

# Kaila's Reception of Hume

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## 1 Introduction

Georg Henrik von Wright writes in his autobiography:

“In the spring term and summer of 1938, I read the classics of my topic, mainly Francis Bacon and David Hume, later also Jevons, Venn, Mill and Whewell” (Wright 2001, p. 69-70).<sup>1</sup>

The topic about which von Wright is talking here is the subject matter of his doctoral dissertation: “the logic and philosophy of inductive inference and the concept of probability”. He tells that it was his Professor and relative Eino Kaila who had steered his studies to this path. (Ibid. p. 71) Later Kaila suggested a comparison between Galileian and Aristotelian science but he did not hesitate agreeing when von Wright wanted to return to the original topic (Ibid. p. 69).

This was a decisive moment in the history of Finnish philosophy. Von Wright made his dissertation about inductive logic, built connections to Cambridge, succeeded Wittgenstein as a Professor there and taught Jaakko Hintikka. The foundations of Finnish analytic philosophy, which dominated philosophy in Finland from the 1950's up to the 1990's, were laid.

The topic of von Wright's dissertation was already then know as “Hume's problem” (Kaila 1938, p. 17). It was in the same year, 1938, when von Wright was reading the classics of the topic, including Hume, that the Finnish major publishing house Werner Söderström brought out Kaila's translation of Hume's *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*.<sup>2</sup> It bears the Finnish title *Tutkimus*

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1 “Vårterminen och sommaren 1938 läste jag mitt ämnes klassiker, närmast Francis Bacon and David Hume, sedan också Jevons, Venn, Mill och Whewell”. All the translations from Swedish or Finnish into English are done by the author.

2 Henceforth “first Enquiry”. The first Enquiry appeared in print in 1748. Its original title was *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*. Hume changed the title in a 1758 edition.

inhimillisestä ymmärryksestä. Most likely, von Wright read the first Enquiry while studying Hume as the most developed discussion of induction by Hume is in that work. At this point of his life, von Wright was able to read philosophy in English (Wright 2001, p. 71). So he could have read Hume's original, but it is quite a coincidence that Kaila's translation appeared precisely at the same time. I am not suggesting that von Wright was behind Kaila's translation. Still it and Kaila's understanding of Hume must have had an impact on the young student although von Wright's mother tongue was Swedish (he knew Finnish). Both Kaila and von Wright were much occupied with Hume then. As such, Kaila's translation and interpretation have influenced the history of Finnish philosophy, indirectly at least. Hence, Kaila's understanding of Hume has some importance for the historiography of Finnish philosophy.

In this paper, I will make seven remarks about Kaila's reception of Hume. I will begin with the translation and then proceed to psychologism, perceptual atomism, mechanist associationism, causal and inductive principles, and methodological monism. Finally, I will summarise the correctness of Kaila's interpretation of Hume in the concluding remark.

## **2 Kaila's Translation of the first Enquiry**

Apparently, Kaila did not really know English. As far as I know, he did not write philosophy in English at all. Instead, his knowledge of German, French and Swedish was fluent. So Kaila must have used heavily some German or French translation or translations of the first Enquiry while transposing it into Finnish. I am not suggesting that he did not have the English original in front of himself when translating but he had to get help from the translation(s) in the language(s) he knew well.

Unfortunately, Kaila does not say anything about this or refer to any other translation or commentary in *Tutkimus inhimillisestä ymmärryksestä*.

It is not therefore surprising that Kaila's translation is not very accurate. For example, Kaila does not take into account textual variants. It is also quite old so it does not really match the present

standards in exactness and Finnish.<sup>3</sup> But it is not hopeless either. So it can be still used as a basic Finnish introduction to Hume. Needless to say, philosophers and scholars have to use the English original.

For his translation, Kaila wrote a 30-page introduction. In contrast with the translation, the introduction still has some philosophical and scholarly value as I will show below. It consists of four sections. First Kaila tells a very brief story about Hume the man. He mostly circulates the old clichés that Hume was a precocious philosopher and his primary interest was to become famous, not a first-rate philosopher (Kaila 1938, p. 8-9). So the still interesting stuff in the introduction occurs in the last three sections. Sections 2 and 3 are devoted to the both interpretative and critical discussion of causal and inductive principles (see below). In the last section, Kaila brings forward his own “phenomenology of causation” both praising and criticising Hume.

