Countering the Crisis of Western Philosophy’s Enchanted Corpse: Anti-Instrumentalist Agency, Criticality, and the Transformative Educational Model of Hamilton’s Dialectical Knowledge

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1. Introduction: The Current Threat of Instrumentality

The problem of an exaggerated emphasis on instrumentality in education in recent decades has been highlighted by several scholars as a pervasive educational crisis, damaging the pupil/student’s experience and the meaningfulness and worth of education itself.\(^1\) Chris Higgins argues that ‘the instrumentalist view of life’ underpins the transmission model of education as fundamentally hostile to the aesthetic experience integral to much education in the Humanities and ‘a crucial aspect of human flourishing’ (p.6).\(^2\) Higgins’s argument involves a critique of instrumentalism that highlights several things, including: the merely apparent warrant it provides for the transmission model; its effectual silencing of questions of value – such as might arise when we ask, ‘What is worth knowing?’; the tendency within its dominant ideology for ‘public institutions [to] fall prey to the least common denominator of ethical life: instrumentalism’; the un-argued and uncritically accepted reductivism of the instrumentalist’s definition of human life as consisting almost exclusively in those activities, skills, attitudes, and conduct that focus on meeting our most basic survival needs, through subservience to the often highly restricted conditions of employment, within a particular economic system (p.9). Higgins’s focus on the language of instrumentalism also indicates how it has insidiously pervaded our thinking and attitudes towards the richer-textured purposes of education, reducing this texture to a fixation upon, and only justifiable with reference to, how education serves employability. But an alternative is proposed, in which the student, through the Humanities/aesthetic education, is better enabled to question what sort of person s/he wants to become, what it is to live a good life, what is a just society – the sort of questions that are raised in what Higgins calls, the transformative model of education.

In order to introduce the notion that the aesthetic education pertaining to the Humanities is pre-eminently valuable, Higgins turns to Dewey’s Art as Experience; this transformative model of education is one that encourages critical evaluative abilities that enable us to experience the very kind of emancipatory awakening from what, as Higgins claims, Maxine Green describes as a human condition otherwise characterized as somnambulant. Higgins explains Dewey’s distinction between ‘bare recognition’ and ‘full perception’, regarding recognition as ‘the beginning of an act of perception’ (p.12). Although not part of Higgins’s argument, Dewey’s phrase ‘act of perception’ is highly pertinent to what I shall later discuss concerning the notion that perception involves agency,


a notion (appropriately), that Dewey may well have imbibed from his knowledge of the Scottish philosophical tradition that had been so hugely influential in American philosophical education during the early to middle decades of the 19th century. The pervasive, dull, though unquestionably useful, ‘bare recognition’ of things and people, Higgins argues (pace Dewey), ‘threatens experience itself’, inasmuch as experience is peculiarly vivacious or vital (p.13). The Arts and Humanities, or, more particularly in keeping with Higgins, an aesthetic education in, say, how to read a painting or poem with reference to the details of its medium, inevitably involves the student in thinking and discussing topics through which ‘the richness and meaningfulness of a human life’ becomes better understood and valued; this has to do with how the Arts and Humanities importantly assist the student ‘to perceive the richness and complexity of the world’, without which we become practically lost amidst the plenum of an unintelligible and disvalued chaos. Furthermore, for Higgins, some such hyperbolically-described condition of human existence reduced to total aesthetic and critically indiscriminate dullness, indicates something of the deep value to humanity’s experience of learning and the risks for those of us, entrapped within the dominance of an instrumentalist ideology, who nevertheless seek to defend and promote the value(s) of the Humanities, namely, the danger that we may allow good ideas to ‘degenerate into slogans, clichés, and remembrances of what was once a live insight. […] We must not settle for trading tokens of recognition: whether they be No Child Left Behind, “liberate the oppressed,” or “fund the arts”’ (p.16).

