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# Hume's skepticism.

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HUME'S SKEPTICISM

A Dissertation Presented

by

DENNIS F. THOMPSON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 1998

Philosophy

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This work is dedicated in loving memory to

William Arthur Thompson (1947 - 1994)

"Every step I take is with hesitation, and every new reflection makes me dread an error and absurdity in my reasoning."

[A Treatise of Human Nature, I.IV.VIII]

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

HUME'S SKEPTICISM

MAY 1998

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David Hume has traditionally been regarded as a skeptic, perhaps the most formidable in the history of Western philosophy. Since the publication of Norman Kemp Smith's Philosophy of David Hume in 1941, however, there has been an increasing tendency to downplay the skeptical dimension of Hume's philosophy, in some cases to the point of denying that Hume is a serious skeptic, or even a skeptic at all. Much of the motivation for a nonskeptical reading of Hume comes from recognition of his endorsement of empirical science and his own project of founding a "science of man." Recent scholarship has, in my opinion correctly, recognized Hume as a constructive rather than a purely destructive thinker. Yet this recognition has, in my opinion incorrectly, gone hand in hand with a tendency to overlook or deny the skeptical side of Hume's thought.

In this work, I address the issue of Hume's skepticism. I believe that though the issue of Hume's skepticism is more

complicated than is suggested by some of those who interpret him as a skeptic, nevertheless the traditional view is more true to Hume's texts than is a nonskeptical interpretation. I argue, on the basis of a reading of the Treatise of Human Nature and Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, that Hume is a serious theoretical skeptic with regard to much of our alleged knowledge.

In saying that Hume is a *serious* theoretical skeptic I mean that (i) Hume's skeptical pronouncements are in general sincere, not ironic, (ii) Hume's skepticism extends to a large part of our alleged knowledge, and (iii) Hume's skepticism is a result of his substantive philosophical views. In saying that Hume is a *serious theoretical* skeptic I mean that though Hume doesn't prescribe eschewal of beliefs that are not rationally justified, he thinks that much of our alleged knowledge essentially involves beliefs that cannot be rationally justified and that hence much of our alleged knowledge is not knowledge at all.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout the following chapters all references to A Treatise of Human Nature and the Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature are to the second Selby-Bigge edition and all references to An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding are to the third Selby-Bigge edition of the the Enquiries. I will use the following abbreviations in citing Hume's works:

T: A Treatise of Human Nature [References to the Treatise will be by Book, Part, Section, and page number except where that information would be redundant. For example, a reference to the first section of the third part of the first book of the Treatise would have the form (T, I.III.I, n)]

A: Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature [References to the Abstract will be by page number only.]

E: An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding [References to the Enquiry will be by section, part, and page number except where that information would be redundant. For example, a reference to part two of section seven would have the form (E, VII.II, n)]

All references to works other than the Treatise, Abstract, and the Enquiry will be in author-date form with page

numbers only. Exceptions to full author-date citation where required to avoid redundancy will be announced in the text. Cited works will be listed under "Works Consulted" following chapter VII.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1

David Hume has traditionally been regarded as a skeptic, perhaps the most formidable in the history of Western philosophy. This traditional view of Hume has not been limited to his contemporaries, to those who ignore Hume's aspirations concerning a "science of man," or to those who are generally unsympathetic to empiricism or unappreciative of Hume's genius. For example, in A History of Western Philosophy, Bertrand Russell writes of Hume that

It is evident that he started out with a belief that scientific method yields the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; he ended, however, with the conviction that belief is never rational, since we know nothing. After setting forth the arguments for skepticism...he goes on, not to refute the arguments, but to fall back on natural credulity (Russell [1945], 671).

Russell, however, also says this of Hume:

To refute him has been, ever since he wrote, a favourite pastime among metaphysicians. For my part, I find none of their refutations convincing; nevertheless I cannot but hope that something less sceptical than Hume's system may be discoverable (Russell [1945], 659).

In spite of the widespread acceptance of the traditional view of Hume's philosophy as skeptical, since the publication of Norman Kemp Smith's Philosophy of David Hume in 1941, in which he presents searching criticism of what is generally referred to as the "Reid-Beattie" interpretation

of Hume, there has been a tendency to downplay the skeptical dimension of Hume's philosophy, in some cases to the point of denying that Hume is a serious skeptic, or even a skeptic at all.<sup>1</sup> I agree with Kemp-Smith's criticism of the Reid-Beattie interpretation insofar as that interpretation presents Hume as a solely destructive thinker intent only on taking empiricism to its logical conclusion. I do not, however, agree with any interpretation of Hume according to which he is not a serious skeptic.

In this work, I will address the issue of Hume's skepticism. I believe that though the issue of Hume's skepticism is more complicated than is suggested by some of those who interpret him as a skeptic, nevertheless the traditional view is more true to Hume's texts than is a nonskeptical interpretation. I will argue that in fact Hume is a serious theoretical skeptic with regard to a large part of our alleged knowledge, that is, that for Hume much of our supposed knowledge is not knowledge at all because the relevant beliefs cannot be rationally justified.

In saying that Hume is a serious theoretical skeptic I mean that (i) Hume's skeptical pronouncements are in general sincere, not ironic, (ii) Hume's skepticism extends to a large part of our alleged knowledge, (and hence is broader than, for example, what one might refer to as Kant's "skepticism" about noumena), and (iii) Hume's skepticism is a result of his substantive philosophical views concerning

topics such as causation, causal inference, and the extent of our conceptual capacity, that is, the extent of our meaningful thought. In saying that Hume is a serious theoretical skeptic I mean that though Hume doesn't prescribe eschewal of beliefs that are not rationally justified, he thinks that much of our alleged knowledge essentially involves beliefs that cannot be rationally justified and that hence much of our alleged knowledge is not knowledge at all.

In arguing that Hume was a serious skeptic I consider both the Treatise and the first Enquiry. Though the Treatise contains discussion of topics not treated in the Enquiry, the Enquiry was the latter of the two works and according to Hume himself it contains his mature views on epistemology and metaphysics.<sup>2</sup> So the Enquiry too must be taken account of in assessing the seriousness of Hume's skepticism.

2

It is, perhaps, a sign of the strength of the traditional skeptical interpretation of Hume that the thesis that he is a serious skeptic is often met with puzzlement - after all, isn't it beyond doubt that Hume is a skeptic? Such puzzlement is often the result of a lack of familiarity with Hume's texts and with recent Hume scholarship. Still, given the influence and duration of the traditional skeptical interpretation it is important to point out at the

3



beginning at least some of the motivations behind a nonskeptical interpretation of Hume's philosophy.

Of course, any serious, nonskeptical interpretation of Hume rests on a reading of Hume's texts involving many fine points of textual interpretation. Many such points are discussed in the following chapters. It seems to me, however, that the motivation for such a reading usually comes from one or more of the five following sources:<sup>3</sup>

(1) Hume's various disavowals or putdowns, in both the Treatise and the first Enquiry, of (some form of) skepticism.

(2) Hume's enthusiasm for empirical science and his own project of founding a "science of man."

(3) Hume's statement, in Treatise I.III.XV, of apparently normative rules for making causal judgments.

(4) Analysis of Hume's argument concerning causal inference, the argument traditionally held to be an argument for inductive skepticism, as it appears in the Treatise I.III.VI, the Abstract 650-52, and the first Enquiry IV.II.

(5) The fact that Hume distinguishes between various kinds of inductive inference and accepts some kinds of inductive inference but rejects others. This raises what I refer to in chapter IV as "the problem of discrimination."

Why is it important to know whether or not Hume was a skeptic? Not because deciding this point is primarily a matter of knowing what was in Hume's head or what his intentions were. In my view, deciding this point is not primarily a matter of doing forensic psychology, though of course considerations about Hume's purposes are relevant to the scholarly issue of Hume's skepticism. Rather, deciding this point is a matter of knowing whether or not the philosophy Hume actually produced, as represented in the Treatise of Human Nature and the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, is skeptical.

Why, then, is it important to know whether or not the Treatise of Human Nature and the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding present a skeptical philosophy? Hume is a major figure of Western philosophy (and thereby of Western civilization) and the Treatise and first Enquiry are generally considered to be two of the great works of the Western philosophical tradition. So, if understanding our own philosophical tradition is important to us - and I assume that it is - we should determine, so far as is possible, whether or not the philosophy of one of our greatest philosophical predecessors is or is not skeptical. In other words, whatever conclusion one comes to with regard to the question of Hume's skepticism, surely scholars of the modern period of philosophy should have a consistent

interpretation of one of the central figures of that period. Further, insofar as scholarship informs teaching, possession of a consistent interpretation of the figures of modern philosophy can reasonably be expected to enhance one's teaching.

Finally, Hume's philosophy is based on principles that still possess some degree of appeal - for example, the empiricist principle that the content with which we think comes ultimately from our having experiences and the principle that in thought we are immediately acquainted not with things as they are in themselves but with our own subjective representations. So, unless we foolishly believe that we can have nothing to learn from earlier thinkers such as Hume, it is reasonable to expect that an understanding of Hume's own view of the implications of empiricism and the "theory of ideas" may be philosophically enlightening.

## Notes to Introduction

1. The "Reid-Beattie interpretation" is the interpretation of Hume found in works and correspondence of Thomas Reid and James Beattie, in particular in Reid's An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense (Reid [1764]), and Beattie's Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth in opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism (Beattie [1770]). This is an interpretation according to which Hume's main achievement was to show the weakness of classical empiricism by taking it to its logical conclusion in skepticism. On this rather unflattering (and, in Beattie's case, hostile) interpretation, Hume is indeed a skeptic, but his skepticism is seen as the self-defeating result of uncritical acceptance of empiricist principles. This interpretation, moreover, focuses almost exclusively on Hume's skeptical results to the exclusion of his attempts to create a "science of man." Though the Reid-Beattie interpretation is not restricted to the authors who gave it its name, by no means do all of those who accept what I refer to as the traditional view of Hume - a view according to which he is a skeptic - accept the Reid-Beattie interpretation or the specific criticisms of Hume's position made by Reid and Beattie.

2. In the "Advertisement," written by Hume and attached to the posthumous 1777 Essays And Treatises On Several Subjects, which includes his two Enquiries, Hume refers to the Treatise as his "juvenile work," and announces that

Henceforth, the Author desires, that the following Pieces may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles (E, 2).

Lest it be thought that the "Advertisement" is merely Hume's attempt to increase sales by distancing himself from his unpopular earlier work, two points should be noted: (1) By the time Hume wrote the "Advertisement" he had become a well-known and financially independent literary figure. Even discounting Hume's reputation for honesty, he hardly needed to resort to false repudiations of his earlier work in order to boost his readership. (2) In personal correspondence with friends Hume advises against reading the Treatise and directs them instead to the first Enquiry, then published as

Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding. See, for example, Hume's 1751 letter to Gilbert Elliot, in The Letters of David Hume, Volume I, 158.

3. I am not claiming these considerations are fully discrete nor am I claiming that they cannot be brought under some more general headings. Clearly, (2) - (5) all concern Hume's views on empirical science and the methods of inquiry and inference it employs.

CHAPTER  
I  
HUME'S SKEPTICISM AT THE CLOSE OF BOOK I OF THE TREATISE

1

In the final section of Book I of the Treatise of Human Nature, Hume pauses to consider his situation as he prepares to enter "those immense depths of philosophy" which lie before him in Books II and III. Hume must enter these immense depths in order to carry out his project, announced in the Introduction, of establishing an experimental "science of man," which will serve as the foundation for and further the progress of the other sciences. Initially, this consideration of his situation nearly reduces him to despair and inaction. Not only does he remember his many past errors and perplexities, but the epistemological considerations of Book I have led him to recognize "The wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties, I must employ in my enquiries..." (T, I.IV.VII, 264). Further, "the impossibility of amending or correcting these faculties" reduces Hume, at this point, "almost to despair" (T, 264).

In spite of his serious misgivings, Hume nevertheless does, of course, set sail into the immense depths of philosophy in Books II and III, not to mention his various philosophical voyages in later works. Toward the end of Section VII Hume expresses his hope that he might "establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true...might at

least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination" (T, 272). He hopes to "contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge" and says that we should not only be willing to enter into elaborate philosophical researches, but we should also "...yield to that propensity, which inclines us to be positive and certain in *particular points*, according to the light, in which we survey them in any *particular instant*" (T, 273).

It seems, then, that Hume has had a decided change of outlook between the beginning and the end of Section VII. Though he begins the section with serious doubts about his own epistemic capacities, he ends hoping to further knowledge, attain certainty in particular points, and establish a system that will withstand critical examination. Perhaps, then, Hume's apparent negative assessment of his epistemic capacities at the beginning of the section is not an expression of his real view. Perhaps Hume is not, as his initial pronouncements might suggest, a skeptic. The very fact that Hume does embark on further philosophical voyages seems to be evidence that he is not really a skeptic.

Given Hume's hopeful and even cheerful pronouncements toward the end of this last section of Book I, it might seem that Section VII should be read as describing a movement from a skeptical and despairing position which is not Hume's true position to a non-skeptical and hopeful one which is.<sup>1</sup> I do not, however, think that such a reading is correct.

Though I agree that Hume's mood changes dramatically from the earlier to the later parts of the section, I believe that Hume begins and ends Section VII as a skeptic, as I will now attempt to show by a more detailed consideration of that section.

2

Before I look in detail at particular passages of Section VII, I need to say what I mean when I claim that Hume is a skeptic. Basically, I will adopt Robert Fogelin's distinction between theoretical and prescriptive skepticism and between a theoretical, a prescriptive, and a practicing skeptic.<sup>2</sup> *Theoretical skepticism* is the view that the members of a certain set of beliefs or claims are not *rationally justified* - we do not and cannot have good reason for thinking that those beliefs or claims are true, for we can have no evidence for those beliefs or claims.<sup>3</sup> The theoretical skeptic thus holds that the members of the corresponding set of knowledge claims are false. So theoretical skepticism can also be characterized as the view that all knowledge claims of a certain kind are false. A theoretical skeptic, then, is one who holds with regard to a certain set of beliefs or claims, that the members of that set are not rationally justified. He thus holds that all of the members of the corresponding set of knowledge claims are false.



*Prescriptive skepticism* is the view that we should abstain from holding certain beliefs or making certain knowledge claims because those beliefs or claims lack rational justification. A prescriptive skeptic is one who makes such prescriptions with regard to some set of beliefs or knowledge claims. A practicing skeptic is one who follows, or attempts to follow, the prescriptions of prescriptive skepticism, that is, one who refrains from holding certain beliefs or from making certain knowledge claims.

I also adopt Fogelin's distinction between epistemological skepticism and conceptual skepticism. *Epistemological skepticism* is the view that challenges the supposed grounds or justification for the members of a set of beliefs or claims while accepting that those beliefs or claims are intelligible. *Conceptual skepticism* is the view that the members of a certain set of purported beliefs or claims are unintelligible and hence are in fact pseudo-beliefs or pseudo-claims.

When I say that Hume is a skeptic throughout Section VII (and throughout the Treatise and the first Enquiry generally), I mean that he is a theoretical epistemological skeptic, that is, that he espouses a theoretical epistemological skepticism. [For brevity's sake I will usually drop 'epistemological' and will often drop 'theoretical' in speaking of Hume's theoretical epistemological skepticism.] In general Hume is a

prescriptive skeptic only with regard to those claims that go beyond our capacities, and he is a conceptual skeptic only with regard to a limited set of claims made in philosophy. I will discuss Hume's prescriptive and conceptual skepticisms and the extent to which he is a practicing skeptic at various points in later chapters.

As Fogelin points out, one can, without inconsistency, be a theoretical skeptic without being a prescriptive or practicing skeptic.<sup>4</sup> Thus *ad hominem* arguments from the fact that the skeptic does not refrain from holding beliefs or making knowledge claims are irrelevant to theoretical skepticism. Of course, there are various reasons one might have for holding theoretical skepticism. It will become clear as I proceed what Hume's reasons are for holding theoretical skepticism and what kinds of beliefs or claims are included in the set with regard to which he is a skeptic.

3

Why does Hume begin Section VII in such a state of doubt with regard to his ability to gain knowledge? Within Section VII, Hume gives us a general overview of "those desponding reflections" which have led him nearly to despair. This overview is, of course, basically an outline of some of his main epistemological and metaphysical reasonings and conclusions in the earlier parts of Book I. One "desponding reflection" that he mentions early on is

this: No matter how carefully he reasons on any particular matter, he ultimately cannot provide a justification for his assenting to a conclusion;<sup>5</sup> his assenting is merely a matter of psychological propensity:

After the most accurate and exact of my reasonings, I can give no reason why I shou'd assent to it; and feel nothing but a *strong* propensity to consider objects *strongly* in that view, under which they appear to me (T, 265).