The introduction crystallizes Kaila's understanding of Hume after decades of reading him. That is the reason why I focus exclusively on it. It is also the most extensive discussion of Hume in Kaila's works although there is a quite detailed discussion in *Sielunelämä biologisena ilmiönä* (1920).<sup>4</sup> That work is earlier though and it does not contain anything about Hume that is not in the introduction to *Tutkimus inhimillisestä ymmärryksestä*.

### **3 Psychologism**

Notwithstanding his caricature view of Hume the man, Kaila is in general a balanced reader of Hume's philosophy. As will be seen below, he both criticises Hume sharply and defends him for the most simple-minded criticism. Yet there is one side of Hume's philosophy that Kaila just cannot stand. That is Hume's alleged psychologism. According to Kaila, Hume confuses epistemology and logic with psychology:

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3 A new Finnish translation of section 12 of the first Enquiry was published by Vastapaino in 2006 (Hume, D. *Esseitä*).

4 The title translated into English is *Mental Life as a Biological Phenomenon*.

"This work is perhaps the strangest production of the traditional English psychologising empiricism – this movement that supposes that also epistemological logical problems, questions of content, validity and warrant, can be solved by studying the psychological side of knowledge, its origin and development."<sup>5</sup> (1938, p. 12)

Kaila goes once so far as to accuse Hume of obscure thinking:

"Hume's psychologising, logical circumstances obscuring, way of thinking" (1938, p. 29)<sup>6</sup>.

If this is not enough, Kaila even thinks that Hume neglects logical analysis:

"Thus, Hume should ask as follows: what produces the habit to identify the real spatio-temporal relation of cause and effect with the formal, logical relation of reason and consequence?

Hume does not, and cannot proceed like this, for when he neglects logical analysis, he does not see that according to his definition, causation as "necessary connection" means identifying this relation with above-mentioned logical relation." (1938, p. 25)<sup>7</sup>

These are clearly over-statements from Kaila's side. They tell more about his own philosophical context than about Hume. In Kaila's time, philosophers had to fight for survival in the middle of the increasing number of special sciences that were taking the territory belonging traditionally to philosophy. When we return to Hume's philosophical context, we see that it is not fair to accuse him of confusing epistemology and logic, formal logic in particular, with psychology. In the first place, Hume

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5 "Tämä teos on klassillisen englantilaisen *psykologisoivan empirismin* ehkä merkkillisin tuote – tämän suunnan, joka arvelee, että myöskin tieto-opin *loogilliset* probleemmat, siis sisällys- ja pätevyys-kysymykset, voidaan ratkaista tutkimalla tiedon *psykologista* puolta, siis sen alkuperää ja kehitystä."

6 "Humen psykologisoivalle, loogillisia seikkoja hämärtävälle käsitystavalle"

7 "Humella olisi siis syytä kysyä näin: mistä johtuu taipumus samastaa syyn ja vaikutuksen reaalin ajallisaikallinen suhde perusteen ja seurauksen formaaliseen, loogillisen suhteen kanssa?"

Hume ei menettele eikä voi menetellä näin, sillä kun hän laiminlyö loogillisen analyysin, jää häneltä huomaamatta, että hänen antamansa määritelmän mukaan syyn ja vaikutuksen "välttämätön yhteys" tulee merkitsemään tämän suhteen samastamista mainitun loogillisen suhteen kanssa."

self-consciously rejects formal logic as useless:

"HERE is all the Logic I think proper to employ in my reasoning; and perhaps even this was not very necessary, but might have been supply'd by the natural principles of our understanding. Our scholastic head-pieces and logicians shew no such superiority above the mere vulgar in their reason and ability, as to give us any inclination to imitate them in delivering a long system of rules and precepts to direct our judgment, in philosophy. All the rules of this nature are very easy in their invention, but extremely difficult in their application; and even experimental philosophy, which seems the most natural and simple of any, requires the utmost stretch of human judgment." (T 1.3.15.11)