Somewhat more recently, Joanna Williams has rigorously analysed part of the problem in terms of how instrumentality constructs social inclusion as solely dependent on a specious assumption that a learning-and-earning relationship, universally and exclusively determines individual prosperity (p.153). In addition, referring to work by Wolf and Mullan - CH she points out that the oft-asserted ‘relationship between education and economic growth is considered by many commentators to be at best tenuous, potentially contradictory and most likely wrong’ (p.154). A key part of Williams’s exposure of the deeply misleading assumptions and assertions that underpin an increasingly prevalent instrumentalist ethos in education generally, includes a linguistic or discourse analysis that rightly scrutinises the instrumentalist’s use of terms such as ‘build’, as in claims by DfEE (1989) about building ‘human capital by encouraging creativity, skill and imagination’ (p.155). As Williams shows, the ways in which such hugely important human capacities are ‘linked to the needs of the labour market’ imply that apparently purposeless ‘creativity and imagination’ are rejected, since appeals to the market determine education’s sole or overriding purpose as developing only that creativity/ imagination deemed suitable for a notional, personified, uncontrollable, and thus supremely authoritative/ unquestionable economy (p.156).

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This implicates the hegemony of instrumentalism in a profound devaluing and consequent degradation of abilities that do not conform to this purpose or which may contrary to it. Furthermore, if Williams is right, there is an intensely pernicious effect of this dominance of instrumentalism, as it ‘constructs social exclusion not simply as resulting from the poverty associated with unemployment but as individuals (and communities) lacking the skills essential to become employable’ - poverty is thereby blamed on individuals’ lack of an education reductively and misleadingly redefined in terms of skills and training. Though Williams’s argument focuses on Further Education, much of what she says is highly pertinent to other sectors, providing a stern warning to all educators of the grave risks to education of what Hyland describes as ‘an impoverished knowledge framework’, as utilitarian determinants effectually exclude or marginalise the theoretical or unquantifiable elements of a more rounded educational experience (Hyland, quoted by Williams, p.157). As Williams concludes: ‘What is lost from education is any sense of purpose beyond the instrumental: there is no space for education for enjoyment, for personal development or simply for its own sake’ (p.159). One might add another loss: that formal education that helps to develop the individual culturally, socially, and intellectually is a necessary condition of being a citizen within a sophisticated society, and especially within the ideal of a maximally participatory democracy.

It seems fair to assert that critics of instrumentality and of the support it so powerfully gives to the transmission model of education, would broadly agree with the following proposition: that much educational practice is increasingly in the grip of instrumentalism’s increasing dominance as entailing an entirely counterproductive, and even self-defeating or irrationally damaging system and ethos, and that this crisis situation must be resisted as unacceptable. In order to contribute to an enrichment of opposition to this problem of instrumentality, I shall discuss some pertinent elements of the work of a now little-known but one-time famous and influential 19th-century anti-instrumentalist, Sir William Hamilton.

**Hamilton – A Brief Introduction**
Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh from the mid 1830s until his death, Sir William Hamilton (1788-1856) drew on an outstandingly rich reading to encourage, both through his pedagogy and his writing, an approach to knowledge and learning that has an interesting resonance with some of the more recent concerns about instrumentalism in education theory. A more detailed tracing of the influence of Hamilton’s educational progressivism and relationship with developing anti-instrumentalist ideas in educational theory during the 19th century, is a story yet to be written, but it is one that would need to consider, for example, Hamilton’s influence on Henry Mansel at the
University of Oxford, his connections with American philosophy and schools, and his profound influence on the highly influential, more public intellectual, Thomas Carlyle (and thereby on Charles Dickens’s novelistic influence on Victorian attitudes to education).

Acutely conscious of philosophical contexts both in Britain and in Europe, of modernity’s materialist reductionism, or extreme Rationalism’s presumption of a potential omniscience, Hamilton’s early essays in 1829 and 1830 constitute vigorous attacks on what he regarded as the lamentable and dangerous condition of philosophy in Britain. His clearly stated motivation was to awaken Britain out of its dangerously barbaric indifference towards philosophy, commencing thereby a life-time’s commitment to his role as a transformative scholar and educator, whose pedagogical practice appears to have been dedicated to educating his readers and students to realise the dangers of such philosophical somnambulism, and thereby permeate their own life’s work with critical study and thought. But, this was much more conspicuously the commencement of long years of work on the philosophy of Thomas Reid, the father of the Scottish Common-Sense school, and strongest critic and opponent of Hume’s scepticism. The extent of Hamilton’s concern in 1830 about ‘the total neglect’ of metaphysics in Britain cannot be underestimated (PU 11) [CH]. This concern was borne of an acute sense that philosophy, and thereby society, were at severe risk, and closely allied to this, that education was itself in a state of extreme crisis.