The most important example of this occurs in causal reasoning. Experience of constant conjunctions together with a habit instilled by that experience leads Hume to certain conclusions as a result of causal reasoning. These conclusions are the result of the combined effect of experience and habit on the imagination, and that effect is that Hume forms "certain ideas in a more intense and lively manner, than others, which are not attended with the same advantages" (T, 265). Further,

Without this quality, by which the mind enlivens some ideas beyond others (which seemingly is so trivial, and so little founded on reason) we cou'd never assent to any argument, nor carry our view beyond those few objects, which are present to our senses (T, 265).

So, if not for a feature of our psychological makeup "which seemingly is so trivial, and so little founded on reason" we would be locked in a solipsism of the present moment, unable to attribute independent existence to material objects, to trust our reasoned conclusions, or to

trust our apparent memories. Hume concludes that "The memory, senses, and understanding are, therefore, all of them founded on the imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas" (T, 265).

Hume uses 'imagination' in two main senses. In one sense, the imagination is the faculty by which ideas are entertained and are recombined as we wish, as in daydreaming, though even this is guided by the "gentle force" of association. The output of the imagination in this first sense is distinguished from belief. In a second sense, the imagination is the faculty of the mind which, conditioned by experience, associates ideas according to principles of association and transfers force and vivacity from impressions and ideas to other ideas so as to cause belief. The output of the imagination in this sense is belief.

According to Hume, *belief* is, basically, vivid conception.<sup>6</sup> Hume writes:

An opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defin'd, A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION (T, I.III.VII, 96).

Note that Hume's definition of belief seems to be restricted to occurrent beliefs. With regard to dispositional beliefs, Hume doesn't present a definition, but it seems that given his theories about mental operations he must think of a dispositional belief that P as a

propensity to vividly conceive P in certain circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Of course, for Hume, to vividly conceive a proposition is to vividly conceive a set of ideas.

Though Hume characterizes belief in phenomenological terms, as *vivid* conception, he also characterizes belief in terms of its fixedness, or, as he also puts it, its "*solidity, or firmness, or steadiness,*" and its influence on behavior. In the "Appendix" to the Treatise Hume says that the manner in which the ideas composing a belief are conceived

...gives them more force and influence; makes them appear of greater importance; infixes them in the mind; and renders them the governing principles of all our actions (T, 629).

My believing is not directly under my control in the way that my fantasizing is - what I believe forces itself upon me, so to speak. Further, my beliefs influence my behavior in a way that my fantasies do not.

So, then, all of our beliefs based on the senses, memory, or the operations of the understanding, beyond those concerning the present data of consciousness, are based on the imagination's capacity for investing certain ideas with greater force and vivacity. This "principle" (that is, the imagination with its power and propensity to invest certain ideas with greater force and vivacity, thus engendering

belief), however, is "inconstant and fallacious" and it will lead us into error when implicitly followed. Hume writes,

'Tis this principle, which makes us reason from causes and effects; and 'tis the same principle, which convinces us of the continu'd existence of external objects, when absent from the senses. But tho' these two operations be equally natural and necessary in the human mind, yet in some circumstances they are directly contrary, nor is it possible for us to reason justly and regularly from causes and effects and at the same time believe the continu'd existence of matter (T, 266).

Both causal reasoning and our belief in the existence of an independent external world are based on the imagination's vivification of certain ideas. Yet causal reasoning undermines our belief in an independent external world. So when implicitly followed the principle on which most of our beliefs (that is, all of those beliefs not limited to first-person-present subjective experience) are based leads us to engage in forms of reasoning and belief formation that are inconsistent with one another, that is, that give rise to inconsistent conclusions.<sup>8</sup> However, the imagination must be implicitly followed, Hume says, "in all its variations" (T, 265-6). Thus we must, Hume thinks, be guided in our reasoning and belief formation by the imagination, though this will lead us into error and absurdity.

Why does Hume say that we must follow this "inconstant and fallacious" principle, despite the fact that it will lead us into error? Hume's reasoning here starts from

considerations about causation. In seeking the causes of phenomena we "wou'd not willingly stop before we are acquainted with that energy in the cause, by which it operates on its effect..." (T, I.IV.VII, 266). We seek to discover, Hume says, the tie or connection between cause and effect, the "ultimate and operating principle" by means of which the cause produces its effect (T, 267). Yet, if Hume's earlier analysis of causation is correct, we can never discover this ultimate connection as a component of the objective world.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, though we sometimes think we perceive such a connection, this is "an illusion of the imagination" (T, 267).

The observation that our belief that we perceive a tie between certain objects is an illusion of the imagination leads Hume to an important question. The question, Hume says, is "how far we ought to yield to these illusions" (T, 267). The question of how far we ought to yield to the suggestions of the imagination (that is, the beliefs to which the imagination naturally gives rise) leads to a "very dangerous dilemma." The basic dilemma is this: If we accept all of the suggestions of the imagination, we will be led into error and contradiction. But if we resolve not to accept all of the suggestions of the imagination, if we decide, that is, to reject the "trivial" suggestions of the imagination, the consequences are equally bad. For then we will be resolved to "adhere to the understanding, that is, to the more general and establish'd properties of the

imagination" (T, 267). This, however, will lead us into "total skepticism."<sup>10</sup> Hume writes,

For I have already shewn, that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life" (T, 267-8).

We are saved from this total skepticism, Hume says, only by one of the "trivial" properties of the imagination. This trivial property of the imagination is that it invests little force and vivacity in elaborate reasoning, and so such reasoning is unable to undermine those beliefs we form more easily and naturally.

Suppose, then, that in accord with the trivial property that saves us from total skepticism we take as a principle that we should not accept conclusions established on the basis of "refin'd or elaborate reasoning." Then we are "cut off entirely" from "all science and philosophy," which are pursued mainly through refined and elaborate reasoning. In addition, we are then inconsistent, because we are taking the suggestion of one of the trivial properties of the fancy as a principle to the exclusion of certain others though "by a parity of reason" we ought to embrace all or none. Further, that principle itself has been established only on the basis of the kind of refined and elaborate reasoning it proscribes. So, then, the original dilemma resolves to this: If we embrace the principle that no refined and elaborate



reasoning be countenanced, we are precluded from doing philosophy or science and we are manifestly inconsistent. But if we reject this principle, then (assuming that the epistemological findings of the earlier parts of the Treatise are correct) "we subvert entirely the human understanding." Hume's less-than-sanguine conclusion: "We have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a false reason [the reason that implicitly follows the suggestions of the imagination] and none at all" (T, 268).

One would think that if Hume is to end his reflections in Section VII on a hopeful note, he must have some solution to this "very dangerous" dilemma. What is Hume's solution? In my opinion, he has none, at least if having a solution to the dilemma requires showing either that it is a false dilemma or that the outcome of accepting one or the other of its options does not have the unfortunate implications it seems to have. What Hume in fact says is that he has no such solution:

For my part, I know not what ought to be done in the present case. I can only observe what is commonly done; which is, that this difficulty is seldom or never thought of; and even where it has once been present to the mind, is quickly forgot, and leaves but a small impression behind it. Very refin'd reflections have little or no influence upon us; and yet we do not, and cannot establish it for a rule, that they ought not to have any influence; which implies a manifest contradiction (T, I.IV.VII, 268).

Of course, sometimes "very refined reflections" do have an at least temporary influence on us, which is why Hume begins Section VII nearly in despair. He writes,

The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another (T, 268-9).

What saves Hume from this wretched state? Not reason, but nature: "Fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose..." (T, 269). How does nature perform this rescue? Only by relaxing Hume's philosophical bent of mind or by distracting him with lively sense impressions. In this way Hume's confidence in his ordinary views, his "indolent belief in the general maxims of the world", returns. Hume tells us his own method of dispelling the clouds of doubt raised by philosophical reflection: "I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends..." (T, 269).<sup>11</sup> Still, he feels enough of his former mood, engendered by his earlier "desponding reflections," that he resolves to eschew philosophy and elaborate reasoning in the future. These are the sentiments of his "spleen and indolence," and before long they will give way to other, less pessimistic sentiments, sentiments that will allow Hume to take up philosophy once again. Put

simply, Hume's mood will improve. However, with regard to his splenetic sentiments Hume says

I must confess, that philosophy has nothing to oppose to them, and expects a victory more from the returns of a serious good-humour'd disposition, than from the force of reason and conviction (T, 270).

Hume does offer a reason for pursuing philosophy. But this reason is not that philosophy will lead us to truth or is especially likely to yield knowledge. Rather, Hume says that given that it is "almost impossible" for us not to consider philosophical issues, we should choose the "safest and most agreeable" guide, and he recommends that we choose philosophy rather than its alternative, superstition. But Hume prefers philosophy to superstition, not because philosophy is more likely to lead to truth, but only because it is less likely to disturb us in the conduct of our lives. (See T, I.IV.VII, 271-2.)

With the return of a good humored disposition, Hume will naturally be inclined to investigate philosophical topics; the pursuit of philosophy will once again provide him with a pleasure that he would lose by eschewing it: "...I *feel* I shou'd be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy" (T, 271). However, in spite of the optimism, industry, and renewed interest in philosophy that result from a changed mood, Hume says clearly that

In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism. If we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise. Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles..." (T, 270).

What is this skepticism that we ought to preserve in all the incidents of life? Hume cannot mean that we should carry out a prescriptive skepticism with regard to our beliefs about the existence of an external world, the deliverances of memory, or the conclusions of the understanding, which he earlier called into question. For (1) Hume's causal theory of belief precludes our having the kind of control over our beliefs required for carrying out such a prescriptive skepticism,<sup>12</sup> and (2) Hume says explicitly in discussing his splenetic mood that even after his skeptical reflections he finds himself "absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life" (T, 269). In the same paragraph he says further that

...I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding; and in this blind submission I shew most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles" (T, 269).

The skepticism displayed in Hume's submission to nature cannot, then, be a prescriptive or practicing skepticism. It is, I suggest, a theoretical skepticism which is based on the epistemological and metaphysical reasoning of Book I. Moreover, Hume begins and ends Section VII as a theoretical

skeptic. Though he expresses optimism and ambition toward the end of the chapter, he nevertheless maintains his theoretical skepticism. In the closing paragraph of Section VII, after saying that we should in general indulge our inclination to do philosophy and even yield to our propensity to feel certain with regard to particular points, Hume goes on to offer a caveat against any objection that might be offered against his use of expressions such as "'tis evident, 'tis certain" and "'tis undeniable." These expressions, he says, are "extorted" from him by a present view of things, but they

...imply no dogmatical spirit nor conceited idea of my own judgment, which are sentiments that I am sensible can become no body, and a sceptic still less than any other (T, 274).

This suggests that Hume considers himself a skeptic in spite of his optimistic and seemingly non-skeptical pronouncements.

4

I have quoted several passages from Section VII in which Hume seems to refer to himself as a skeptic. However, what is far more important than these passages for gauging Hume's epistemological standpoint at the end of Book I is the fact that nothing has been said in the course of Section VII to undermine the "desponding reflections" of its earlier

passages. The fact that causal reasoning undermines our belief in an independent material world has not been challenged. The "very dangerous dilemma," on which we have no choice but between "a false reason and none at all," has not been resolved. The claim that the understanding, operating according to its own principles, undermines all belief has not been retracted or qualified. A change of mood has occurred, to be sure. But this change of mood is simply the result of nature taking its course; it is not the result of Hume's having solved any of the epistemological problems of the earlier parts of Book I that were outlined in the beginning of Section VII. Hume can remain a serious skeptic in spite of his later comments and philosophical endeavors because his skepticism is primarily theoretical. Hume does not hold that we should or can refrain from believing in such things as causal connections, the regularity of nature, or the external world. So, though a shift in mood occurs toward the end of Section VII, a shift which allows Hume to resume philosophizing, this shift is fully consistent with Hume's holding a theoretical skepticism throughout. For one can consistently espouse theoretical skepticism while holding beliefs and seeking to expand one's stock of beliefs. Hume does, after all, say that "A true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts as well as of his philosophical conviction" (T, 273). A true skeptic will thus yield to his inclination to do

philosophy - as does Hume. He remains, for all that, a true skeptic.

Actually, one can see Hume's change of mood from the beginning to the end of T, I.IV.VII as a movement toward and then away from practical skepticism. In the earlier parts of this section, Hume, almost in despair, is nearly resolved to becoming a practicing skeptic with regard to philosophical issues. At the end, with a change of sentiment, Hume is no longer tempted to become a practicing skeptic with regard to philosophy. The shift is, nevertheless, from nearly espousing a *practical* skepticism to moving away from such an espousal, not from espousing theoretical skepticism to dismissing it. It is instructive that Hume thinks that a true skeptic will yield to his inclination to do philosophy, for this suggests that the kind of skepticism a true skeptic holds is theoretical rather than prescriptive.

Of course, merely considering the short concluding section of Book I is not sufficient for showing that Hume is a serious skeptic. If Hume's doubts and worries at the beginning of that section are not grounded in his substantive reasoning concerning such topics as causation, induction, our belief in the independent external world, and our knowledge-gaining capacities in general, then they may represent nothing more than a passing phase of insecurity in a thinker about to embark on an arduous and unprecedented undertaking. So, in chapter II I will turn to the earlier

parts of Book I and to the later Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding in order to show that it is Hume's substantive philosophical views, rather than passing sentiments, which lead him to skepticism. First, however, I must address an issue concerning Hume's use of 'knowledge'.

5

In "Of knowledge" (T, I.III.I, 69-73), Hume divides philosophical relations into those that "depend entirely on the ideas, which we compare together," and those that "may be chang'd without any change in the ideas" (T, 69). The first are the "invariable" relations: resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in quantity or number. The second are the "variable" relations: identity, situation in time and place, and causation. Only the invariable relations "can be the objects of knowledge and certainty," according to Hume (T, 70).

What we know, according to Hume, we ascertain either by intuition or demonstration. What is ascertained by intuition is recognized "at first sight, without any inquiry or reasoning" (T, 70). What is ascertained by demonstration requires a "chain of reasoning." Hume's view in the Treatise is that any proposition that is intuitively or demonstrably certain expresses one of the four invariable relations. These propositions are themselves necessary, for their denials imply a contradiction and hence what they assert is impossible (See T, 79-80, 89, and 161-2). In the Enquiry



Hume refers to such propositions as those expressing "relations of ideas," in contrast with contingent propositions expressing "matters of fact." The realm of relations of ideas is the realm of certainty. It is the realm of a *priori* knowledge.

Given that on Hume's official definition of 'knowledge' we can have knowledge only of a *priori*, necessary truths, it might seem that the claim that for Hume much of our alleged knowledge is not knowledge at all is rather trivial. Since according to Hume we find out by experience what things in fact exist and what properties they have, and we ascertain causal connections only a *posteriori*, it might seem that it is merely by definition that Hume excludes much of what we ordinarily think we know from the realm of knowledge.

I believe, however, that though on Hume's official definition *knowledge* is restricted to the *a priori*, Hume also employs our ordinary notion of knowledge, a notion which is not so restrictive. This is the notion traditionally analyzed as *justified, true belief*. Hume, as a philosopher familiar with the history of philosophy, would have been familiar with the traditional analysis of 'knowledge'.

Why do I believe that Hume employs the traditional notion of knowledge? For two main reasons. The first is that Hume employs the term 'knowledge' in contexts in which it is clear that it is not knowledge in the restricted technical sense that is being discussed. The second is that some of

Hume's skeptical attacks are focused on the supposed justification for our beliefs regarding contingent matters of fact. This shows both that (i) he recognizes that there is a sense of 'knowledge' in which we take ourselves to have a *posteriori* knowledge of matters of fact, and (ii) he is interested in showing that in this traditional sense of 'knowledge' much of our alleged knowledge involves beliefs that cannot be rationally justified.