Secondly, Hume does not neglect analysis, even if one could say anachronistically that he does not do logical analysis in some 20th-century meaning of the term. For one of the points of Hume's account of the understanding is that ideas should be analysed and their origin in impressions ought to be traced in order to detect meaningful and meaningless talk (e.g. EHU 7.4). As the theory of the understanding is logic for Hume (see previous quote), for him this is logical analysis. Besides, it would be odd to require the 20th-century logical analysis from Hume because the whole idea did not exist in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The most important point is, however, that Kaila misses the entire nature of Hume's logic (in Hume's sense of the term). For Hume, to use our vocabulary, epistemology or logic cannot be separated from psychology since they are intimately connected. Hume's logic is rather natural logic than formal logic. It is the account of the actual workings of the understanding rather than a formal theory. For example, Hume thinks that a causal reasoning, an inductive inference in our terms, is both a causal mental process (as an association) and an inference or argument (e.g. T 1.3.6.12). Hume might be wrong here, but most certainly he is not confused. From the 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy, it has been rather naturalism that have provided a fruitfull framework to understand Hume's logic (see Kemp-Smith 2005 and Garrett 1997).

## 4 Perceptual Atomism

Despite Kaila's misguided accusation of psychologism, he has some insight into Hume's thinking in other respects. One of them is that Kaila tracks the fundamentals of Hume's account of the understanding to his view of sense perception. On Kaila's interpretation, Hume is a perceptual atomist:

"Hume sees the immediate experience from the point of view of "mosaic thesis": perceptual field is a collection of "loose and separate" (p. 108[EHU 7.26]) pieces, between which there is no other connection than conjunctions produced by habit without any original togetherness or separability of different degrees." (Kaila 1938, p. 28)<sup>8</sup>

In Hume's terms, this means that every perceptual field (visual, tactile, etc.) consists of simple impressions that are really distinct from each other. By his Copy Principle<sup>9</sup>, this concerns the copies of the perceptual fields that are ideas, too: there cannot be any metaphysical difference in the intrinsic features of impressions and corresponding ideas because of the exact similarity of their content. When Hume's Separability Principle and Conceivability Principle are added into this, it follows that there cannot be, indeed, any absolutely/metaphysically necessary connections either between simple impressions, which compose perceptual fields, or between their idea copies. The absolute/metaphysical modality is Hume's other type of modality together with the causal and it is bound by the law of contradiction. Absolute/metaphysical impossibilities entail a contradiction, whereas absolute/metaphysical contingencies do not.<sup>10</sup> (T 1.3.6.1; SBN 86–7, 1.3.6.5; SBN 89, 1.3.7.3; SBN 95, 1.3.9.10; SBN 111–12 and EHU 12.27-8; SBN 163–4) The Separability Principle states that real distinction entails separability (T App. 12; SBN 634) . Since simple impressions and ideas are really

8 "Hume katselee välitöntä kokemusta "mosaiikkiteesin" kannalta: elämyskenttä on keräymä "erillisiä ja irrallisia" (s. 108) palasia, joiden välillä ei ole muuta yhteyttä kuin totumuksen vähitellen synnyttämiä "kytkeymiä" (conjunctions [sic!]), vailla mitään alkuperäistä eriasteista yhteenkuuluvaisuutta tai -kuulumattomuutta."

9 Every simple idea resembles and is at least partly caused by a simple impression (T 1.1.1.7).

10 In contrast with many metaphysicians nowadays, Hume thus runs absolute and logical and hence metaphysical modalities together (T 1.3.3.2-3; SBN 79).

distinct from each other (T 1.4.5.5; SBN 233), they are thus separately conceivable. According to the Conceivability Principle, in turn, conceivability entails absolute/metaphysical possibility (T 1.4.5.5; SBN 233) . Hence, simple impressions and ideas are not only separately conceivable; it is also absolutely/metaphysically possible that they exist separately, i.e. without each other. Now, if A and B are absolutely/metaphysically necessarily connected to each other, neither A nor B can exist without the other in terms of absolute/metaphysical modality. Thus, there cannot be absolutely/metaphysically necessary connections between simple impressions and ideas. (T App. 12 and 20) Kaila is right. As I have argued elsewhere (Hakkarainen 2011, 204-7), Hume is, indeed, a perceptual atomist.