This crisis may be summed up succinctly in terms of the dangers inherent within the post-Enlightenment inheritance of mechanistic theories of mind, to human agency, and, as a consequence of this, to an extremely worrying degradation of criticality (or the very critical discourse that Hamilton thought was vital to protecting a people against perniciously fallacious theories). Spread throughout many parts of Hamilton’s writing and his posthumously published Lectures is a major concern with the need for people to be transformed through an education which stimulates students to be able to think for themselves. Hence, his work, often unforgivingly in its difficulty, demands active learners, whose education in philosophy would best enable them to possess the high-level capacities necessary to critique the increasing predominance of a much-traduced interpretation of the primarily Lockean theory of ideas and its reliance on a new ascendancy of what I call the mechanical metaphor.

But, the crisis facing philosophy and education, for Hamilton, runs much deeper; it goes back to Plato’s commencement of representative theses of perception/knowledge. However, this crisis arises in what Hamilton sees as something of a return of the great spectre haunting much Scottish philosophy: Hume’s extreme scepticism. In short, Humean scepticism’s tendency towards nihilism was seen by Hamilton, as posing the most severe threat of all to philosophy and hence to the viability of all rational critical discourse, a situation that insidiously undermined an intensely scholarly and intellectually demanding philosophy, the core place of which, within the whole framework of Scottish educational traditions, had been seriously threatened and undermined during the 1820s.

This demise of philosophy – this crisis of reason – for Hamilton, also appeared potentially to leave education more generally degraded to a mere instrumental business of
quantification and the transmission of incontestable fact-learning, utterly removed from the higher ideals and practices of human cultivation and theoretical discourse. The resonances between Hamilton’s position and more recent concerns about instrumentality, are fairly clear: if we are currently facing a crisis in education of instrumentality’s domination of and deep threat to the viability of education through its marketization, commodification, and instrumentalist adherence to a transmission model, enforced to serve the limited demands of the economy and status quo, Hamilton was also attempting to resist instrumentalism, though at the beginnings of such a catastrophic trajectory. However, he was doing so within the terrifying context of a recent outcome of scepticism and the mechanistic turn of Enlightenment thought – the French Revolution.

Hamilton’s Anti-Instrumentalism: Encouraging the Student’s Critical Agency and the Use-Value of Philosophy’s Development of Critical Capacities

Hamilton’s position may be sketched as non-absolutist, anti-instrumentalist, and crucially committed to fostering in his students and readers a degree of self-activity or learner agency grounded in liberal-humanist principles to do with the great importance of the learner’s autonomy and the transformative nature of education as the main vehicle, through which such autonomy may be realised and maintained: ‘Strictly speaking, every one must educate himself’; ‘and instruction is only instruction as it enables us to teach ourselves’ (LM, I, p.15; p.16) [CH]. To illustrate something of this, in one of his Lectures, he warmly informs his students that in ancient universities, prior to the invention of printing, ‘the activity of the pupil [was viewed] as the great mean of cultivation, and the communication of knowledge as only of subordinate importance’ (LM, I, p.15).

Several of his arguments indicate a strongly anti-instrumentalist stance, such as for example, his critique of the utilitarianism of his contemporary, James Mill (father of the philosopher who would finally ruin Hamilton’s reputation, John Stuart Mill) [CH REF LECTURES]. But this anti-instrumentalism is perhaps most conspicuously articulated when he quotes (and he was perhaps the first English-speaking philosopher to do so) the now rather well-known injunction by Lessing, that the search for truth is to be preferred above its discovery (PP 40). Hamilton goes on to make his position abundantly clear: he regards philosophy as ‘the best gymnastic of the mind,—[…] almost exclusively conducive to the highest education of our noblest powers’ (PP 41). In so arguing both in ‘Philosophy of Perception’ and in his later Lectures, Hamilton rejects an instrumentalist purpose for the study of metaphysics, but does not reject the use-value of this study. However, his argument is complex, since he not only acknowledges that one can identify a use-value in the study of philosophy, namely, its education of our higher capacities or ‘noblest powers’,

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but he also turns the utilitarian advocacy of knowledge-acquisition on its head by arguing (probably with some wit) that the possession of knowledge is subordinate to ‘the cultivation of our faculties’ and hence such cultivation is indeed of great use (LM, I, p.5). Hamilton’s discussion of these points in his Lectures are fairly lengthy but he raises numerous points, which in a longer discussion, could be utilised to enrich understanding of, for example, how, through erroneously assuming the greater value of the practical knowledge of the sciences, these have been elevated above philosophical studies that are in fact of greater use-value and how, through this subordination of philosophy, ‘education has been systematically distorted’ (LM, I, p.9).