For example, in "Of the inference from the impression to the idea" (T, I.III.VI, 86-94), Hume writes:

There is no object, which implies the existence of any other if we consider these objects in themselves, and never look beyond the ideas which we form of them. *Such an inference wou'd amount to knowledge, and wou'd imply the absolute contradiction and impossibility of conceiving anything different. But as all distinct ideas are separable, 'tis evident there can be no impossibility of that kind* (T, 86-7). [Italics added]

Note that at this point Hume has already ruled out our possessing knowledge of causal connections in the technical sense of 'knowledge'. Yet he goes on to consider the justification for our causal claims and inferences and concludes, I will argue, that they are without rational justification.

In the first Enquiry, after saying that "...the knowledge..." of causal relations "...is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings a priori; but arises entirely from experience..." he goes on to say that "...all

the laws of nature, and all the operations of bodies are known only by experience...(E IV.I, 27; 29).<sup>13</sup> [Italics added]

So, Hume uses 'knowledge' in both a technical and a traditional sense. It is with regard to knowledge in the traditional sense that Hume holds that much of our alleged knowledge is not knowledge at all.<sup>14</sup>

## Notes to Chapter I

1. Such a reading of T, I.IV.VII is given by Annette Baier in chapter 1 of A Progress of Sentiments (Baier [1991]). I will consider Baier's anti-skeptical interpretation of Hume in a later chapter.

2. Fogelin draws these distinctions in his Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature. See Fogelin [1985], 5-6.

3. When I say that Hume is a skeptic with regard to some set of claims or beliefs, I'm not saying that he claims to know or even believes that they are false. Hume's theoretical skepticism is in fact a *neutral* skepticism. The sets of claims with regard to which Hume is a skeptic are such that for each claim they include, they also include its negation. So Hume's theoretical skepticism may be characterized more generally as the view that the members of certain sets of beliefs or claims are such that we cannot know their truth values.

4. Fogelin writes:

Clearly, a philosopher can be a theoretical skeptic of the most general and radical kind without prescribing anything about holding beliefs and without himself following any such prescriptions. This distinction, though obvious enough, is important, for it disposes at once of vulgar *ad hominem* arguments that attempt to refute the skeptic by pointing to his conduct which it is said, gives the lie to his supposed skepticism (Fogelin [1985], 5).

I don't mean to suggest that Fogelin is alone in recognizing that Hume is a theoretical but not a prescriptive skeptic with regard to much of our alleged knowledge. Without explicitly drawing the distinction between theoretical, prescriptive, and practical skepticism, Bruce Aune makes what I take to be essentially the same point when he says that Hume "...was a skeptic...only in believing that his many instinctive beliefs could not be rationally defended" but that Hume's "...inability to defend them did not render them any less acceptable in his sober

eyes" (Aune [1970], 71). The distinction is also recognized by A.H. Basson, Terence Penelhum, and many others, though they do not address it as directly, or express it in the same terminology, as Fogelin.

The important point is that one can be a theoretical skeptic without being a prescriptive or practicing skeptic. One can be a theoretical skeptic with regard to some claims C1...Cn without believing that all or even any of C1...Cn are false. One may, in fact, believe that some or all of C1...Cn are true, yet nevertheless adopt a theoretical skepticism with regard to C1...Cn.

5. Hume's reasons for saying that ultimately he can give no justification for assenting to any conclusion will be discussed in later chapters. His view that he can provide no such justification is based largely on his reasoning in various sections of T, I.III (in which he discusses knowledge, causal inference, and belief, and presents what we call "the problem of induction"), T, I.IV.I, "Of scepticism with regard to reason", and T, I.IV.II, "Of scepticism with regard to the senses."

6. Where the proposition one believes is a matter of fact, that is, is contingent, one's belief simply is an idea invested with a high degree of force and vivacity via its relation to some impression. But with regard to beliefs concerning non-contingent propositions Hume writes:

...Wherein consists the difference betwixt believing and disbelieving any proposition? The answer is easy with regard to propositions, that are prov'd by intuition or demonstration. In that case, the person, who assents, not only conceives the ideas according to the proposition, but is necessarily determin'd to conceive them in that particular manner...Whatever is absurd is unintelligible; nor is it possible for the imagination to conceive anything contrary to a demonstration (T, I.III.VII, 95).

7. In an unpublished article, Bruce Aune makes a similar point. Aune writes that although Hume

...speaks of belief as a vivid idea, he would not disagree with the contemporary claim that [beliefs] are mental dispositions, for he held that the ideas we have formed continue to be present to our minds "only in power"

and will be "revived" when we experience something with which they are associated (Aune [3], 16).

8. Causal reasoning and our propensity to believe in the existence of an independent external world give rise to inconsistent beliefs in that (1) our natural propensities lead us to believe in the independent existence of the immediate objects of perception, while causal reasoning leads us to recognize that those objects are not independent; (2) our natural propensities motivate us to hold the philosophical theory of "double existence," while causal reasoning provides no basis for an inference to the supposed independent objects that we believe correspond to our perceptions. Of course, the second inconsistency isn't between a belief resulting from our natural propensity and a conclusion arrived at by causal reasoning but rather between a belief resulting from our natural propensity and a conclusion arrived at by analysis of causal reasoning.

9. I will discuss Hume's analysis of our idea of causation in chapter II.

10. Hume argues in T, I.IV.I that reason operating according to its own principles subverts itself. I will discuss Hume's argument in that section in a later chapter. Note, however, that the "reason" that is self-subversive is not some idealized Cartesian reason which intuits truths according to the "natural light", but simply the imagination in its "general and more establish'd" operations. This fact is important for evaluating the extent of Hume's skepticism, as will appear further on.

11. Hume writes:

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour's amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and

strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther (T, 269).

12. In the Enquiry, Hume uses the example of the unavoidability of a person's belief that heat exists, when he has experienced the regular conjunction of heat with flame and currently observes a flame. Hume writes,

This belief is the necessary result of placing the mind in such circumstances. It is an operation of the soul, when we are so situated, as unavoidable as to feel the passion of love, when we receive benefits; or hatred, when we meet with injuries. All these operations are a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought and understanding is able either to produce or to prevent (E, V.I, 46-7).

13. Of course, one might say that Hume's comments in E IV.I conflict with the skeptical interpretation I advance, for he seems to be saying that we do have the kinds of empirical knowledge with regard to which I claim he is a theoretical skeptic. Note, however, that Hume is at that point taking for granted the common sense view that we do have such knowledge and inquiring into the genesis of that (alleged) knowledge. So his point can be made by saying that *if* we have empirical knowledge, that knowledge is based in experience. The argument traditionally interpreted as an argument for inductive skepticism comes after this stage in Hume's reasoning and the upshot of that argument is, I will argue, that our inductive inferences and inductively derived beliefs cannot be rationally justified and that hence much of our alleged empirical knowledge is not knowledge at all.

14. Of course, one might say that the issue of whether or not our beliefs constitute *knowledge* is not itself very interesting. So long as we have rationally justified beliefs, what does it matter if those beliefs constitute knowledge? Though I have chosen to present Hume's skepticism in terms of a negative assessment of much of our alleged knowledge, that negative assessment results from his denial, with regard to much of that alleged knowledge, that the beliefs involved are rationally justified. So Hume's critique of our alleged knowledge applies just as much to the fall-back position that we have, not knowledge, but rationally justified beliefs.

CHAPTER  
II  
HUME'S ACCOUNT OF CAUSATION AND CAUSAL INFERENCE

1

One of the cornerstones of Hume's philosophy is his account of causation and causal inference. Moreover, it is this part of Hume's philosophy which has traditionally been seen as presenting the most formidable skeptical challenge to our claims to knowledge about matters of fact. It is primarily on the basis of Hume's analysis of our idea of causation and his presentation of what we now call "the problem of induction," that he has been widely regarded as a skeptic who presented serious challenges to our claims to empirical knowledge. Recently, however, Hume's views on these matters have been interpreted in ways that downplay or deny Hume's own skepticism and the seriousness of his skeptical challenge. In following chapters I will consider several such interpretations and argue that they are mistaken. First, however, I will present Hume's basic reasoning on the topics of causation and causal inference in the Treatise, Book I, Part III. (I will also refer to the first Enquiry where useful).



In "Of probability; and of the idea of cause and effect" (T, I.III.II, 73-8), Hume takes up the topic of causation, the only form of relation that can "give us assurance from the existence or action of one object, that 'twas follow'd or preceded by any other existence or action..." (T, 73-4). Only this relation, he says, "informs us of existences and objects which we do not see or feel..." (T, .74). What Hume begins in this section is an analysis of our idea of causation. This analysis will have serious consequences for the possibility of our having knowledge of matters of fact and hence a direct bearing on the question of whether or not Hume is a skeptic.

Hume's procedure in analyzing an idea is, of course, to trace it to the simple impressions from which it ultimately arises. According to Hume, each idea is copied from and represents some impression or impressions.<sup>1</sup> By examining the impression or impressions from which an idea arises the idea itself is made clear, and by examining the idea our reasoning involving that idea is made clear. When we understand an idea's etiology and hence its content, we can reason more precisely; we will, for example, be less likely to mistake the idea for some other, similar idea and will thus be less likely to go astray in our reasoning.

Hume begins by considering whether the impression that produces our idea of causation, "an idea of such prodigious consequence," can be found in our experience of a particular

pair of objects that we regard as cause and effect. The impression cannot be of one of the particular qualities of the objects, for there is no single quality or set of qualities that characterizes all and only those objects we regard as causes or effects. So, the idea of causation must be based on some relation or relations between causally connected objects. The relations discoverable by an examination of an individual cause-effect pair are (i) contiguity (spatial and temporal nearness) and (ii) succession (the cause precedes its effect in time). According to Hume, these are the only relations that we find in examining a particular instance of causation.

The relations of contiguity and succession do not, however, fully exhaust our concept of causation; our idea of causation cannot be analyzed into merely the ideas of contiguity and succession of objects. One object's being contiguous and temporally prior to another is not a sufficient condition of its being the cause of that other. Thus Hume says,

There is a NECESSARY CONNEXION to be taken into consideration; and that relation is of much greater importance, than any of the other two above mention'd (T, 77).

Why does Hume say that the relation of necessary connection "is of much greater importance" than the relations of contiguity and succession? One reason, of

course, is that more seems to be involved in one object or event's causing another than contiguity and succession, as Hume says. When I say that the rock's hitting the window caused the window to break I seem to say more than that the rock hit the window and then the window broke. I seem to be saying also that the rock's hitting the window in some way necessitated its breaking, that the window had to break when the rock hit it. But another reason, I believe, is that Hume is concerned at this point with causal inference. The idea of causation is "of such prodigious importance" because the relation of causation is the only relation on the basis of which we can infer objects beyond those present to our senses or memory. Hume is concerned at this point with necessary connection because necessary connection seems a likely candidate for justifying our causal inferences.<sup>2</sup>

Now, the impression from which the idea of necessary connection is derived cannot be an impression of any of the particular qualities of objects, for again, the relation of cause and effect does not depend on these qualities. Still, the only relations discovered by examining an individual cause-effect pair are contiguity and succession. Hume proposes to leave the direct examination of our idea of necessary connection, that is, the direct search for the impression or impressions from which that idea is derived, and consider two related questions "the examination of which will perhaps afford a hint, that may serve to clear up the present difficulty" (T, 78). These questions are

(1) "For what reason we pronounce it necessary that every thing whose existence has a beginning, shou'd also have a cause?" (T, 78)

(2) "Why we conclude that such particular causes must necessarily have such particular effects; and what is the nature of that inference we draw from the one to the other, and of the belief we repose in it?" (T, 78)

How will considering these questions help Hume in finding the source of our idea of necessary connection? Examination of (1) will show that the connection between cause and effect is not logically or metaphysically necessary and hence will support his answer to (2): We conclude that a given object must necessarily have a particular effect on the basis of habit and our experience of involuntary thought transitions. Our inference from an object to its causal correlate (that is, its cause or its effect) is a matter of the triggering of a habit instilled in us by repeated experience of the regular conjunction of similar objects, and our belief in the conclusion of a causal inference is to be explained as the causal result of experience and habit. The idea of necessary connection, Hume will eventually say, arises from our experience of regular and involuntary transitions among our thoughts when our experience-instilled habits are triggered by further experience.

In "Why a cause is always necessary" (T, I.III.III, 78-82), Hume considers the causal maxim, which states that "whatever begins to exist, must have a cause of existence" (T, 78). This maxim is supposed to be certain and hence founded on intuition. However, all certainty is based on one or more of the four invariable relations - resemblance, degrees in quality, proportion in number, or contariety - and none of these is implied in the causal maxim.<sup>3</sup> Thus the causal maxim is not intuitively certain. Hume proceeds to show that it is not demonstratively certain either.

Hume's main argument is the following: We can demonstrate that everything that begins to exist must have a cause if and only if we can demonstrate that it is not possible for an object to begin to exist without a cause.<sup>4</sup> We can, however, conceive of an object coming into existence without conjoining with it the distinct idea of a cause. So the separation of these ideas is possible, and hence the actual separation of the objects is possible, that is, it implies no contradiction.<sup>5</sup> Thus the proposition that it is possible for an object to begin to exist without a cause cannot be refuted by reasoning "from mere ideas." So, we cannot demonstrate that it is not possible for an object to begin to exist without a cause. Therefore, we cannot demonstrate that everything that begins to exist must have a cause.

Hume's main conclusion in this section, then, is that the causal maxim is neither intuitively nor demonstrably certain. We do not accept it on the basis of any a priori intuition or demonstration. Yet it seems that we do accept it, so this "opinion" must be the result of observation and experience. However, rather than pursue the question of how experience gives rise to our belief in this general principle, Hume turns to this conjunctive question:

Why we conclude, that such particular causes must necessarily have such particular effects, and why we form an inference from one to another? (T, 82)

This is, of course, just the second of the two questions raised earlier. Hume notes that perhaps in the end we will find that "the same answer will serve for both questions" (T, 82). Hume's answer to the question of how experience gives rise to belief in the causal maxim and his answer to the conjunctive question quoted above will, as he suggests, be the same. That answer will be, in short, that our belief in the causal maxim and our conclusions and inferences with regard to particular causally related objects are a result of the operation of experience-instilled habits.

4

In "Of the impressions of the senses and memory" (T, I.III.IV, 84-86), Hume notes that the "materials" of causal reasoning are "heterogeneous." Causal inferences proceed

from impressions of an object by means of the memory or senses to an idea of a causally connected object. One of Hume's conclusions in this section is that the belief which attends impressions of the memory or senses is "nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present" (T, 86). The force and vivacity of the sense impression or memory "lays the foundation" for our causal reasoning when we "trace the relation of cause and effect" (T, 86). The central point Hume will undertake to explain in this and succeeding sections is causal inference, that is, the transition from an impression of an object to the vivified idea of, that is, the belief in, a causally connected object.

Hume's explanation of our belief in the conclusions of causal inferences is as follows. Empirical belief in general is "A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION" (T, I.III.VII, 96). How does Hume reach this conclusion? What Hume is concerned with are empirical beliefs that rest on inference. Hence he says that since reason alone cannot "...satisfy us that the existence of any one object does ever imply that of another," our empirical beliefs are not the result of reason but of "custom or a principle of association" (T, 97).

The difference between believing P and merely conceiving or imagining P cannot be that in believing P I have different ideas than I do in simply conceiving or imagining P. For if I have different ideas in believing P,

then what I believe is not the same thing that I conceived or imagined. Nor can my belief that P be a matter of my attaching some other individual idea to the set of ideas which constitute my conception of P. For then it would be in my power to believe whatever I wish, which, Hume says, is clearly not the case. So the difference between believing P and merely conceiving P must lie in the manner in which I have the ideas. Since the only way of varying an idea without changing its content is to vary its degree of force and vivacity, belief consists in conceiving ideas with a superior degree of force and vivacity.

How do the ideas that constitute my belief come to have this high degree of force and vivacity? Through their relation to a present impression (of the senses or memory).<sup>6</sup> Hume writes:

I wou'd willingly establish it as a general maxim in the science of human nature, that when any impression becomes present to us, it not only transports the mind to such ideas as are related to it, but likewise communicates to them a share of its force and vivacity (T, 98).

Hume thus presents a causal theory of empirical belief: I come to believe P because the idea of P is related to a present impression by one of the natural relations, and through the relation some of the force and vivacity of the impression is transmitted to the related idea, thus enlivening it. Thus my experience and a feature of my psychological makeup, that is, the fact that my mind



operates according to certain principles of association, together cause me to have the empirical beliefs that I do.