One of Kaila's main criticism of Hume is based precisely on this point. As a Gestalt psychologist endorsing rather a holist than atomist theory of perception, Kaila does not and cannot accept Hume's perceptual atomism. However, regardless who is right or wrong here, Kaila does not seem to realise that as well as his own view, Hume grounds his account in the best theory of the psychology of perception of the time. For Kaila, that is Gestalt psychology – for Hume it is Berkeley's theory of vision (Frasca-Spada 1998, 26 and 38, and Garrett 1997, 61).<sup>11</sup> So it seems that Kaila did not know John Laird's Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature that argues for Hume's debt to Berkeley in this respect already in 1932 (p. 68-9).

## **5 Mechanist Associationism**

Connected to perceptual atomism, Kaila thinks that

“[...]Hume is one of the most extreme representatives of mechanist association psychology.”<sup>12</sup>

(Kaila 1938, p. 27)

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11 For some reason, Hume does not refer to Berkeley when he advances his perceptual atomism. A copy of Berkeley's An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision (1709) that Hume most likely owned was recently found at the library of Ontago University in New Zealand (Anstey 2011).

12 “[...]Hume on eräs mekanistisen assosiaatipsykologian jyrkimpiä edustajia.”

By the attribute “mechanist”, Kaila means that the pieces of the mosaic, the really distinct simple impressions and ideas are not inherently intentional. If they were inherently intentional, they would suggest each other in their content. As they do not, the only thing that connects them is “blind” association that works on custom and habit. This connection is only conjunction in space or time, not absolutely necessary connection, which would make it absolutely necessary that if one occurs, another will be there, too. In a word, certain simple impressions and ideas are merely learned to be associated with each other – there is nothing in themselves that even suggests, not to speak necessitates others. (Kaila 1938, p. 27-31)

I think Kaila's view of Hume is exactly right here – if he is speaking about Hume of his first work *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) at least. In the Abstract of *Treatise* 1 and 2 (1739) that Hume published about a year later than them, he presents himself as a proud inventor of associationism:

“Thro’ this whole book, there are great pretensions to new discoveries in philosophy; but if any thing can intitle the author to so glorious a name as that of an *inventor*, ’tis the use he makes of the principle of the association of ideas, which enters into most of his philosophy.” (T Abstract Abs. 35)

I have made the full case for the same interpretation as Kaila elsewhere (Hakkarainen 2011, 204-7). Here it is sufficient to summarise the two main reasons for it and to point out the passages where the clearest textual evidence for this interpretation may be found. In the first place, Hume thinks that the simple impressions and ideas of the five senses are qualitatively simple. In themselves, they are nothing but instances of the properties perceived by only one of the five senses, i.e. “proper sensibles”: colours, tactile qualities (hardness, temperature, etc.), sounds, smells, tastes. (T 1.2.3.13-16; SBN 38–9) As such they do not necessitate other simple impressions or ideas; colours do not necessitate sounds, for example. They are connected merely by association (T 1.1.4.1). Secondly, there is nothing in the simple impressions and ideas themselves that would even suggest other simple impressions or ideas (EHU 7.8; SBN 63; see also T 1.3.6.10; SBN 91). Associating them is only learned after repeated perception of certain kind of impressions occurring together in space or time (T 1.3.14.16 and EHU 7.27-8).



There is one possible misunderstanding that I must point out here. That Hume is a representative of mechanist, blind associationism does not imply that the mind is completely passive by his lights. The passivity view could be outlined very briefly as follows. The mind does not play any active role in association. Rather, it is a passive recipient of impressions and ideas because it is composed by their mechanist, blind associations (Hume's bundle view of the mind in T 1.4.6). However, this overlooks the point that Hume emphasises the activity of the mind, the memory in particular, in the associations that compose personal identity, i.e. the cross-temporal identity of the mind:

“In this view, therefore, memory does not so much *produce* as *discover* personal identity, by shewing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions.” (T 1.4.6.20; SBN 262)

Furthermore, Hume's own understanding of causation should be taken into account here. According to Hume's (in)famous two definitions of cause, impressions and ideas may work as causes (T 1.3.14.31; SBN 170 and EHU 7.29; SBN 76-7). To that extent, they can be said to be active. Since they are parts of some mind, the parts of minds may be active. Does not this make also the mind active in Hume's terms?