For Hamilton, philosophy energises and exhausts us through the processes of enquiry. This general conception suggests that philosophical discussion is endless, yet integrally vital, life-affirming, and the obverse of the stasis or cessation of discussion he equates with finitude, absolutism, chaos, indifference, extreme scepticism, and barbarity: ‘if the result of speculation be a paralysis of itself; the consummation of knowledge is only the condition of intellectual barbarism’ (PP 40). In a number of ways Hamilton strove to encourage arduous philosophical study as an end in itself, but also as the best means of promoting the individual student’s critical capacities. As Alexander Campbell Fraser recalled of his pedagogy, he pre-eminently nurtured his students to think independently. But this encouragement of independent thinking is rooted in a grave concern and even horror, namely, that weak or stunted critical capacities give rise to uncritical acceptance of bad theories, which can prove disastrous to humanity. It is evident that the horrors of the French Revolution provided Hamilton with a most salutary moral lesson concerning the risk of an over-emphasis on instrumental reasoning, as the sordid offspring of a highly reductive materialist or mechanical conception of the mind which Hamilton briefly located in the work of Cabanis and Condillac (PU 3).

The example of French philosophy’s recent history stood for Hamilton as a terrible warning of the dangers of being critically incapable of resisting highly reductive mechanistic/materialist philosophical theories that tend towards extreme scepticism and nihilism. In his ‘Philosophy of the Unconditioned’ he severely criticised Victor Cousin’s incorporation of Schelling’s absolutism (PU 22-23). In ‘Philosophy of Perception’ he briefly attacks 18th-century French philosophy’s uncritical acceptance of an inadequate version of Locke’s theory of ideas (PP 44). And, much more extensively, Hamilton provided a lacerating attack on the one-time highly influential Thomas Brown’s ‘ignorant attack on Reid’ and ‘transmutation’ of Reid’s Scottish Common-Sense standpoint from one that Hamilton named natural dualism/realism, to what he saw as the wholly indefensible and scepticism-inducing hypothetical realism (PP 56). Hamilton’s opposition to scepticism is by no means a simplistic rejection of doubt or questioning – quite the opposite – but all of his philosophical

5 All references in this form are to Hamilton, Lectures on Metaphysics, Works, vol. 3.
6 Fraser, Biographia Philosophica, 57-58. Also see, (McCosh 1874: 428) – CH REF: McCosh, James (1875), The Scottish Philosophy, Biographical, Expository, Critical, From Hutcheson to Hamilton, London.
struggles with positions in philosophy of either extreme idealism/absolutism or extreme materialism/mechanism comprise his most outstanding critical engagements with tendencies in philosophy towards absolute scepticism and its resultant complete degradation of critical discourse.

The Danger of Hume’s Scepticism
The extreme or absolute scepticism of Hume was understood by Hamilton as a system of equipollence that could only result in the kind of stasis predicted by Hume himself – a complete social and individual paralysis, determined by the self-refuting establishment of opposing arguments, between which there could be no preference criterion – a system of mutual annihilation or subversion (for example, see PU 2-3; 18; PP 42-43; 94-96). The theoretical paralysis of discourse and of agency, arising from Humean scepticism, announces a deep crisis in reason. Hamilton was facing an enormous failure of the Enlightenment’s project to make Reason pre-eminent. This was undoubtedly a problem of pan-European dimensions, which from Hamilton’s post-Kantian and post-Scottish-Enlightenment context increasingly appeared to arise out of failures in philosophical vitality and learning, or a general incapacity within the intelligentsia/bourgeois public sphere to provide adequate critical antidotes to theoretically poisonous standpoints.