How in particular do I come to believe in the conclusions of causal inferences? The answer to this question will appear in following sections, but the basic explanation is as follows. According to Hume, when I have had sufficient experience of objects of type A being regularly conjoined with objects of type B, I develop a habit of forming an idea of an object of type B on experiencing an object of type A. So, when I have a new impression of an object of type A, this habit is triggered and I form the idea of an object of type B. Another way of putting this is: because regularly conjoined objects of types A and B stand in the causal relation, which is a natural relation (a relation of association between perceptions), given my experience of their regular conjunction, whenever I have an impression or idea of an object of type A I have an idea of an object of type B. Further, when I have an impression of an object of type A, the natural relation of causation functions not only to effect the transition to an idea of an object of type B but also to transmit some of the force and vivacity of the impression to it, thus enlivening it and producing belief.<sup>7</sup>

#### 5.1

In "Of the inference from the impression to the idea" (T, I.III.VI, 86-94), Hume examines our causal inferences

and concludes that they are not based on reason. In this section Hume is still in the process of answering the question of Section III (which appeared earlier, with slightly different wording, in Section II):

Why we conclude that such particular causes must necessarily have such particular effects, and why we form an inference from one to another? (T, 82)

This question was intended to help in the search for the impression or impressions from which the idea of necessary connection is derived. Of course, determining the source and nature of the idea of necessary connection is itself part of Hume's analysis of our idea of causation. But note that Hume's main interest from the beginning has been in causal inference; it is because causal inference is our one means of inferring the existence of things we are not now perceiving or remembering to have perceived that the idea of causation is "of such prodigious consequence" (See T, I.III.II, 74-5).

Hume begins by noting that the inference we draw from cause to effect is not based on knowledge of the essences of the related objects. No object implies the existence of any other distinguishable object.<sup>8</sup> Thus our causal inferences are not a priori. Rather, our causal inferences are based on experience. What kind of experience? Experience of repeated conjunctions of similar object pairs. When I have repeatedly observed tokens of type A followed by tokens of

type B, then, on observing a new token of type A, I infer the existence of a token of type B. Similarly, on observing a new token of type B, I infer the existence of a token of type A. I infer both from cause to effect and from effect to cause. In short, I infer from an object to its causal correlate. Hume writes:

We remember to have had frequent instances of the existence of one species of objects; and also remember, that the individuals of another species of objects have always attended them, and have existed in a regular order of contiguity and succession with regard to them. Thus we remember to have seen that species of object we call flame, and to have felt that species of sensation we call heat. We likewise call to mind their constant conjunction in all past instances. Without any farther ceremony, we call the one cause and the other effect, and infer the existence of the one from that of the other (T, 87).

Hume has thus discovered a new relation between cause and effect to add to those of contiguity and succession - constant conjunction. Hume's initial reaction is disappointment. He is still looking for the source of the idea of necessary connection, but the constant conjunction of objects doesn't seem to be a possible source for this idea, for

From the mere repetition of any past impression, even to infinity, there never will arise any new original idea, such as that of a necessary connexion..." (T, 88).

However, given that we draw an inference from one object to another (from the impression to the idea) after experience of their constant conjunction, he will examine that

inference. Perhaps ultimately it will appear that "the necessary connexion depends on the inference, instead of the inference's depending on the necessary connection" (T, 88). Hume's words here suggest that he has been looking for necessary connection as that which grounds or justifies our causal inferences. His deceptively casual hint that perhaps the necessary connection depends on the inference rather than vice versa foreshadows his eventual move away from considering necessary connection as a candidate for justifying our causal inferences.

Since it is clear that our causal inferences are founded on past experience of constant conjunction, the next question is whether experience produces the inference through reason or through the imagination, that is, whether we are determined to make these inferences by canons of reason or by principles of association, by logic or merely because of our psychological makeup. If our inferences were based on reason, Hume says, we would have to be operating on the assumption that instances of which we've had no experience must resemble those of which we have had experience and that nature is uniform. In other words, if our causal inferences are based on reason, then a uniformity principle stating that objects that we have not yet experienced will have the same properties and stand in the same causal relations as those we have experienced must be one of the assumptions that justifies us in drawing our conclusions.

Now, Hume asks, what supports this assumption? It is not supported by intuition, for "we can at least conceive a change in the course of nature" but intuitive truths are based on invariable relations between ideas and hence are such that their denials are inconceivable. So if we are justified in believing the uniformity principle, UP, there must be an argument which supports it.

For Hume, there are two kinds of arguments, "demonstrative" and "probable". Demonstrative arguments are arguments in which the premises entail the conclusion. Further, demonstrative arguments involve only propositions stating relations between ideas and therefore their conclusions state necessary truths. Hence, if P is the conclusion of a demonstration,  $\sim P$  is inconceivable. Probable arguments (or, as Hume refers to them in the first Enquiry, "moral arguments") are arguments based on experience of the way things happen to be; such arguments either do not entail their conclusions (these are inductive arguments proper) or entail their conclusions (these are deductive arguments) but contain at least one premise that is arrived at by inductive inference. Hume's probable arguments, then, either are or depend on inductive arguments. So, Hume's dilemma stated in terms of probable or demonstrative arguments can be stated in outline this way: Support for the UP must be based either on necessary truths involving invariable relations of ideas or on contingent truths based on experience. But it can be based on neither, so no such support is possible.

There can be no demonstrative argument for the UP, for

We can at least conceive a change in the course of nature; which sufficiently proves, that such a change is not absolutely impossible. To form a clear idea of anything, is an undeniable argument for its possibility, and is alone a refutation of any pretended demonstration against it (T, 89).

There can be no probable argument for the UP, for all probable arguments presuppose the UP. Hence any proffered probable argument would be circular:

...probability is founded on the presumption of a resemblance betwixt those objects, of which we have had experience, and those, of which we have had none; and therefore 'tis impossible this presumption can arise from probability... (T, 90).

Hume makes the point about circularity more clearly in the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding:

We have said that all arguments concerning existence are founded on the relation of cause and effect; that our knowledge of that relation is derived entirely from experience; and that all our experimental conclusions proceed upon the supposition that the future will be conformable to the past. To endeavour, therefore, the proof of this last supposition by probable arguments, or arguments regarding existence, must be evidently going in a circle, and taking that for granted, which is the very point in question (E, IV.II, 35-6).

The UP is not intuitive. An argument for it must be either probable or demonstrative. But the UP can be supported neither by demonstrative nor probable arguments.

Therefore, there is no support for the UP. Therefore, (Hume's main conclusion) we are not determined by reason to make causal inferences. Even after experience of the constant conjunction of objects, we can't satisfy ourselves by reason that we should extend that experience to unobserved instances:

We suppose, but are never able to prove, that there must be a resemblance betwixt those objects, of which we have had experience, and those which lie beyond the reach of our discovery (T, 91-2).

So, we must be determined to make causal inferences by features of our psychological makeup, that is, principles of association:

Reason can never shew us the connexion of one object with another, tho' aided by experience, and the observation of their constant conjunction in all past instances. When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is not determin'd by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite them in the imagination (92).

## 5.2

The general problem Hume is concerned with essentially involves inference from the observed to the unobserved. Though one often discusses Hume's argument in terms of justifying our predictions about the future, Hume's inductive skepticism applies to inferences about the unobserved past and unobserved parts of the present as well. This is why it is calls into question the legitimacy of our

present beliefs about contemporary matters of fact that we are not directly observing.

Hume's position, then, seems to be this: All of our beliefs in matters of fact that go beyond what we are now observing or remember to have observed are based on causal inference. Causal inference presupposes the UP, that is, the principle that objects that we haven't observed will have the same properties and stand in the same causal relations as those we have observed. This principle, however, cannot be rationally justified, for it is neither intuitive (that is, it doesn't express an invariable relation between ideas) nor can it be supported by either demonstrative or probable arguments, the only forms of argument there are. Thus our causal inferences rest on a principle that cannot be rationally justified and hence are themselves ultimately without rational justification.

Now, since most of our beliefs in matters of fact are based on causal inference and causal inferences are ultimately without rational justification, it seems that Hume has produced an argument showing that most of our beliefs in matters of fact are, though psychologically explicable, without rational justification. It seems, in other words, that Hume has produced an argument showing that the members of the set

{ b, c | b is a belief in a matter of fact and b is based on causal inference .or. c is a claim with regard to a matter of fact and c is based on causal inference }



are without rational justification. This is clearly a skepticism with regard to the greater part of our factual beliefs. Of course, Hume doesn't think that we should or can refrain from holding such beliefs, nor does he think that such beliefs are unintelligible. Thus he seems to have argued for a theoretical (but not a prescriptive or conceptual) skepticism with regard to knowledge of matters of fact.

In attempting to justify our belief in the uniformity principle on which our causal inferences are based, Hume raises what is now called "the problem of induction." It is the problem of providing a justification for inductive inferences, that is, those inferences in which a conclusion is drawn from premises that do not deductively entail it. In such inferences, it is possible for the conclusion we draw to be false though the premises from which we draw it are true. The question is, quite simply, what justifies us in drawing a conclusion from a set of premises when the falsity of the conclusion is fully consistent with the truth of the premises? The causal inferences Hume is concerned with are themselves inductive inferences: From the true premise that all a's hitherto observed have been conjoined with b's, it does not deductively follow that all a's are conjoined with b's or that the next observed a will be conjoined with a b, and this remains true no matter how

extensive the class of observed a's and how randomly selected those a's are.

I should stress that Hume's argument for inductive skepticism is not merely aimed at inferences proceeding from false premises or at inferences that we would ordinarily regard as sloppy or based on improper evidence. Hume's challenge is a challenge to even our best, most careful inductive arguments, what we might call "strong" inductive arguments containing all true premises. This raises a problem for the practice of science. For example, scientists make claims about the behavior of hydrogen even though they've observed only a relatively tiny bit of the total hydrogen in the universe. What justifies such an extension from truths about what has been observed to claims about what has not?

The problem of induction, in brief, is this: To provide a reason why we should believe the conclusions of even strong inductive arguments with all true premises. On Hume's view, no such reason can be provided, yet all of our beliefs about matters of fact that go beyond the present testimony of the senses and memory are based on inductive inference.<sup>10</sup> This view is now often referred to as "inductive skepticism." Inductive inferences cannot be justified deductively, for they are not deductively valid. Nor can such inferences be justified inductively without circularity.<sup>11</sup> But deductive and inductive inference are

our only two kinds of inference. So, inductive inferences cannot be rationally justified.

Fogelin refers to the argument of T, I.III.VI as Hume's "no-argument argument." After noting that Hume recognizes only two basic kinds of arguments, Fogelin writes:

Since, as he will argue, neither form of argument can be used to justify the principle of the uniformity of nature, we arrive at what has come to be known as Hume's skepticism concerning induction....Hume concludes that no argument can justify our inductive inferences because no argument can justify the uniformity principle upon which they rely...(Fogelin [1985], 45-6).

It seems to me that Fogelin's reference to Hume's discussion as a "no-argument argument" very nicely captures Hume's point. Contrary to the claim one sometimes hears, that "Hume merely showed that induction is not deduction," what Hume has shown, I believe, is that ultimately we can give no rational justification for one of our basic forms of inference. Moreover, it is a form that does seem to require some such justification. Intuitively, isn't there something worrisome about a form of inference in which the truth of the premises is fully consistent with the falsity of the conclusion?

Hume seems to think that our only form of probable or inductive inference is causal inference. But even if Hume is wrong in saying that all inductive inference is causal inference, the problem he raises is a problem for inductive inference generally, since all such inference seems to

presuppose a uniformity principle.<sup>12</sup> So even if some of our beliefs concerning matters of fact are based on a form of non-causal inductive inference, Hume's argument nevertheless applies to them.

### 5.3

One might initially feel a sense of puzzlement or even irritation with Hume's inductive skepticism. One wants to say, "Of course we can't show that the conclusions of inductive arguments with true premises must have true conclusions, but that just shows that induction is not deduction. But the conclusions of strong inductive arguments are probable."

But what do we mean by "probable"? There are various interpretations of "probability," and I can't consider them all. But it is not clear that on any of these interpretations we can solve the problem of induction.<sup>13</sup> There are two main approaches to probability: We can discuss probability either in terms objective probability, or subjective probability. Basically, to treat the probability that  $x$  is  $F$  as objective is to interpret its probability as independent of our beliefs about its probability or the evidence we in fact have for it. On this view, something can be probable even though we have no evidence that it is and don't consider it probable.

One way of looking at probability as something objective is the "relative frequency" interpretation.

Roughly, on the relative frequency view, to say that it is probable that the next observed A will be F is just to say that in the long run the relative frequency of As that are F is over 1/2. Hume is, of course, concerned with "singular inference," of just this kind, e.g., "M/N observed As are F; therefore, with probability M/N the next observed A will be F." In this case we're talking about the probability that a given token of a certain kind possesses a certain property (which may be complex).

But consider: Suppose there is a box of 40 apples, 10 of which are wormy, and the wormy apples are randomly distributed through the box. Knowing this beforehand I can know that the probability that any randomly selected apple I remove from the box (observe) will be wormy is  $10/40=.25$ . But suppose I don't know beforehand how many apples there are or how many are wormy. In that case I won't know what proportion of the total number of apples are wormy apples. I won't know, in this case, the probability that any given apple is wormy before examining any apples. Suppose that I then remove (observe) 10 apples, and it just so happens that 8 of them are wormy. Then I might infer that the probability that the next apple I observe will be wormy is  $8/10=.80$ . But clearly since there are now 30 unobserved apples, only 2 of which are wormy, the probability (as relative frequency) that the next apple I observe will be wormy is  $2/30=.0666$ . So the probability judgments I make according to basic

inductive rules can diverge wildly from probabilities considered in terms of relative frequency.

Of course, if I could be sure that the total distribution of wormy apples among all the apples was close to the distribution of wormy apples among the apples I'd selected (If I had a WUP - Wormy Uniformity Principle), then I could be sure there would be no wild divergence. But (i) I couldn't know the distribution a priori, and (ii) the class of things we're making inferences about may well be infinite or at least indefinitely large, but we can only pull a few of them out of the box, so to speak. For example, we've only "observed" a small sample of all electrons, or, for that matter, apples. So I also can't know the total distribution a posteriori. In other words, we can't really say what the "long run" relative frequency of As that are F is. My observations cover only a finite sample and the assumption that that sample is typical is questionable. [Actually, this is trivially true, given the very notion of moral reasoning as terminating in conclusions about the unobserved.] Of course, if I am justified in thinking the UP is true then if  $M/N$  observed As have been F I can infer that in the long run  $M/N$  of all As are F. But how can I justify my faith in the UP? Hume showed that I can't. The problem of inferring relative frequencies from observed cases is simply another instance of the problem of induction.

I might want to say generally that the conclusions of inductive inferences are probable because the relative

frequency of true to false conclusions for good inductive arguments with true premises is greater than  $1/2$ . But how can we show that? The class of all strong inductive arguments with true premises is infinite; we've observed only a relatively small number of such arguments. So again we don't know the relevant relative frequency. We might argue that of those strong inductive arguments we've observed over  $1/2$  have true conclusions; therefore, over one half of all strong inductive arguments have true conclusions; therefore, for any randomly chosen strong inductive argument the probability that it will have a true conclusion is over  $1/2$ . But then again we'd be presupposing the UP, which Hume showed we can't support.

To treat probability subjectively is to treat it as a measure of the degree of confidence a person or group of people actually have in a certain claim or the degree of confidence a person "ought" to have in a certain claim given certain evidence. If we discuss probability in terms of the degree of confidence we ought to have, that is, in terms of degree of rational belief, to say that "The next observed A will be followed by a B" is probable for a given person is just to say that she would be rationally justified in believing it. But rational belief isn't the same thing as actual belief. Degree of rational belief is determined by the relevant evidence. So according to the probabilist to say that a statement is probable just means that it is supported by the relevant evidence. So, to say that a person

is rationally justified in accepting a conclusion is to say that the conclusion is supported by the relevant evidence. So there is a conceptual connection between probability, rationality, and evidential support.

