Edmund Husserl was convinced that philosophy could attain its requisite status of an absolutely rigorous science only if it adopted the phenomenological method of intentional analysis. For him the history of Western philosophy represented a series of abortive attempts to achieve this ideal of rigorous science. Still, progress had been made in the effort to break through to the only possible ground of a rigorously scientific philosophy, the intentional constitution of objectivity in subjectivity.

Since the Cartesian turn to the "Cogito" marked for him the crucial stage in this progress, Husserl focused on modern European philosophy. Much has been written of Husserl’s relationship to Descartes, Kant, and the neo-Kantians. His connections with the British Empiricism of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume have not been explored closely. This study examines the explicit references to Hume in key texts taken from Husserl’s published works to ascertain in some measure the historical relation of Husserl to Hume. Among the British empiricists Hume gained from Husserl the more extensive and favorable treatment. Indeed, in reply to Gaston Berger’s query Husserl stated that Descartes and Hume had the most influence in the development of his phenomenological philosophy.1

Throughout his lifetime Husserl criticized severely Hume’s empiricistic approach to the problem of cognition. This approach, Husserl
asserts, resulted in the "naturalization of consciousness." From this stemmed that "psychologism" and "sensualism" which led Hume into the contradictory impasse of solipsism and skepticism.²

But in Husserl's own phenomenology the "epoche" and the reduction attain their requisite radicalness only when the pregiven being of the world and the self in the world becomes problematic. At that point a total reversal of the "natural attitude" is effected and the way into a transcendental-genetic phenomenology, the only ultimately grounded science, is opened. Therefore, for Husserl himself skepticism is that point of departure required to guarantee for phenomenological reflection the freedom from presuppositions needed to establish philosophy as the foundational and apodictic science of absolute knowledge.³

In contrast to Hume, Husserl believed his was a "consequent skepticism" which overcame methodological skepticism. Nevertheless, Husserl found in Hume's skeptical philosophy the foreshadowing of that radical reversal of attitude involved in his own "epoche" and that radical subjectivism specific to his transcendental reduction. Having achieved the breakthrough to transcendental phenomenology and while beginning to deepen the "genetic turn" central to his idealism Husserl increasingly praised Hume for overthrowing definitively all objectivism and for seeking to ground all objectivity in pure subjectivity. He went so far as to say that Hume's is "an intuitionistic and purely immanent philosophy, and, accordingly, a preliminary form of the only true intuitionistic philosophy, phenomenology."⁴

This study is concerned exclusively with this favorable attitude of Husserl towards Hume. As Gaston Berger remarks,

. . . it seems possible to us to find, behind the massive oppositions, real analogies. More profoundly yet, we perceive in Hume's philosophy a kind of preparatory and necessary moment of phenomenology, a purifying test through which thought must pass before taking clear awareness of the exigencies and character of transcendental philosophy.⁵

Due to the greater availability of Husserl's later writings we believe we can progress beyond Berger's pioneering work to show that in the measure his attitude towards Hume became progressively more favorable Husserl's own subjectivism deepened. Thereby additional light may be shed on the radically subjectivistic character of the "genetic turn" in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and the distinctive character of its later idealism. If successful, this study will