If current anxieties about the dangers of instrumentalism in education seem apocalyptic in the concern about a near-complete degradation of critical capacities and the broader purposes of education as integral to human flourishing, Hamilton shared with some of his philosophical antecedents (in particular, Reid), an even more grave, though perhaps also (paradoxically) a more abstract, concern about (at least theoretically) a total societal collapse. Such collapse is seen as implicit in the totalising potential of Hume’s extreme or absolute scepticism. Hamilton regarded this as having become once again highly dangerous, due to the risk that those intellectual/educational endeavours, so concentrated in the study of metaphysics/epistemology, might be eliminated. What threatened the study of metaphysics was in part an enemy within, largely identified by Hamilton as Thomas Brown’s major misinterpretation, during the first two decades of the 19th century, of the Reidian answer to Hume. But, the danger was also arising due to the ways in which the increasingly dominant philosophies of utilitarianism were rendering highly abstract philosophical discourse redundant, because such theoretical or speculative studies strikingly failed to fit within the instrumentalist demands for useful knowledge.

In such struggles with the rising dominance of instrumentality and its corollary of subordinating the study of philosophy, Hamilton’s situation is almost uncannily similar to that of our own, in which a theoretical/critical disablement of the populace may be seen as a most serious cause for concern. What Hamilton appears to have been strenuously attempting to resist, in what I have called his anti-instrumentalism, was the danger of leaving the way open for an invasion of poisonous theories/ideologies of potentially massive
harm to the human condition. Hamilton, like so many 19th century thinkers after him, must have felt that he was looking into an abyss that demanded urgent critical reaction.
Dialectical Knowledge of Natural Dualism

Hamilton’s reinvigoration of Thomas Reid’s Common-Sense philosophy, provides an epistemological theory that describes knowledge as fundamentally and potently dialectical. Inasmuch as Hamilton might be thought of as establishing knowledge as irreplaceably dialectical, the instrumentalist transmission model of education collapses as indefeasibly based upon a unilateral, univocal, or monistic assumption of knowledge as ultimately objective or removed from any significant influence or role that might be played by the knower/learner. Instrumentalism’s objectification of knowledge, of course, has certain attractions, particularly with regard to the widely held belief that what can be known must be somehow independently existent, that any entity within the universe of knowables must have a continued and distinct existence, regardless of human agency/subjectivity. Any unit of knowledge, for the instrumentalist/transmission account of learning, is largely independent of discourse, debate, speculation, theorising. Where such a monistic standpoint on knowledge permits itself to be open to investigation or critique, the examination can only involve ever more detailed scrutiny and assessment of the knowledge-object’s constituent data.

By sharp contrast with this objectification/instrumentalisation of knowledge (and its consequent diminishment of the learner’s agency or autonomy by means of a transmission model of education), Hamilton’s epistemology provides an iterative or interactive model of perception with implications for a model of learning with which several aspects of his writing and pedagogy accord. Hamilton self-consciously sets the student/reader on a path of discovery and growing awareness of the difficulty or highly problematic nature of knowing itself – hence, what may be called Hamilton’s doctrine of learned ignorance (which here I shall only touch on briefly). The importance of agency in perception and his articulation of what he calls the relativity of knowledge, pervade his work with an anti-rationalist phenomenalism that exhorts the epistemological and moral need to learn the vast extent of our ignorance [CH REF]. Somewhat more particularly, this involves arguments concerning the inexplicable foundations of all cognition inherent within the very nature of consciousness itself. This position would appear to be motivated by a profound commitment to education as an activity that must be principally concerned with stimulating the student’s agency through enquiry that cultivates the higher mental capacities that Hamilton sees as being essential to resisting ill-founded theories and the deadening effects of nihilism or absolute/extreme scepticism.

The doctrine of Natural Dualism involves a fundamental appeal to consciousness that echoes Hamilton’s claim that ‘the science of opposites is one’ (PP 51). In general mankind are equally assured ‘of the reality of an external world, and of the existence of their own minds’ as the ‘fact of Perception revealed in Consciousness’ (PP 55). Thus: ‘Consciousness declares our knowledge of material qualities to be intuitive’ (PP 55). This is not to say that consciousness proves that the external world exists or that it exists as we perceive it to exist. Rather, it is a declaration about the basic starting point of all further
discussion concerning matter, our understanding of its properties, and so on, as something that must commence from an irresistible and indubitable given fact of our existence as dictated by the primary authority, consciousness, that: the fundamental apprehension of the existence of an external, material world is something only intuitively known.