The probabilist argues further that our concept of evidential support with regard to factual beliefs is such that by definition the conclusions of strong inductive arguments are supported by the evidence. For example, past experience of many As all of which were followed by Bs is by definition evidence for the claim that the next observed A will be followed by a B. But then by definition it is rational to accept the conclusions of strong inductive arguments. So to ask if we are rationally justified in accepting the conclusions of strong inductive arguments is equivalent to asking if we are rationally justified in accepting conclusions that we are rationally justified in accepting! Obviously, the probabilist says, the answer is yes.<sup>14</sup>

I believe that Hume's response to the probabilist would be something like the following: Our idea of what degree of belief it is rational to have in any conclusion depends on our notion of relevant evidence and what we take as relevant evidence depends on what inferential practices we accept. If those inferential practices are themselves called into question we can't simply take them for granted in attempting to provide support for our reliance on them. There are an indefinite number of other inferential procedures we might



use and the mere fact that we have adopted one and that one is reflected in our ordinary concepts of evidence and rational justification doesn't mean that that one is rationally justified in our sense, that is, that we have shown that procedure leads from true premises to true conclusions more often than not. Consider our example of the box of 40 apples. This showed us how wildly the probability judgments we would make using our inductive practices might diverge from the objective probabilities we want our beliefs to "track".

The notion of probability Hume himself ultimately works with is a subjectivist notion. Hume recognizes that belief comes in degrees and he sees the probability of my strong belief that the sun will rise tomorrow as a measure of my confidence or degree of belief in the proposition "The sun will rise tomorrow." He also recognizes that as a matter of psychological fact a person who has observed a large number of A's most of which have been B's will have a stronger belief that the next A he observes will be a B than will a person who either has never observed an A or who has observed a large number of A's most of which have been non-B's.<sup>15</sup> This fact, however, itself leads to the question, "Given that we do in fact adjust our degrees of belief in the ways that Hume points out, what is the justification for the inductively derived beliefs we hold and the confidence with which we hold them?" Hume's argument for inductive skepticism shows that his answer is "There is no

justification for the inductively derived beliefs we hold and the confidence with which we hold them."

The basic point can be expressed this way: Admittedly, we ordinarily take experience of uniform conjunction of objects of type A with objects of type B as evidence for the claim that in unobserved cases objects of type A are conjoined with objects of type B. What Hume points out, however, is that observed conjunctions of as and bs can serve as evidence for the claim that unobserved as and bs are conjoined, only on the supposition of the UP. But the UP itself is without support. So, experienced conjunctions cannot serve as evidence for claims about unexperienced conjunctions.

6

In "Of the idea of necessary connexion" (T, I.III.XIV, 155-72), Hume returns to the question "What is our idea of necessity, when we say that two objects are necessarily connected together?" (T, 155). In line with Hume's method, he must look for the impression that gives rise to such an idea. Note, however, that though necessary connection initially seemed a candidate for justifying our causal inferences, whatever the impression from which our idea of necessity is derived turns out to be, it cannot justify our causal inferences; for Hume has already shown that nothing can justify them.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Hume can continue with his larger project of analyzing the idea of causation.

Though Hume has argued for a theoretical skepticism with regard to our alleged knowledge of unobserved matters of fact, his larger goal throughout T, I.III is to provide an analysis of our idea of causation. Of course, the goal of providing an analysis of our idea of causation is itself part of a larger goal, Hume's main goal of establishing a "science of human nature" that will describe the operations of the human mind and allow for prediction and explanation of human behavior and mental phenomena. This remains Hume's goal in spite of the skeptical result of his considerations in T, I.III.VI.

Hume's proposed science of human nature involves causal explanation and inference. So how can he continue with his project of establishing such a science despite the skeptical result of T, I.III.VI? Hume can continue because he is a theoretical rather than a prescriptive or practicing skeptic. Though Hume has shown that there is no ultimate justification for our beliefs based on causal inference and hence no ultimate justification for explanations couched in terms of causation, he thinks it is part of our nature to engage in causal inference and explanation. Hume as an agent firmly believes in the uniformity of nature and the reliability of causal reasoning.<sup>17</sup>

Hume's basic argument concerning the idea of necessary connection is the following: Our idea of necessity arises only after experience of the constant conjunction of objects in like relations of succession and contiguity. But this

experience produces no new impression of any quality in the objects which could serve as the model of the idea of necessary connection. So, the idea of necessity doesn't represent a quality in the objects. However, the observation of resembling pairs of objects in like relations of succession and contiguity has an effect on the observer - it produces, via a habit, a new impression in the mind of the observer and it is this impression that is the model for our idea of necessity:

For after a frequent repetition, I find, that upon the appearance of one of the objects, the mind is determin'd by custom to consider its usual attendant, and to consider it in a stronger light upon account of its relation to the first object. 'Tis this impression, then, or determination, which affords me the idea of necessity (T, I.III.XIV, 156).

The effect of observation of a number of pairs of resembling objects in like relations of succession and contiguity is that on having the idea or impression of one member of the pair we feel a "determination of the mind" to pass to the idea of the other member. It is this internal impression that is the model of the idea of necessity. The idea of necessity is, then, based on an impression of reflection:<sup>18</sup>

The idea of necessity arises from some impression. There is no impression convey'd by our senses, which can give rise to that idea. It must, therefore, be deriv'd from some internal impression, or impression of reflexion. There is no internal impression, which has any relation to the present business, but that propensity, which custom produces, to pass from an object to the idea of its usual

attendant. This therefore is the essence of necessity (T, I.III.XIV, 165).

Hume is not saying that our idea of necessity arises from an impression of reflection but nevertheless represents some quality in causally related objects themselves. According to Hume, necessity is not in the objects but in the mind that regards them:

Necessity, then, ... is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another (T, 165).

Upon the whole, necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects; nor is it possible for us ever to form the most distant idea of it, consider'd as a quality in bodies (T, 165-6).

Following his discussion of our idea of necessity, Hume presents his two definitions of the causal relation:

We may define a CAUSE to be 'An object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac'd in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter.'

'A CAUSE is an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it, that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other' (T, 170).

On either of these definitions, Hume says, "...there is no absolute nor metaphysical necessity, that every beginning of existence shou'd be attended with such an object" (T, 172). Much has been written concerning Hume's two

definitions. Hume has been charged with offering definitions that are neither intensionally nor extensionally equivalent.<sup>19</sup> Much has been written as well on the issue of whether or not Hume presents a purely "regularity theory" of causation.<sup>20</sup> These questions are of both philosophical and scholarly interest.<sup>21</sup> However, I will not here enter into the question of whether Hume's two definitions of cause are or are not consistent with one another or whether Hume does or does not hold a pure regularity theory of causation. For whatever the truth about Hume's definitions, his skepticism about our empirical knowledge follows from his account of the causal relation as it is in the objects (definition 1), his analysis of causal inference, and his skeptical argument concerning induction. Even if (as seems plausible) Hume thinks that an idea of necessity forms a part of our pretheoretical idea of causation, Hume's view is that necessity does not exist in the objects and in no way justifies our causal inferences. Of course, it is important that necessary connection is not something found in causally connected objects themselves, for if it were, then perhaps it would provide a rational basis for causal inference.

7

I have now given an account of Hume's reasoning with regard to causation and causal inference that is true to Hume's text, though somewhat superficial. With this account as a base, I will now turn to recent interpretations of

Hume's views on causation and causal inference. I will argue that Hume does present an inductive skepticism, that Hume does not hold that causal inference is rationally justified, and that given Hume's analysis of causation and his inductive skepticism, we can never know that we do have a case of causal relation on the basis of which we can infer. In establishing these particular conclusions I hope to lend weight to the thesis that Hume is in fact a serious theoretical skeptic.

## Notes to Chapter II

1. In "Of the origin of our ideas" (T, I.I.I, 1-7), Hume divides "All the perceptions of the human mind" into "impressions" and "ideas". These differ only "in the degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind..." impressions being more forceful and lively, ideas less so. Hume further classifies perceptions into "simple" and "complex"; simple perceptions cannot be further analyzed into more basic perceptions, but complex perceptions can be analyzed into simple perceptions. Every simple idea, Hume says, corresponds to a simple impression which it resembles, and a complex idea is composed of simple ideas which correspond to and resemble some simple impressions. Thus all of our ideas correspond to and resemble some set of simple impressions. Moreover, Hume asserts that the impressions are the causes of their correspondent ideas:

That all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent (T, 4).

The claim that every simple idea is causally dependent on a simple impression which it resembles is often referred to as Hume's "Copy Principle." Hume presents two arguments for the claim that our impressions are the causes of our ideas:

(i) We always have the impression before the idea, never the idea before the impression. (ii) Where we lack the capacity for receiving certain impressions, "as when one is born blind or deaf", we lack the corresponding ideas.

2. In Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature, Robert Fogelin makes the point that Hume places such importance on necessary connection largely because of his interest in causal inference:

Why should the relation of a necessary connection be of more importance than the relations of contiguity and priority? The answer is obvious if we keep in mind that Hume's main concern at this stage of his discussion is to understand the basis of an inference from the perceived to the unperceived...A necessary connection is obviously a better candidate for grounding this inference, for given a perception of an object and the perception of a necessary



connection, perhaps we will have the basis for the transition from the perceived object to an unperceived object (Fogelin [1985], 42).

This view of Hume's interest in necessary connection makes sense of the fact that though Hume initially seems to include necessary connection as an essential element in our idea of causation, he eventually says, in T, I.III.XV, that constant conjunction is that "on which the relation of cause and effect totally depends" (T, 173). Further evidence for this view lies simply in the fact that from the beginning of his discussion of the idea of causation Hume lays stress on its important and unique role in empirical inference, and the fact that after discussing the idea of necessary connection in T I.III.XIV he says:

The necessary connection betwixt causes and effects is the foundation of our inference from one to the other. The foundation of our inference is the transition arising from the accustom'd union. These are, therefore, the same (T, 165).

Of course, at that point it is clear that necessary connection is not the foundation of our causal inferences in the sense that it provides a rational justification for them. These inferences, Hume has by that point shown, have a causal-psychological basis but not a rational justification. Nevertheless it is clear that what Hume was seeking was the "foundation" of these inferences, and only with the skeptical argument of T I.III.VI does it become clear that there is no rational foundation for these inferences.

3. In "Of relations" (T, I.I.V, 13-15), Hume distinguishes two types of relation, "natural" and "philosophical". Natural relations function to associate ideas, philosophical relations are simply points of comparison between things. Hume lists seven types of philosophical relations: resemblance, identity, space and time, quantity, degrees in quality, contrariety, and cause and effect. Of these seven, three are also natural relations: resemblance, spatial or temporal contiguity, and, of course, cause and effect.

In "Of knowledge" (T, I.III.I, 69-73), Hume divides philosophical relations into those that "depend entirely on the ideas, which we compare together," and those that "may be chang'd without any change in the ideas" (T, 69). The first are the invariable relations, resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in quantity

or number, the second are the variable, identity, situation in time and place, and causation. Only the invariable relations "can be the objects of knowledge and certainty," according to Hume (T, 70).

What we know, according to Hume, we know either by intuition or demonstration. What is known by intuition is recognized "at first sight, without any inquiry or reasoning" (T, 70). What is known by demonstration requires a "chain of reasoning." Hume's view in the Treatise is that any proposition that is intuitively or demonstrably certain expresses one of the four invariable relations. These propositions are themselves necessary, for their denials imply a contradiction and hence what they assert is impossible (See T, 79-80, 89, and 161-2). This is the realm of certainty. It is the realm of a priori knowledge. [For a nice discussion of Hume's view of a priori knowledge as it relates to the analytic/synthetic distinction, see Bruce Aune's Rationalism, Empiricism, and Pragmatism: An Introduction (Aune [1970]), chapter II, part 2, 44-8.]

The realm of probable reasoning and probability consists of our apprehension of propositions which assert that one or more of the variable relations hold between certain objects, and of inferences involving such propositions. These propositions are contingent; their denials, whether true or false, are nevertheless coherent and hence what they assert is at least possible. This is the realm of a posteriori knowledge.

4. Hume is correct in saying that demonstrating the causal maxim, that everything that begins to exist must have a cause, is equivalent to demonstrating that it is not possible for an object to begin to exist without a cause. Consider the following formulations of the causal maxim (everything that begins to exist must have a cause) and Hume's reformulation of it (it is not possible for an object to begin to exist without a cause), in the language of quantified modal logic:

(1)  $\lceil \forall x \{ E_t B_{xt} \rightarrow E_y C_{yx} \} \rceil$  (2)  $\lceil \neg \langle \exists x \{ E_t B_{xt} \ \& \ \sim E_y C_{yx} \} \rangle \rceil$

The following formula, [P], is a theorem of quantified modal logic:

[P]  $\lceil \forall x \{ E_t B_{xt} \rightarrow E_y C_{yx} \} \rceil \ . \langle \neg \rangle \ . \ \lceil \neg \langle \exists x \{ E_t B_{xt} \ \& \ \sim E_y C_{yx} \} \rangle \rceil$

According to Hume, we cannot demonstrate (2) and hence we cannot demonstrate (1). If Hume is correct in saying that we

cannot demonstrate (2), then he is correct in saying that we cannot demonstrate (1), for (1) and (2) are logically equivalent.

Does Hume say that (1) is false as well as undemonstrable? He thinks that  $\forall x\{E_t B_x \rightarrow E_y C_y x\}$  is not logically necessary, so (1) is false if [] is taken as 'It is logically necessary that'. Given what he says in the Treatise and first Enquiry about necessity and conceivability, I believe that he would also consider (1) false if [] is taken as saying that  $\forall x\{E_t B_x \rightarrow E_y C_y x\}$  is necessary in a broader sense, that is, metaphysically necessary - for then we could not conceive an object beginning to exist without a cause, but Hume says we can conceive this. I must admit, however, that Hume's use of 'might' in the words often quoted from the 1754 letter to John Stewart - "...I never asserted so absurd a proposition as that any thing might arise without a Cause..." (Letters Of David Hume, Volume I, 187), clouds the issue.

5. Hume's view is that a state of affairs is possible if and only if it is conceivable. Thus he writes:

'Tis an establish'd maxim in metaphysics, That whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence, or in other words, that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible. We can form the idea of a golden mountain, and from thence conclude that such a mountain may actually exist. We can form no idea of a mountain without a valley, and therefore regard it as impossible (T, I.II.II, 32).

Hume also holds that a state of affairs is conceivable if and only if it implies no contradiction.\* He writes:

The separation, therefore, of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence, is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction or absurdity... (T, I.III.III, 79-80).

This is expressed more clearly in the Abstract:

What is demonstratively false implies a contradiction; and what implies a contradiction cannot be conceived (A, 653).

\* Of course, strictly speaking, states of affairs don't imply contradictions. What Hume has in mind, I believe, can be expressed by saying that a state of affairs is conceivable if and only if a sentence stating that it obtains neither formally nor semantically implies a contradiction. For a sentence stating that a state of affairs obtains to semantically imply a contradiction is, for Hume, for that sentence to combine words that stand for ideas in such a way that a person cannot combine the relevant ideas so as to conceive the state of affairs in question.

6. Though Hume first and generally describes the memory as a faculty which conveys ideas before the mind, he also speaks of "impressions of memory." [See T, I.III.IV, 83, and "Of the impressions of the senses and memory," T I.III.V, 84-6.] Hume's point in referring to memory perceptions as impressions is that such perceptions possess the force and vivacity that constitute belief.

7. Hume says that although causal reasoning allows us to infer the existence of objects beyond those that are present to the senses or memory, such reasoning must be grounded in an impression of the senses or in ideas of the memory "which are equivalent to impressions." Otherwise, our reasoning would be merely hypothetical (See T, I.III.IV, 82-4).

8. As I pointed out in chapter I, in "Of the inference from the impression to the idea" (T, I.III.VI, 86-94), Hume writes:

There is no object, which implies the existence of any other if we consider these objects in themselves, and never look beyond the ideas which we form of them. Such an inference wou'd amount to knowledge, and wou'd imply the absolute contradiction and impossibility of conceiving anything different. But as all distinct ideas are separable, 'tis evident there can be no impossibility of that kind (T, 86-7).

9. Hume's argument in the Treatise that there can be no probable argument for the principle of uniformity actually seems to involve the claim that any attempt to rationally support a causal inference must presuppose the uniformity

principle, but this principle, insofar as it takes us beyond what is present to the memory or senses, must itself be based on causal reasoning. Hume says that in all probable reasoning there is something present to the mind in sense or memory and something not present to the mind which we infer on the basis of what is present. He also says that the only relation that can take us beyond what's present to the mind in memory or sense is that of cause and effect. These taken together imply that all probable reasoning is, or at least essentially involves, causal reasoning. The uniformity principle, since it goes beyond the present testimony of the senses and memory and is not based on demonstrative reasoning, must be based on probable reasoning if it has a rational basis. But probable reasoning is or essentially involves causal reasoning. So to attempt to justify the uniformity principle by reference to probable reasoning is circular, since all causal reasoning, and hence all probable reasoning, is based on the uniformity principle. The point of considering the uniformity principle was, of course, to see if our causal inferences are rationally justified. But if all probable reasoning is or essentially involves causal reasoning, then the attempt to support causal inference in general by probable reasoning is viciously circular. You justify causal inference by making a causal inference!

