



# Hume and the Enlightenment

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## **A Modern Malignant Demon? Hume's Scepticism with Regard to Reason (Partly) Vindicated**

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Despite the fact that many Hume scholars now think that Hume is a kind of naturalist and agree that he thinks that his philosophy is continuous with the sciences of the mind, they ignore much of the evidence that bears on his claims. I discuss Hume's argument in the section of the *Treatise* titled 'Of Scepticism with Regard to Reason'. I take him to be arguing there against aspects of Cartesianism, in particular the claim that one can be certain that one is right about some very simple mathematical or logical beliefs. I argue that his view is vindicated to a surprising degree by some recent research on the family of cognitive deficits called 'acalculia'. Acalculics can have false beliefs about even very simple arithmetical propositions. At the same time, they can be convinced that their claims are obviously true. They are not insane. Their case constitutes a modern malignant demon. My paper follows up arguments I put in an earlier paper on Hume: 'Is Induction Epistemologically Prior to Deduction?' (*Ratio*, 17, 2004: 28-44).