In the fourth section of his introduction, Kaila spends many pages for criticising Hume on mechanist, blind association (1938, 27-35). It is not necessary to go into the details of Kaila's criticism in this context because it stems from his own views rather than his reading of Hume. Suffice it to say that according to Kaila, experiences do suggest other experiences. As such, association is not mechanist and blind. Kaila emphasises, however, – rightly in my opinion – that Hume's critics should not make a hasty judgement from this. Even if experiences suggest each other, it does not mean that they are absolutely necessarily connected. So Hume's denial of absolutely necessarily connected simple impressions and ideas still stands.

## **6 Causal and Inductive Principles**

Even if Kaila's view on Hume's theory of the understanding is rather balanced, his understanding

of Hume's philosophy in general is narrow. He sees Hume as mostly occupied with philosophy of mind and epistemology, the problem of induction and causation in particular. It does not seem to have come to Kaila's mind that this is only one side of Hume's philosophy. Hume was not a narrow thinker focusing on those which are nowadays known as philosophy of mind and epistemology, which were account of the faculty of the understanding for him. He developed a systematic view of human nature ranging from metaphysics to history covering theory of the passions, morals, politics and criticism (aesthetics). Furthermore, the different parts of this systematic view are not totally separate from each other. Rather, they are intertwined. For instance, history provides the most extensive resource for the experience of human nature and the larger this experience the stronger the human understanding is according to Hume's account of it. For the understanding is partly generated by experience. (DNR 1.9 and EHU 9.5.n.20)

However, perhaps we should not blame Kaila too much for this. His narrow perspective to Hume reflects merely his general conception of philosophy. Von Wright tells in his autobiography that when he started studying philosophy with Kaila in 1934, philosophy was understood either as psychology or as epistemology and logic (2001, p. 54). In the light of Kaila's criticism of psychologism, he must have seen psychology as a distinct field from philosophy that was only still studied institutionally under the umbrella of the queen of the sciences. So for Kaila, philosophy was primarily epistemology and logic. For him, one of the main topics in them was induction and causation. Kaila's understanding of Hume on induction and causation was therefore central in his reception of Hume. Let me discuss it next. I will focus on causal and inductive principles.

Kaila thinks that Hume conflates three causal and inductive principles, two of which should be kept separate. The first of them is what Kaila calls "the principle of invariance"<sup>13</sup>. According to him, it states that "every change has a cause, which precedes the change according to a rule without exceptions." (1938, p. 13) In Hume's philosophical context, this causal principle, or at least its first part

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13 "lainmukaisuusperiaate"

that no change without a cause, was called the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). For historical accuracy, I will use this term.

According to Kaila, the PSR involves in its second part another principle that Hume scholars call the Uniformity Principle (UP) (Millican 2002, p. 110). It states that "future, in a sense, conforms to the past." (Kaila 1938, p. 13) Here Kaila follows Hume's use quite closely as they both also speak about similar causes similar effects principle (Ibid. and T 1.3.3.9). The idea is that causes that are similar to experienced causes will have effects that are similar to their experienced effects.

The third principle is actually a specific metaphysical view of causality. According to it, causal relations are absolutely/metaphysically necessary connections. This necessary connection is supposed to hold between a power in the cause and effect. The causal power is thus that entity or feature of the cause which grounds or explains the occurrence of the effect metaphysically. Recall that the absolute/metaphysical modality is Hume's other type of modality together with the causal and it is bound by the law of contradiction. That causality is absolutely/metaphysically necessary connection means thus that the following implication entails a contradiction (absolutely/metaphysically impossible): if the cause occurs, the effect does not occur. (T 1.3.14.13 and Kaila 1938, p. 23-4)

Kaila's contention that Hume conflates the PSR and causation as absolutely/metaphysically necessary connection is not correct. It is true that Hume discusses the latter in his discussion of necessary connection in EHU 7 and T 1.3.14. In T 1.3.14.1, he refers back to his discussion of the PSR. But that is not the whole story; Hume's topic in these sections is wider. He discusses the nature of causal necessity in general. So it concerns necessity in every intelligible causal principle.