10. Why would Hume think that all of our beliefs about matters of fact that go beyond the present testimony of the senses and memory are based on inductive inference - that is, all of our beliefs derived by probable/moral reasoning - depend on inductive reasoning? Basically because no set of statements wholly about the observed entails any statement about the unobserved, and so any inference to an unobserved matter of fact must either be inductive or be derived by a series of inferences at least one of which is inductive. You can't go from statements wholly about what has been observed to a statement about what has not been observed by purely deductive reasoning. So, for example, the inference from "All observed As have been followed by Bs" to "All As (observed and unobserved) are followed by Bs" is not deductively valid nor are the examples of moral reasoning Hume focuses on, such as "Past As have been followed by Bs; therefore, future As will be followed by Bs."

Of course there can be an inference to an unobserved matter of fact that taken by itself is deductive. For example:

All As are followed by Bs  
-----

The next observed A will be followed by a B.

But this inference is deductive only if the premise refers to all As, including future As. But then that can't be merely a report of what has been observed. [I haven't observed future As.] We would arrive at that premise on the basis of our observations of some As, and again, the inference from "Some As are Bs"/"All observed As are Bs" to "All As are Bs"/"All As (observed and unobserved) are Bs" is inductive.

So whether a particular example of moral reasoning taken by itself is inductive or deductive in either case our justification for accepting its conclusion will involve dependence on inductive inference. This is why all probable reasoning depends on inductive reasoning: not because every particular bit of it taken in isolation is inductive but because every bit of it is either inductive or depends on inductive inference in having a premise that is arrived at by inductive inference. Hume's distinction between demonstrative reasoning and probable/moral reasoning is not just the same as the distinction between deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning. Among arguments involving only propositions stating matters of fact, that is, among Hume's "probable" or "moral" reasonings, will be some deductively valid arguments. But those arguments will not be demonstrative in Hume's sense.

11. One way of thinking of this circularity is this: For inductive inference to be justified it would have to be shown that strong inductive arguments with true premises lead to true conclusions more often than not. But how can we show this generally? To say that so far our reliance on strong inductive arguments with true premises has led us to true conclusions more often than not, therefore, it will in general, is to presuppose the reliability of inductive inference.

12. Why do I say that all inductive inference presupposes a uniformity principle? Consider the following forms of inductive inference:

All observed A's are B's  
-----

All A's are B's

n/m observed A's are B's  
-----

n/m A's are B's

The first form of inductive inference is simply a special case of the second with  $m = n$ . Now, how can we provide a general justification for inferences of the second sort? To justify such inferences inductively, that is, by inferences of the same sort, would be circular. But to justify them deductively would (given that not all A's have been observed) require the premise that the distribution of unobserved A's that are B's is the same as the distribution of observed A's that are B's, for variable A and B.\* But this is simply another way of stating the uniformity principle. Thus such inferences require a uniformity principle. This applies as well in the case of singular inferences, that is, those inferences having conclusions of the form "with probability  $n/m$  the next observed A will be a B."

13. For my discussion in section 5.3 I am indebted to Bruce Aune, and Wesley Salmon. My discussion leans heavily on similar discussions of probability vis-a-vis the problem of induction found in Aune [1991] and Salmon [1967], though any oversimplification or mistake in my text should be attributed to my misunderstanding rather than to any fault in their treatments of the issues.

14. Antony Flew presents the probabilist's view of reasoning from past experience as part of what it is to be rational in Hume's Philosophy Of Belief. Flew states the "principle of induction" as a rule for guiding our expectations about the unobserved, and says that insofar as all arguments from experience involve adherence to such a rule, "...to follow it must be as paradigmatically reasonable as to try to learn from experience" (Flew [1961], 82). Trying to learn from experience, however, is paradigmatically rational:

The man who stubbornly ignores all the lessons of experience displays irrationality, just as much as if he were perversely maintaining at one and the same time two demonstrably inconsistent propositions (Flew [1961], 80).

Though the details of particular treatments differ, this approach to the problem of induction basically consists in an attempt to dissolve the problem by showing that it rests on conceptual, semantic, or methodological confusion. See, for example, P.F. Strawson's Introduction to Logical

Theory (Strawson [1952]), 248-63, and A.J. Ayer's Language, Truth, and Logic (Ayer [1952]), 49-50 and 100-101.

15. In Knowledge of the External World, Bruce Aune notes that though Hume's account of probability is subjectivist in that it identifies the probability of P for a person with that person's actual degree of confidence or belief in P, there are two senses in which Hume's account of probability is objective. First, Hume thinks that observers exposed to the same evidence for P will have approximately the same degree of belief that P. Second, various observers can compare notes, so to speak, and thereby move toward agreement on P's probability. See Aune [1991], chapter III.

16. Fogelin makes the point that though Hume is originally interested in necessary connection as a candidate for rationally justifying our causal inferences, following the argument for inductive skepticism necessary connection no longer bears the burden of justifying our causal inferences, since nothing can bear that burden. Thus the argument for inductive skepticism, Fogelin says, allows Hume to separate the notions of causation and necessary connection. Fogelin says that Hume does hold a regularity theory of causation, and thus with the separation of the ideas of causation and necessary connection Hume is able to give a non-circular account of the idea of necessary connection using causal notions. See Fogelin [1985], Chapter IV, 38-52.

17. Hume's firm belief in the uniformity of nature and the principle that as a matter of fact every event is caused, is shown in, for example, "Of the probability of chances," T I.III.XI, "Of Liberty and Necessity," E, VIII, and "Of Miracles," E, X.

18. In "Division of the subject" (T, I.I.II, 7-8) Hume draws a distinction between two different types of impressions: "impressions of sensation" and "impressions of reflection". An impression of sensation "arises in the soul originally, from unknown causes" (T, 7). An impression of reflection arises when ideas (which are, of course, copied from earlier impressions) come to mind and give rise to new impressions: such as desires, fears, hopes, etc. Our minds make copies of these impressions as well as of the impressions of sensation, and so we get ideas of the various passions,



desires, and emotions. Our ideas of impressions of reflection represent our inner emotive states or sentiments.

According to Hume, the ultimate cause of sense impressions is "perfectly inexplicable by human reason" (T, I.III.IV, 84). It is impossible to decide with certainty whether sense impressions arise from objects, the mind itself, or even God, according to Hume. This impossibility of knowledge with regard to the causes of our impressions will show up later in the Treatise as the impossibility of knowledge with regard to the existence of external objects as the causes of our impressions. Hume's statement in T, I.III.IV is made in a context that in no way suggests irony or a mere preliminary suggestion to be rejected later on. Hence I take it as prima facie evidence of Hume's theoretical skepticism.

19. See, for example J.A. Robinson's "Hume's Two Definitions of 'Cause'", Thomas Richards's "Hume's Two Definitions of 'Cause'", and Robinson's reply to Richards, "Hume's Two Definitions of 'Cause' Reconsidered", all of which appear in Hume (Chappell [1968]).

20. For example, Norman Kemp-Smith, in The Philosophy of David Hume (Smith [1964]), argues that Hume does not hold a regularity theory. According to Kemp Smith, Hume's view is that after we have observed a number of instances of the sequence A, then B, we develop a habit of forming the idea of an instance of B on experiencing an instance of A. The operation of this habit produces a feeling of necessitation, that is, we have an impression of expecting when we experience an instance of A. This feeling is the impression from which the idea of necessary connection is derived. This feeling of necessitation is then projected onto the causally related objects, leading us, Kemp Smith says, "...to affirm the independent, and indeed universal, operation of causal determination" (Smith [1964], 93). According to Kemp Smith, necessary connection, though an element on the side of the observer, is an essential element in the concept of causation itself, for Hume. In Fogelin [1985], Robert Fogelin argues, contra Kemp-Smith, that Hume does hold a regularity theory.

21. For a clear statement and discussion of many of the issues raised by Hume's definitions of causation, and the competing interpretations that have been offered of those

definitions, see chapter 5 of Don Garrett's Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy (Garrett [1997]).

CHAPTER  
III  
HUME'S INDUCTIVE SKEPTICISM RECONSIDERED: THE STOVE  
INTERPRETATION

1

Hume's reputation as a skeptic has been based in large part on those sections of the Treatise, Abstract, and Enquiry in which he apparently presents an inductive skepticism. I have thus far attributed an inductive skepticism to Hume, and the attribution of inductive skepticism is, of course, part of the traditional interpretation of Hume. On this interpretation, according to Hume our inductive inferences have no rational justification whatsoever. So, for example, though my experience has been that all observed As are Bs, the conclusion that the next observed A will be a B has the same degree of rational justification (that is, none) as does the conclusion that the next observed A will be a non-B. However, several scholars have rejected the traditional interpretation of Hume as a proponent of inductive skepticism as I have just stated it. One such scholar is D.C. Stove. In this chapter, I will consider Stove's alternative interpretation and I will argue that it is inferior to the traditional interpretation.

2

In "Hume, Probability, and Induction,"<sup>1</sup> D.C. Stove argues that contrary to the traditional interpretation, Hume

did not disprove "inductive probabilism". Inductive probabilism, IP, is the thesis that there are inductive arguments which, though not valid, are nevertheless such that their premises probabilize their conclusions for any rational person who knows those premises. Hume's refutation of IP is, according to Stove, "an entirely imaginary episode in the history of philosophy" (Stove [1968], 189).<sup>2</sup>

According to Stove, Hume has been mistakenly credited with refuting IP in part because attention has not been paid to Hume's use of "probable argument" and "demonstrative argument." Stove says that when Hume characterizes an argument as demonstrative, he does not mean simply that it is deductively valid but rather that it is (i) deductively valid and (ii) all of its premises are necessary truths (and hence knowable a priori). By "probable arguments" Hume means "arguments from experience", that is, arguments which (i) have contingent premises all of which are observational, and (ii) are not deductively valid. Stove claims that "the distinction between validity and invalidity is the only distinction among 'degrees of evidence' that Hume takes notice of..." (Stove, 198).<sup>3</sup>

Stove holds that when Hume says that all arguments from experience presuppose the Resemblance Thesis (that is, the Uniformity Principle, UP)<sup>4</sup> he has the following in mind:

...an argument "p, so c" presupposes that q if and only if the argument is invalid as it stands, and it is

necessary, in order to turn it into a valid argument, to add q to its premises (Stove, 203).

So, according to Stove, Hume's claim that all probable arguments presuppose that the future will resemble the past is to be translated as: "All arguments from experience are invalid as they stand, and in order to turn them into valid arguments, it is necessary to add to their premises the Resemblance Thesis" (Stove, 204).

Stove rejects the possibility that Hume means that arguments from experience presuppose the Resemblance Thesis as a rule of inference, because "...we have Hume's word for it that what arguments from the impression to the idea presuppose is a proposition..." (Stove, 201). I believe that Stove's purpose in saying that for Hume arguments from experience presuppose the Resemblance Thesis as a proposition rather than as an inference rule is to preclude interpretations on which the circularity Hume sees in inductive attempts to support inductive inference is "rule circularity".<sup>6</sup>

On the rule-circularity interpretation, Hume's argument against probable support for the Resemblance Thesis would not be that any argument from experience in support of the Resemblance Thesis would contain that thesis itself as a premise and would hence be circular. Rather, Hume's argument would be that inductive arguments in support of inductive inference themselves exhibit the very form of inference the legitimacy of which is in question. On this

interpretation, the UP would function as an inference rule licensing inductive inferences. On the rule-circularity interpretation, Hume does consider inductive support for inductive inference but finds that such support would involve rule circularity.<sup>7</sup> On this interpretation, even if Hume does not disprove inductive probabilism, he at least raises a serious philosophical problem for the proponent of inductive probabilism. Stove denies that Hume raises any problem for inductive probabilism, hence he does not accept the rule-circularity interpretation.

As I said above, Stove's object in stressing that Hume says that arguments from experience presuppose the Resemblance Thesis as a proposition is to rule out the rule-circularity interpretation. How would the fact, if it is a fact, that Hume thinks arguments from experience presuppose the Resemblance Thesis as a proposition rule out the rule-circularity interpretation? Though Stove doesn't make this fully clear, I believe he may be reasoning in this way: When we make an inference from premises to conclusion, we always employ some inference rule. An inference rule, however, is schematic or formal; while we may presuppose a particular inference rule in drawing a certain inference, the rule itself doesn't appear as a premise of our argument.<sup>8</sup> Our premises are propositions (sentences or statements, if you prefer). So to say that arguments from experience presuppose the Resemblance Thesis as a proposition suggests that it appears as a premise in such arguments. If this is

so, then an argument from experience having the Resemblance Thesis as its conclusion would be circular. So Hume's referring to the UP as a proposition suggests that it is not rule circularity but instead premise circularity that he has in mind.

According to Stove, then, when Hume says that any argument from experience for the Resemblance Thesis would be circular, he does not mean any argument demonstrative (in our sense) or probable (in the sense of IP). A circular argument could not be probable in the sense of IP, because a circular argument has to be valid. So "any arguments from experience" must mean "any valid arguments from experience." Thus Hume's claim that any probable argument for the Resemblance Thesis would be circular can be read as: "Any valid arguments from experience for the resemblance thesis must be circular," and given that arguments from experience have observational premises, this may be further translated as "The Resemblance Thesis is deducible only with circularity from observational premises."

There is something confusing in what Stove says about Hume. Stove says that Hume recognizes only one form of good inference, valid deductive inference. Stove also says that Hume recognizes two kinds of argument, demonstrative and probable, probable arguments being non-valid arguments. But when Stove considers Hume's skeptical argument (the argument of T, I.III.VI, of A (651-652), and of E IV.II),<sup>9</sup> he interprets Hume's consideration of the possibility of

probable arguments in support of the UP as a search for valid deductive arguments. So within the context of what is usually recognized as Hume's argument for inductive skepticism "probable argument" in effect means "valid argument with contingent premises." So if Stove is correct, at that point in the Treatise both "demonstrative" and "probable" characterize valid deductive arguments.

This is important because though Stove initially says that the arguments Hume calls "probable" are inductive arguments, his reading of T, I.III.VI requires that when Hume says the UP can be supported neither by demonstrative arguments nor by probable arguments, by "probable argument" Hume means "valid argument with contingent premises." But why should Hume have switched the meaning of "probable argument," as Stove's reading seems to require? Stove doesn't tell us, yet his interpretation seems to depend on Hume's having shifted the meaning of "probable argument."

A further problem is this: If, as Stove claims, Hume divides arguments into demonstrative arguments, which are valid and contain only necessary premises, and probable arguments, which are non-valid and contain contingent premises, then Hume leaves no room for valid deductive arguments with contingent premises. Not only does that seem implausible by itself, it conflicts with Stove's claim that in the end Hume is considering the possibility of a valid argument with contingent premises in support of the UP.



Stove gives the following translation of Hume's skeptical argument:<sup>10</sup>

(1) Predictive inductive inferences are valid only if the Resemblance Thesis is added to their premises.<sup>11</sup> But (2) the Resemblance Thesis is a contingent statement, and so (3) it is not deducible from necessarily true premises but (4) it is deducible from observational premises if any. But - from (1) and (4) - (5) The Resemblance Thesis is deducible only with circularity from observational premises. Therefore, - from (3) and (5) - (6) Predictive inductive inferences are valid only if a premise is added to them which is deducible neither from necessarily true premises nor, without circularity, from observational ones. (Stove, 207)

According to Stove, then, there is no evidence for the claim that Hume refuted IP. Further, there is independent evidence that Hume did not even consider IP. For, (1) Hume gives as a sufficient ground for denying that the inference from "This is a flame" to "This is hot" is one that reason leads us to make, the fact that it is intelligible to suppose the premise true and the conclusion false, that is, the fact that the inference is invalid. (2) Hume thinks it is sufficient for establishing the unavailability of the Resemblance Thesis for inductive arguments that it is not without circularity deducible from premises of the type appropriate to be evidence for it. (3) Hume intends (6) as a criticism of predictive inductive inferences. But the charge that such inferences presuppose the Resemblance Thesis yet that thesis is unavailable is an effective

criticism, Stove says, only if those inferences were intended to be valid. For if an argument is intended to be probable in the sense of IP it is not an effective criticism to say that an unavailable statement is necessary to make it valid (Stove, 208-10).

