonism during the early modern period reinforced a gradually emerging wave of skepticism that captured the hearts and minds of radical intellectuals like Pierre Bayle and others. Hume would soon follow in their footsteps.

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