He points up the dialectical nature of what he regards as the deliverance of consciousness concerning the question of our immediate knowledge of matter:

When I concentrate my attention in the simplest act of Perception, I return from my observation with the most irresistible conviction of two facts, or rather, two branches of the same fact;—that I am,—and that something different from me exists. In this act, I am conscious of myself as the perceiving subject, and of an external reality as the object perceived; and I am conscious of both existences in the same indivisible moment of intuition. The knowledge of the subject does not precede nor follow the knowledge of the object;—neither determines, neither is determined by, the other. The two terms of correlation stand in mutual counterpoise and equal independence; they are given as connected in the synthesis of knowledge, but as contrasted in the antithesis of existence (PP 55).

Using terms such as ‘act of Perception’, ‘correlation’, ‘mutual counterpoise and equal independence’, Hamilton’s articulation of what consciousness reveals about perception bears within it some highly interesting educational implications concerning epistemological fundamentals of the human condition. The duality of mind and body that is here expressed is a non-Cartesian one of correlation, of a relation of knowledge that is synthetic, yet contrastive with regard to an antithesis of being, giving the foundation or general nature of knowledge as an iterative or dynamic energy, a starting point of knowledge development/evolution that is inherently relational and thus of process. He elegantly provides an interplay of polar opposites brought into a unity that nonetheless respects an existential differentiation; a circular relation of knowledge inscribed with traces of paradox and ultimate incomprehensibility that is also adequately comprehensible as broadly yet curiously consonant with an experiential moment of attentive reflection. Empirical in character, being discovered by means of an ‘observation’ of ‘the simplest act of Perception’ from which we ‘return’ to articulate a foundational principle of knowledge, the dialectical nature of what consciousness discloses in a single act of Perception is distinctively contrary to the broad trajectory of so many other competing theories of mind.

If this broadly characterises what Hamilton describes as ‘the fact of consciousness in perception’, then this fact or truth forms the dialectical basis for philosophical discussion that is itself a critical standpoint diametrically opposed to the tendency towards nihilism that he detected within both Hume’s extreme scepticism and the various representative theses of perception that he outlines (see PP 94-95; 57-58). But, crucially, another implication of this dialectical model is that, in its iterative character of correlation between existentially/ontologically differentiated polarities (fundamentally of mind and body),
Hamilton is providing an epistemology that directly contradicts the unilateralism of instrumentality’s transmission model of education; Hamilton’s epistemology is thus substantially opposed to instrumentality, fosters critical discourse (or that running back and forth between positions that is the very meaning of ‘discourse’), and is inherently transformative in its dynamic or vital character as a system that at least avails the possibility of mutual modification or the progressive/evolutionary nature of the ideas or cognitions that comprise its discursive subject matter.

Furthermore, his use of the word ‘act’ in his phrase ‘act of Perception’ is highly significant: Hamilton’s dialectical knowledge/perception is one that crucially involves the percipient’s/learner’s agency; the learner is and must be highly active in learning and the epistemological basis of this agency is encapsulated in the notion that perception is not passive, but vital, active, an energy in which the percipient conditions all that s/he perceives. The implication for education is clear: the learner’s activity of grappling with (and being energised by) highly complex matters of the broadest and deepest relevance to understanding the human condition, is involved in conditioning all s/he encounters, since: To think is to condition; and conditional limitation is the fundamental law of the possibility of thought’ (PU 14).

However, Hamilton regards the standpoint of Natural Dualism as by no means prevalent. His accusation that Brown had transmuted Reid into a hypothetical realist involves referring to, as he puts it, ‘a crochet of philosophers’, who similarly adhered to this fundamentally self-defeating principle. However, this principle had ‘exerted a more extensive and important influence, than any principle in the whole history of philosophy’ (PP 61):

Some philosophers (as Anaxagoras, Heraclitus, Alcmaeon) maintained that knowledge implied even a contrariety of subject and object [which is to assert that these pre-Socratic philosophers adhered to a view similar to Hamilton’s own]. But since the time of Empedocles, no opinion has been more universally admitted, than that the relation of knowledge inferred an analogy of existence. This analogy may be supposed in two potences [sic]. What knows and what is known, are either, 1◦, similar, or, 2◦, the same; and if the general principle be true, the latter is the more philosophical. This principle it was, which immediately determined the whole doctrine of a representative perception. (PP 61)

He continues with a substantial list of philosophers whose theories had been determined by their adherence to this principle, that the relation of knowledge implies an analogy of existence (see PP 62). What Hamilton clearly thinks he is struggling against is nothing less than a long philosophical tradition reaching back to Plato’s Socrates which, through denying the ‘evidence of Consciousness’ and thereby implicitly running against all evidence’ (PP 61) has postulated or implicitly relied upon an unwarranted principle to explain, instead of
accepting as true, the incomprehensible fact of consciousness that ‘one contrary is immediately percipient of another’ (PP 62).