I believe that Stove is mistaken in his claim that Hume did not consider probabilizing support for the Resemblance Thesis. On Stove's view, a "probable argument" capable of justifying the Resemblance Thesis would be circular because any such argument would require the Resemblance Thesis as a premise in order to be valid. Thus what Hume is really considering is whether or not there could be a non-circular valid argument with contingent premises for the Resemblance Thesis. It is, however, unlikely that in the sections of the Treatise and Abstract traditionally held to contain an argument for inductive skepticism Hume employed the phrase "probable argument" in the limited sense that Stove claims he did. For:

(1) As Robert Fogelin points out, an essential assumption of Hume's argument in "Of scepticism with regard to reason," (T, I.IV.I) is that a set of premises can confer a degree of probability between zero and one on a conclusion.<sup>12</sup> For in that section Hume argues that all knowledge "degenerates" into probability as a result of higher order evaluations of lower order judgments, and the probability is "greater or less" according to various factors. Hume's skeptical argument turns on the claim that

higher-order evaluations will gradually diminish the probability of any first-order judgment. Hume says nothing to suggest that he regards all of the first-order judgments as conclusions of valid arguments. If Hume thought of all of the first-order judgments as conclusions of valid arguments, then the probability of those judgments, given their premises, would be one, and this would remain true no matter what other, higher-order judgments were added to the premises. His argument thus presupposes that judgments can be probabilized though not entailed by a set of premises. This argument, moreover, comes long after the argument of Treatise I.III.VI.

(2) As Fogelin also points out, Hume's explicit discussions of probability in T, I.III, sections II-XIII are clearly an attempt to explain, albeit in terms of psychology, how premises can give less than conclusive support to a conclusion.<sup>13</sup> In "Of the probability of chances" (T, I.III.XI), Hume says that "many arguments from causation exceed probability, and may be receiv'd as a superior kind of evidence" (T, 124). Now, Hume clearly holds that causal arguments or inferences are not demonstrative. The premises of such arguments are not necessary truths, nor are their conclusions. So, given that Hume takes the demonstrative argument/probable argument distinction to be exhaustive, causal arguments are, for him, probable arguments. Yet some of these arguments provide less support for their conclusions than others do for theirs:

By knowledge, I mean the assurance arising from the comparison of ideas. By proofs, those arguments, which are deriv'd from the relation of cause and effect, and which are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty. By probability, that evidence, which is still attended with uncertainty" (T, I.III.XI, 124).

This suggests that Hume thinks that there are arguments that in some sense probabilize their conclusions, for if there is a class of arguments from experience some of which render their conclusions free from doubt and some of which provide less but still positive support for their conclusions, then there are arguments that (at least in a psychological sense) probabilize their conclusions. Now, if all of these arguments were valid, then the probability of their conclusions, given their premises, would be one. They would all be on a par, which Hume says is not the case. So it seems that Hume recognizes non-valid arguments that probabilize their conclusions.

Of course, in T, I.III.XI Hume speaks of causal arguments, that is, "proofs", which are free from doubt. I take it that he means that the conclusions are free from doubt for a person given his belief in the premises. But not all causal arguments are free from doubt in this way, as Hume's discussion in the very next section, "Of the probability of causes," shows. So, some causal arguments provide a degree of support for their conclusions without rendering their conclusions free from doubt. Again, this suggests that Hume recognizes non-valid arguments that probabilize their conclusions.

I should note, however, that when I say that the demonstrative argument/probable argument distinction is exhaustive for Hume I do not mean that Hume recognizes only valid arguments with necessary premises and inductive arguments with contingent premises. The class of arguments that Hume refers to as "probable" includes both valid arguments with contingent premises and non-valid inductive arguments with contingent premises. Of course, even valid probable arguments that go beyond reports of the current data of consciousness or reports of memory will involve, according to Hume, causal inference, and so such arguments will themselves be based on inductive inference.

Why do I say that Hume uses "probable argument" to refer to both valid arguments with contingent premises and inductive arguments proper? One reason is that, as I argue in the next section of this chapter, Hume himself recognizes and employs non-deductive argument throughout the Treatise. Another reason is that in T, I.III.VII, Hume says that

...we may exert our reason without employing more than two ideas, and without having recourse to a third to serve as a medium betwixt them (T, 97).

This suggests that our causal inferences are not made deductively, via some third "idea" of nature's uniformity.

Yet another reason is that in discussing the "reason of animals" (T, I.III.XVI), Hume says that animal causal reasoning "is not in itself different, nor founded on

different principles, from that which appears in human nature" (T, 177). Yet animals, though they clearly engage in causal inference, "...can never by any arguments form a general conclusion, that those objects, of which they have had no experience, resemble those of which they have" (T, 177). So animals, in inferring that a present object or event will be followed by a certain other object or event, do not reason deductively according to a uniformity principle. Nor, then, do humans, whose causal reasoning is "not in itself different."

Now, there are two obvious objections to the claim that Hume recognizes non-valid probabilizing arguments because he recognizes arguments that differ with regard to the degree of certainty with which a person who believes the premises will believe the conclusion. The first objection is this: The distinction Hume draws is psychological or epistemological but the distinction between validity and invalidity is formal. The fact that Hume recognizes arguments that differ with regard to certainty doesn't show that he recognizes arguments that differ with regard to validity. Even if Hume recognizes only deductive arguments and hence thinks that any acceptable causal argument must be valid, he might nevertheless hold that certain deductive arguments, despite their formal validity, are such that people who believe in their premises don't feel certain about their conclusions. But why would Hume think that valid arguments differ in this psychological way? He doesn't

suggest this anywhere. Of course, if you start out with Stove's view that Hume is a deductivist, you'll have to interpret his distinction between proofs and probabilities as a distinction between arguments that share the formal property of validity. But if you don't start out with the view that Hume is a deductivist, the supposition that Hume thinks valid arguments differ with regard to the degree of certainty with which a person who believes the premises believes the conclusion seems to require some argument. I do not know that there is no good argument, based on Hume's texts, for this supposition. But I am not aware of any textual support for this supposition.

Why would Hume think that proofs, arguments based on invariable experience, differ in certainty from probabilities, arguments based on variable experience, if he considered both of these kinds of arguments deductive?

Consider:

(i)  $m/n$  observed As have been Bs

(ii) UP

-----  
(iii) With probability  $m/n$  the next observed A will be a B

Let's suppose premise (ii) is some statement of the UP that would render the above argument valid. Now, the difference between proofs and probabilities is that in proofs  $m=n$  but in probabilities  $n > m$ . But note that the probability of

the next observed A being a B as stated in the conclusion varies with the proportion of m to n. The conclusion itself, the entire statement "With probability  $m/n$ ..." is in both cases entailed by the premises and, it seems, would be believed by any rational person who believes the premises with the same degree of belief no matter what A, B, m, and n are.

The epistemic difference between a proof and a probability, however, is the strength with which the statement "the next observed A will be a B" is believed by a person who believes the premises. The objective difference between them is captured in the premises: in one case the major premise states that all observed As have been Bs, in the other case it states only that some observed As have been Bs. So, why would Hume think that what is basically a difference in quantification in the premises have such profound epistemic implications unless he considers proofs and probabilities inductive arguments?

The second objection to the claim that Hume recognizes non-valid probabilizing arguments because he recognizes arguments that differ with regard to the degree of certainty with which a person who believes the premises will believe the conclusion is this: I am arguing that Hume is open to the possibility of non-valid arguments the premises of which objectively probabilize their conclusions. Yet the fact that Hume recognizes psychological or epistemic differences among arguments from experience doesn't show that he is open



to objective differences among them even if he considers those arguments inductive.<sup>14</sup> One answer to this objection is that Hume does say that there is one non-psychological, objective difference between proofs and probabilities. Proofs are based on experience of invariable conjunction, probabilities on experience of variable conjunction.<sup>15</sup> At any rate, my main reasons for thinking that Hume is open to the possibility of inductive arguments that objectively probabilize their conclusions are stated in section 4 and so I will defer discussion of this point until then.

4

How does my reply to Stove in the last section - a reply involving the claims that Hume is not a deductivist and that he does consider probabilizing support for the Resemblance Thesis - fit with Hume's inductive skepticism? Didn't I characterize Hume's inductive skepticism as the view that our inductive inferences have no rational justification whatsoever? But if that is so, they are all on a par; all of our inductive inferences are recognized by Hume as equally bad and so it would seem that he doesn't really consider probabilizing, that is, inductive, support for the Resemblance Thesis.

The claim that Hume considers inductive or probabilizing support for the Resemblance Thesis is compatible with the claim that Hume holds inductive skepticism as I have characterized it. To show how these

claims are compatible I must draw a distinction between arguments that probabilize their conclusions in the sense that if we believe in their premises we in fact have a degree of confidence in their conclusions and arguments that probabilize their conclusions in the sense that given the truth of their premises their conclusions are objectively probable. The first is a matter of human psychology. The second is a matter of logic. In the second sense, belief in the premises of a probabilizing argument rationally justifies (a degree of) belief in the conclusion.<sup>16</sup>

It seems clear that Hume recognizes both the possibility and the actuality of probabilizing arguments of the first sort. In T, I.III, sections XI-XIII, Hume discusses inductive arguments that probabilize their conclusions, and these considerations take place after his skeptical argument occurs. But, of course, the considerations adduced in the argument for inductive skepticism show that there is not really a possibility of inductive arguments that are probabilizing arguments of the second, justificatory, sort, because the UP, which is necessary in order to justify our inductive inferences, cannot be supported by any form of argument.

Still, if we keep in mind the distinction between theoretical and prescriptive skepticism, it is not surprising that Hume should discuss our ordinary inferential procedures (procedures which in fact we can't avoid following, according to Hume) and draw distinctions between

various levels of evidence, in contexts in which he isn't raising questions of the ultimate justification of those procedures but rather engaging in psychological explanation.

I believe, however, that Hume is initially open to the possibility of probabilizing arguments of the second sort. With the skeptical argument of T, I.III.VI it becomes clear that there are no probabilizing arguments of this second sort. So, in the later sections, Hume is discussing probabilizing arguments of the first, psychological sort, as the text shows. The discussion in T, I.III, sections XI-XIII is clearly an attempt to explain in terms of psychology how evidence leads us to have a degree of confidence in a conclusion drawn from but not entailed by that evidence. But that doesn't show that Hume didn't entertain the possibility of probabilizing arguments of the second, justificatory, sort, earlier on. I believe that Hume is initially open to the possibility of a probabilizing argument for the Resemblance Thesis, though his skeptical considerations show that there can be no such argument.

Why do I believe that Hume is, prior to the end of his skeptical argument in T, I.III.VI, open to the possibility of probabilizing arguments of the second sort, and hence open to the possibility of such an argument in support of the UP? First, because of Hume's general method. Throughout Book I of the Treatise Hume follows a pattern of first considering the justification for a belief or practice and then, having shown that a belief or practice is not

rationally justified, giving a psychological explanation of why we hold that belief or engage in that practice. Hume's later psychological consideration of non-deductive probabilizing arguments would fit this pattern only if he had first considered these arguments from the standpoint of justification, that is, only if he had earlier considered the possibility of non-deductive arguments that probabilize a conclusion in the second, justificatory sense.

My second reason for believing that Hume is initially open to the possibility of justificatory probabilizing arguments for the UP is that Hume himself recognizes and employs non-deductive argument throughout the Treatise. For example, in "Of the origin of our ideas" (T, I.I.I) Hume argues for the "Copy Principle" - the principle that all of our simple ideas are derived from and correspond to simple impressions which they represent. In arguing to this conclusion Hume infers from his experience of the constant conjunction of his own simple ideas and impressions that "the existence of the one has a considerable influence upon that of the other," that is, that they are causally connected (T, 4). He then offers two arguments to show that it is the impressions which cause the ideas, not vice versa.

Hume's argument for the causal dependence of ideas on impressions which they represent cannot be composed of only valid inferences. For even if, given Hume's later analysis of causation, it is analytically true for Hume that constantly conjoined objects are causally connected and that

when two kinds of objects are constantly conjoined the prior object is the cause of the latter, Hume produces a counterexample to his own generalization, the "color-shade" counterexample.<sup>17</sup> This counterexample suggests that it is not the case that all simple ideas are preceded by resembling impressions. Yet Hume lightheartedly dismisses this counterexample with the observation that "...the instance is so particular and singular, that 'tis scarce worth our observing, and does not merit that for it alone we should alter our general maxim" (T, 6).

If Hume thinks the premises of his argument for the causal dependence of all ideas on prior impressions are true and he thinks the inference from those premises is valid, how can he possibly admit a counter-example? I believe that Hume is so cavalier about the color-shade counterexample because he is interested in and is employing inductive inference, drawing those conclusions he regards as best supported, though not conclusively supported, by empirical evidence.<sup>18</sup>

Hume's general recognition and use of probabilizing arguments is shown clearly in the Enquiry, section IX, where he says that

All of our reasonings concerning matter of fact are founded on a species of Analogy, which leads us to expect from any cause the same events, which we have observed to result from similar causes. Where the causes are entirely similar, the analogy is perfect, and the inference, drawn from it, is regarded as certain and conclusive....But where the objects have not so exact a similarity, the analogy is

less perfect, and the inference is less conclusive; though still it has some force, in proportion to<sup>19</sup> the degree of similarity and resemblance (E, IX, 104).

Hume's claim that in the case of a "less perfect" analogy our inference is such that still some weight is given to the conclusion shows that he recognizes matter of fact reasoning that involves probabilizing support for a claim. Moreover, even in the case of "perfect" analogy, our inferences are, of course, probabilizing, for analogical inference is inductive, not deductive. This is so despite the fact that the conclusion may be "regarded as certain and conclusive."

Hume's commitment to analogical reasoning is not limited to a general recognition of the analogical character of causal reasoning. For Hume goes on to suggest that his own theory of "the operations of the understanding" acquires additional confirmation from the fact that it serves to explain the same phenomena in both men and nonhuman animals. Nonhuman animals, Hume says, infer effects from causes, but clearly they do not do so on the basis of "reasoning and argumentation." So, according to Hume,

Nature must have provided some other principle, of more ready, and more general use and application; nor can an operation of such immense consequence in life, as that of inferring effects from causes, be trusted to the uncertain process of reasoning and argumentation. Were this doubtful with regard to men, it seems to admit of no question with regard to the brute creation; ,and the conclusion being once firmly established in the one, we have a strong presumption, from all the rules of analogy, that it ought to be

universally admitted, without any exception or reserve (E, IX, 106).

Of course, given the distinctions between theoretical and practical skepticism and between the two sorts of probabilizing arguments, one might say that Hume is throughout the Treatise and the first Enquiry employing a form of inference the character of which he never considers an issue. Yet this seems implausible, given Hume's concern with justification and method.

Hume's concern with method is made clear even in the Introduction to the Treatise, where he says that in order to make progress in the sciences "the tedious lingering method" of piecemeal investigation previously followed must be abandoned in favor of an investigation into "human nature itself" (T, xvi). He goes on to say that "the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation" (T, xvi). Hume's concern with method is also clear in his adherence to the general empiricist maxim that all ideas are copied from prior impressions. This maxim guides Hume's philosophical investigations throughout the Treatise, which is, of course, subtitled "Being An Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning Into Moral Subjects," and throughout the first Enquiry.

Hume's concern with justification is also evident throughout the Treatise. Hume's Part III search for the source of the idea of necessary connection is motivated not

simply by the desire to carry out the "mental geography" described in the first Enquiry, but in large part by a concern with the foundation of causal inference, for only the causal relation "informs us of existences and objects, which we do not see or feel" (T, 74).

Further evidence of Hume's concern with justification is the fact that according to Hume himself one of the main reasons for his despair, in T, I.IV.VII, is that even after "the most accurate and exact" reasoning, he "can give no reason" for assenting to a conclusion, but simply feels a strong propensity to do so (T, 265). Why should this worry Hume if he is not concerned with the justification for his conclusions?

Finally, as James Noxon points out, Hume recognizes that likelihood of truth is not simply a matter of degree of confidence.<sup>20</sup> For Hume recognizes that a high degree of confidence often attaches to beliefs based on, for example indoctrination or superstition, though, as Noxon correctly says, his "...pejorative language makes it abundantly clear that he gives no credence to these beliefs" (Noxon [1973], 164).