Kaila is closer to the truth, however, when he says that Hume confuses the PSR with the UP. For Hume separates them only for the sake of the argument, or so he says:

“The next question, then, shou’d naturally be, *how experience gives rise to such a principle [PSR]? But as I find it will be more convenient to sink this question in the following, Why we conclude, that such particular causes must necessarily have such particular effects, and why we form*

*an inference from one to another?* we shall make that the subject of our future enquiry.” (T 1.3.3.9)

Accordingly, from this point onwards in the Treatise, Hume goes on to discuss the UP. It is a well-known problem in Hume scholarship that he does not really return to the PSR in the Treatise. So he seems to think that the PSR and UP are not totally separable in the end. But as I pointed out above, Kaila himself also thinks that the PSR and UP are not totally separate: the former involves the latter.

## **7 Methodological Monism**

Kaila was a strong defender of methodological monism: there is no substantial difference between the method of science and the method of human and social sciences. So it is not surprising that he finishes his introduction to *Tutkimus inhimillisestä ymmärryksestä* by praising Hume as a great champion of methodological monism:

“For that reason, it is equally impossible to “explain” mental things than it is natural events. In both cases, human knowledge is eventually only descriptive generalising of matters of fact. Hume understood this very well.”<sup>14</sup> (Kaila 1938, p. 36)

Kaila's view here is more or less correct when it is appreciated that Hume's distinction is not between science and human/social sciences but natural philosophy vs. moral philosophy. Natural philosophy studies nature, moral philosophy human nature. So physics belongs to natural philosophy and history to moral philosophy. In order to show this, it is sufficient to point out that the subtitle of the Treatise is “being An Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects”. As the introduction to this work shows, Hume's intention is precisely to extend the experimental method of natural philosophy into moral philosophy:

“AND as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation. 'Tis no

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<sup>14</sup> “Sen vuoksi ei henkisiin asioihin nähden “selittäminen” ole mahdollinen yhtään sen suuremmassa määrässä kuin

luonnontapahtumiin nähden, molemmissa tapauksissa on inhimillinen tieto lopultakin vain tosiasiallisuuksien yleistävää kuvailua. Tämän oli Hume syvällisellä tavalla käsittänyt.”

astonishing reflection to consider, that the application of experimental philosophy to moral subjects should come after that to natural at the distance of above a whole century; since we find in fact, that there was about the same interval betwixt the origins of these sciences; and that reckoning from THALES to SOCRATES, the space of time is nearly equal to that betwixt my LORD BACON and some late philosophers in *England*, who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing, and have engaged the attention, and excited the curiosity of the public.”(T into.7).

## 8 Concluding Remark

Every philosopher is the child of his or her time. No philosopher can step outside the framework of his philosophical context. When we thus judge Kaila's understanding of Hume's philosophy, we should take into account the philosophy of Kaila's time. We ought to try to understand Kaila as well as Hume.

So Kaila's reception of Hume must first go through this filter that frees it from the “vice” of psychologism and the conception of philosophy as epistemology and logic, in particular, as the zeitgeist of the philosophy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then it is possible to see that Kaila understood Hume's theory of the understanding quite well – reckoning that Kaila was not a Hume scholar. I am particularly impressed by Kaila's insight into the fundamental role that perceptual atomism plays in Hume's account of the understanding. Kaila has also a point when he says that Hume is a representative of mechanist associationism – so long as one does not exaggerate the passivity of the Humean mind and the point is limited to the Treatise. Kaila presents also good basic criticism of perceptual atomism and mechanist associationism. In addition, as was seen above, Kaila's discussion of causal and inductive principles is not bad. Therefore I think that these parts of Kaila's introduction to *Tutkimus inhimillisestä ymmärryksestä* can be still used a basic introduction to Hume on the understanding in Finnish.

This brief article also points out a direction for future research on Kaila and Finnish philosophy. Kaila's and von Wright's sources of Hume should be studied. Especially interesting would be the

history of Kaila's translation of the first Enquiry. When and how was it done? What were the sources that Kaila used? Which English edition did he have? That would some shed light on how they saw Hume and the decisive moment of Finnish philosophy when Kaila and von Wright agreed that the latter's doctoral dissertation would be on Hume's problem.

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## **References**