Generating or relying upon the philosophical principle ‘that the relation of knowledge implies an analogy of existence’, the philosophers had turned from Nature because of a fundamental refusal to accept the ultimately incomprehensible veracity of the duality of existence (of mind and matter) and the synthesis of this duality in the dialectical relation of knowledge as the given starting point of all philosophy, reasoning, education, and the very possibility of social human existence. The philosophers who had effectually abandoned the pre-Socratics’ wisdom of a fundamental, inexplicable, yet inescapable difference between the subject and object (knower and known) that describes the basic dialecticism of knowledge, were implicitly jeopardising the fundamental philosophical (and later Enlightenment) project to escape ignorance. The danger to philosophy could not be greater. Hamilton thinks that the Hypothetical Realist is particularly implicated in destroying philosophy through the irrationalism of a fundamentally self-undermining stance: the Hypothetical Realist’s position is, he argues, suicidal, since by ‘subverting the universal edifice of knowledge’ (the veracity of consciousness), it ‘annihilates itself’ (PP 64). The irrationalism of the prevalent philosophical position of Hypothetical Realism becomes even more apparent when we consider that this doctrine also illegitimately hypothesised the very thing its hypothesis is attempting to explain – hence, Hypothetical Realism is founded on a major instance of question begging (see PP 64-65). Capable of generating some poignantly prophetic conceits that are deeply enmeshed in that strand of his discussion warning his reader of the dangerous demise of philosophy due to the critical ineptitude of a too pervasive irrationalism, he regards the widely adopted position of Hypothetical Realism as profoundly involved in the destruction of all philosophical discourse: ‘The first act of Hypothetical Realism, is [...] an act of suicide: philosophy, thereafter, is at best but an enchanted corpse, awaiting only the exorcism of the sceptic, to relapse into its proper nothingness’ (PP 64).

Conclusion
The nihilist tendencies that Hamilton sees within the highly pervasive and prevalent doctrine of Hypothetical Realism’s self-defeating, question-begging, and therefore irrational condition, generally characterises the background or context within which the new rise of a virulent, deeply threatening Humean scepticism could occur. Coupled with the increasing prominence of an ill-educated utilitarian insistence on the superior value of learning within the confines of a transmission model’s reductive constriction of knowledge (solely to its acquisition and at the expense of neglecting the development of critical and broader cultural and moral capacities), this nihilist tendency envisaged by Hamilton, appears to place philosophical education in a new pivotal position as offering the hope that, through education’s transformative potential to enhance critical abilities, some reversal or
mitigation might be possible of a cultural hegemony apparently hell-bent on subordinating education’s enormously emancipatory potential. Opposing the theoretical forces of a nihilist-inclining scepticism that appeared to threaten the very possibility or basic conditions of genuine learning, Hamilton articulates a position of dialectical knowledge that teems with theoretical implications that might be further developed in relation to other theorists such as John Dewey and Paulo Freire, such as, the notion that a transformative model of education, grounded in a dialectical epistemology, might be so structured socially and in relation to a highly educated and principled teacher as to conduce people, not only into the sort of high-spirited energising intellectual activity advocated by Hamilton, but also into developing argumentation capacities for conducting a progressive unfolding of critical discourse. Hence, a principal aim of some such reinterpretation of Hamilton’s anti-instrumentalist, dialectical epistemology might have to do with how such critical discourse may proceed through ever deeper and extensively informed enquiries into the most intractable problems facing our youth, so as to enable them to grapple with the major difficulties that so pressingly beset the modern human condition. The fundamental dialecticism of Hamilton’s epistemology also similarly invites further examination of its slender suggestions of a certain egalitarianism, socially and within the contexts of education, and through this one might hope that turning education towards a firmer hold of the great use-value of cultivating our pupils’ critical capacities may be a major step towards some form of enriched participatory democracy in which instrumentality may be accorded a much more proportionate position within educational practice and experience.