My third reason for believing that Hume is initially open to the possibility of justificatory probabilizing arguments for the UP is that Hume's despair, at the close of Book I, is a result of his having come to realize the lack of justification for his own beliefs and procedures. Why should he be reduced to despair by such a realization if



from the beginning he has engaged in an inferential practice the justification of which he never even considers a live issue? It seems more plausible to suppose that along the way the question of the justification of inductive inference was raised and answered in the negative. And the place where Hume seems most likely to have raised and answered that question is in the argument of T, I.III.VI.

My fourth reason for believing that Hume is initially open to the possibility of justificatory probabilizing arguments for the UP is closely related to my second. It seems clear that Hume recognizes, at least in some parts of the Treatise, the possibility of arguments in which the premises provide support but not conclusive support for the conclusion. Stove initially says that such arguments are those Hume refers to as probable. But since according to Stove Hume limits contenders for supporting the UP to valid arguments, the "probable" arguments Hume considers in T, I.III.VI are actually valid arguments. Again, why would Hume suddenly use "probable argument" in a very different sense in T, I.III.VI, as Stove's view requires?

5

Still, if Hume thinks that the Resemblance Thesis is necessary to justify our empirical inferences, doesn't that alone make Stove's point that Hume is a deductivist? Isn't the Resemblance Thesis necessary precisely in order to make those inferences valid? And isn't the Resemblance Thesis

unavailable precisely because there can be no non-circular deductive argument for it? The issue depends in part on what Hume has in mind when he says that our probable inferences presuppose the UP. If the only way one proposition can presuppose another, for Hume, is that the second is required to complete a set of premises that deductively entail the first, then perhaps Stove is right. But if Hume thinks that there can be no demonstrative argument for the UP and that any probable argument for the UP must involve inductive inference and that such inference presupposes the UP in the sense that only our belief in the UP gives us some reason to accept the conclusions of such inferences, then his charge of circularity applies to attempts to provide inductive arguments in support of the UP.

Unfortunately, Hume doesn't tell us exactly what he means when he says that all probable arguments "are founded on" or "proceed upon" or "suppose, as their foundation" the "supposition" that the future will resemble the past. Hume isn't all that careful with regard to fine points of logic and logical terminology. Still, I don't see why we should accept that the only way the Resemblance Thesis can be presupposed by our empirical inferences is that it is necessary in order to render them valid. For Hume is concerned with justification, and he often provides evidence or justification for a claim which does not entail that claim. His support for the principle that ideas are caused

by resembling impressions is one example of this.

Further, Hume says that the UP is presupposed by our arguments from experience. It is notoriously difficult, if not impossible, to render a statement of the UP which is strong enough to render the kind of empirical inferences in which Hume is interested valid without being obviously false.<sup>21</sup> It seems that Hume would have recognized that any statement of the uniformity principle so strong that added to the other premises of our empirical inferences it would render a valid argument would be false and would in fact have absurd results. This suggests that Hume thinks that the UP is presupposed by our empirical inferences not in order to render them valid, but in order to give us reason to believe that their conclusions are likely to be true, and hence in order to render our inductively derived beliefs justified.

Stove thinks that when Hume says probable arguments presuppose the UP he means that they require it as a premise in order to be deductively valid. And this makes sense if the only form of inference Hume recognizes is deductive inference. But why couldn't Hume mean that probable arguments require the UP in order even to probabalize their conclusions? Hume isn't primarily concerned with deductive logic but with justification, with providing reasons for a conclusion, and my reason for believing P need not entail P.

Actually, Hume doesn't ever say that every probable argument will have the UP as a premise. In the Treatise he

says that probable arguments are "founded on the presumption of a resemblance betwixt those objects, of which we have had experience, and those, of which we have had none... (T, I.III.VI, 90). He also asks, of course, what arguments "such a proposition" itself may be founded upon (T, 89). In the Enquiry he says that probable arguments "proceed upon the supposition that the future will be conformable to the past" (E, IV.II, 35). Hume talks more directly of our presumptions and suppositions than of "propositions". But in using arguments we presume or suppose the legitimacy of a form of inference insofar as our arguments embody that form or have premises derived from an argument that embodies that form. We also presuppose whatever principle/s underwrite our use of that form of inference. This does not, of course, mean that rules of inference or principles in support of them appear as premises in our arguments nor does it mean that their inclusion in the set of premises of an otherwise invalid argument would yield a valid one.

For the sake of clarity, let me distinguish valid arguments with contingent premises from inductive or non-valid arguments with contingent premises. I'll call arguments of the first kind V-probable. I'll call arguments of the second kind I-probable. I-probable arguments are simply the kind of inductive arguments Hume is traditionally thought to be concerned with. Of course, since Hume is considering our justification for the UP, in what follows I

am speaking only of justificatory arguments, whether I-probable or V-probable.

I have suggested that Hume is open to the possibility of I-probable arguments for the UP. But with the argument of T, I.III.VI it becomes clear that there can be no I-probable argument for the UP. Why? I-Probable arguments presuppose the UP in the sense that the UP is what justifies our belief that the conclusions of such arguments are likely to be true. So our justification for accepting the conclusion of an I-probable argument for the UP is that we already believe the UP. So any attempt to construct an I-probable argument in support of the UP must fail precisely because it presupposes the UP and is hence a circular deductive argument.<sup>22</sup> [Note that it is not a demonstrative argument, for the UP isn't a necessary truth.] Importantly, this does not require that I attempt to deduce the UP but only that I attempt to support it to some degree. So, then, we cannot have a demonstrative argument for the UP because it is not a necessary truth. We can't have a V-probable argument for the UP because any such argument would be circular. But any attempt to construct an I-probable, that is, inductive argument for the UP must fail, for the attempt will yield a circular deductive argument - a circular V-probable argument. So Hume's conclusion, that we cannot support the UP by any argument at all, still stands.

In a sense Stove is correct. Any purported I-probable argument which supports the UP will be circular and hence

deductively valid. If you attempt to support P and you assume P, then you have a valid argument for P, since P can't be true as a premise and false as a conclusion. So a circular argument can't be I-probable. But this does not show that Hume didn't initially consider the possibility of I-probable, that is, inductive arguments for the UP. It is just that any attempt to construct such an argument will fail precisely because it will yield a valid, that is, non-probable argument. Of course, Hume's assumption that all I-probable arguments presuppose the UP is essential here.

The fact that an I-probable argument in support of the UP would be circular and hence valid and hence not I-probable at all does not mean that in ordinary I-probable arguments our presupposition of the UP yields a valid argument, merely that it gives us some reason for accepting the conclusions of inductive inferences. Further, though in our ordinary inductive arguments we use inference rules that we accept on the basis of the UP, nevertheless neither the rules nor the UP itself appear as a premise of those arguments.

6

Even if Stove were right that from the outset the only arguments Hume considers as contenders for supporting the UP are valid arguments, it would not follow that Hume has in mind only one form of inference, deductive inference. Suppose, with Stove, that (having rejected demonstrative

support for the UP) what Hume is looking for to support the UP is a deductive argument with contingent premises and conclusion. If so, a probable argument in support of the UP would have the following basic form:

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P1...Pn          }Contingent Premises Based on Experience
-----          }P1...Pn Entail UP
UP                }
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This would, of course, be the kind of argument I've been referring to as a "V-probable argument." Consider a V-probable argument with premises P1...Pn having the UP as its conclusion, call it A1. Now, if P1...Pn of A1 are to support the UP, they have to go beyond the present testimony of the senses and memory. For the UP could not be entailed merely by reports of what I am now perceiving directly or remember to have perceived directly, because the UP makes a claim about future experience. So at least one of P1...Pn will be based in part on inductive inference. But inductive inference presupposes the uniformity principle. Thus A1 will be circular in the sense that the argument itself will establish the UP only by using a premise that presupposes it. So the circularity Hume sees in attempts to support the UP by V-probable arguments may very well have to do with the way the premises of such arguments are established. In other words, the circularity Hume is pointing to may be a result of the kinds of inferences that are used to establish

the premises even of V-probable arguments and what those inferences presuppose.

The strongest argument from experience we could have for the UP would be one with contingent premises (since *ex hypothesi* it is based on experience) that is deductively valid and has the UP for its conclusion. So one could say that Hume is just giving the supporter of the rationality of UP the benefit of the doubt by allowing him a valid deductive argument. But of course, any such experience-based argument would have premises inferred inductively and so presuppose the UP.<sup>23</sup>

Consider A1. At least one premise of A1 is contingent and does more than report the present testimony of sense and memory. Call this premise P/A1. Now, P/A1 is either the conclusion of an inductive inference or is the conclusion of a V-probable argument (that is, a probable argument in Stove's sense of "probable").<sup>24</sup> If P/A1 is the conclusion of an inductive inference, then Hume's circularity charge applies because such inferences presuppose the UP. But if P/A1 is the conclusion of a V-probable argument (that is, is entailed by a set of contingent premises) then that argument, call it A2, will have premises each of which is either a report of present testimony of sense and memory or the conclusion of an inductive argument or the conclusion of a V-probable argument. The premises of A2 cannot all be merely reports of the present testimony of sense and memory, for if so they could not entail any of P1...Pn of A1 which



go beyond such reports, and so could not entail P/A1. So at least one of the premises of A2 is either the conclusion of an inductive argument or is the conclusion of a V-probable argument. Call this premise P/A2.<sup>25</sup> If P/A2 is the conclusion of an inductive argument then A2 presupposes the UP and Hume's circularity charge applies. But if P/A2 is the conclusion of a V-probable argument then the same set of cases must be considered.

The point is that either the supporter of the rationality of the UP engages in an infinite regress to escape use of inductive inference and so reliance on the UP, or at some point makes an inductive inference which presupposes the UP. Thus, since presumably justification is finitary, Hume's circularity charge makes sense and is directed at attempts to provide inductive support for the UP.

The form of inference in which Hume is most interested, causal inference, is inductive. To suppose that Hume did not have inductive inference in mind in his skeptical argument is to suppose that he did not see or, if he did see, did not think it important that at least one of the premises of a valid but nondemonstrative argument establishing the UP is going to be derived by inductive inference (immediately or mediately). I simply think it is very unlikely that Hume would have failed to see that inductive inference must play a role in establishing the premises of such arguments or would have regarded that fact

as unimportant. Hence even if Stove is right that Hume's "probable" arguments in T, I.III.VI (insofar as they are contenders for supporting the UP) are deductive, inductive inference receives implicit consideration in his treatment of those arguments, as I believe I have shown above. Of course, in one sense it is true that Hume recognizes only one form of good inference, deductive inference. For after his criticism of attempts to justify the UP, on which inductive inference is based, he does not, of course, consider such inference rationally justifiable. Why should he, given his argument? But this does not mean that he does not have inductive inference in mind as a target of his skeptical argument.

7

With regard to Stove's "independent" evidence that Hume did not even consider IP: (1) According to Stove, Hume gives as a sufficient ground for denying that the inference from "This is a flame" to "This is hot" is one that reason leads us to make, the fact that the inference is invalid. In T, I.III.VI Hume considers the inference from "This is a flame" to "This is hot" before he mentions the UP and its role in such inferences. He uses this example to explicate the claim that it is "...by EXPERIENCE only, that we can infer the existence of one object from that of another" and that the experience that gives rise to such inferences involves constant conjunction (T, 87). He says in the next

paragraph but one that if reason determined us to make such inferences "it wou'd proceed upon" the UP (T, 89). Then comes the argument that the UP can be supported by neither probable nor demonstrative arguments. Hume doesn't actually say anything in T, I.III.VI about our supposing that "This is a flame" is true while supposing that "This is hot" is false. He certainly doesn't say anything about needing to find a premise which together with "This is a flame" and "All flames observed in the past have been hot" would entail "This is hot."

(2) According to Stove, Hume thinks it is sufficient for establishing the unavailability of the Resemblance Thesis for inductive arguments that it is not without circularity deducible from premises of the type appropriate to be evidence for it. I don't see how this claim is independent evidence for the claim that Hume "did not even consider IP." For the claim that Hume thinks the UP is unavailable merely because it is not deducible without circularity from contingent premises is only true if Hume, in T, I.III.VI, is looking only for valid arguments with the UP as conclusion, which is Stove's main point. Further, as I've argued above, even if Hume is explicitly considering only valid arguments for the UP, that doesn't show that he doesn't have inductive inference in mind.

(3): According to Stove, Hume's charge that probable inferences presuppose the Resemblance Thesis yet that thesis is unavailable "is an effective criticism only if those

inferences were intended to be valid." But that is not true. If the UP is required in order to give us some reason to believe that the conclusions of our inductive inferences are likely to be true, then, if the UP is unavailable, we don't have reason to believe that the conclusions of our inductive inferences are likely to be true. That, I take it, is an effective criticism of our inductive inferences.

8

Barry Stroud has presented an interpretation of Hume's argument that captures Hume's concern with the justification of our inductive inferences, is reasonably true to Hume's text, and avoids attributing deductivism to Hume. In Hume (Stroud [1977]), Chapter III, Stroud considers Hume's argument for inductive skepticism. His analysis and reconstruction of Hume's argument begins with the question of what Hume means when he says that if our causal inferences were based on reason we would be proceeding upon the supposition that the uniformity principle, UP, is true. Consider the statements:

(PE) All observed A's have been followed by B's.

(PI) An A is observed now.

-----  
So, (FE) A B will occur.

According to Stroud, it is clear that one thing Hume means is this:

...one whose experience is correctly described by statements of the form of PE and PI will not have reason to believe a statement of the form of FE unless he has reason to believe the UP. (Stroud [1977], 55)

Why does Hume think inferences from the observed to the unobserved are founded on the UP in the above sense? Stroud rejects the suggestion that Hume's only reason for holding that our inferences from the observed to the unobserved are founded on the UP is that such inferences are invalid without the UP. In other words, Stroud rejects the claim that Hume is a deductivist. On the deductivist interpretation, Hume assumes that I have reason to believe P only if I have reason to believe some P\* which entails P. On this interpretation Hume's argument doesn't really have any skeptical force since all he has established is that

...if no one is ever justified in believing a proposition unless he is justified in believing something that logically implies it, then no one is ever justified in believing anything about the unobserved. (Stroud [1977], 56-7)

On the deductivist interpretation, though Hume is correct in holding that no statements about what has been observed ever entail any statements about what hasn't, he's wrong to assume that justifying reasons must be deductively sufficient, for in fact they needn't be.

Stroud makes two general points against this interpretation: First, it is unsympathetic in "...ascribing

to Hume a quite arbitrary and unjustified assumption with no explanation why he might have found it convincing." Second, on this interpretation it is "...difficult to see why so many able philosophers...should have thought that [Hume's] argument, if successful, would have just the skeptical implications he claimed for it" (Stroud [1977], 57).

Stroud sketches an alternative interpretation of Hume's argument which does not attribute deductivism to Hume and which, if successful, does support his skeptical conclusion. The central point of this interpretation is the idea that a reasonable or justified belief about the unobserved requires past experience and the reasonable or justified belief that one's past experience is a good reason to believe what one does about the unobserved. But this latter belief, Hume's argument shows, cannot itself be justified.

Stroud argues in this way: Given PE and PI (and my belief that they are true), my belief [B] in the conclusion FE is justified only if I hold the following belief: [B]\* - PE and PI together are good reason for holding [B]. However, I must not simply hold [B]\* but be justified in holding it, I must have some good reason for holding [B]\*. So I must have some good reason for believing that PE and PI are good reason for holding [B]. According to Stroud, this potentially regressive aspect of the notion of reason or justification may be what Hume has in mind. On this view, a rational agent proceeds rationally at each step in the process of belief formation:

By concentrating on this aspect of reasonableness Hume could find support for his claim that a reasonable belief in something unobserved requires more than certain kinds of past and present experiences. It requires as well that one reasonably believe that what one has experienced is good reason to believe what one does about the unobserved. And then Hume's question, which he thinks leads to scepticism, is how one can ever get a reasonable belief to that effect. (Stroud [1977], 62)

Stroud points out that if Hume's question does lead to skepticism it is not because he assumes that good reasons must be deductively sufficient. Consider the premise:

(R) PE and PI are good reason to believe that a B will occur.

Adding the premise (R) to PE and PI still does not yield a deductively valid argument to FE. So the skeptical force of Hume's argument is not derived from his being a deductivist. Stroud continues:

In any case, it is plausible to argue that no one who has observed a constant conjunction between As and Bs and is presently observing an A will reasonably believe on that basis that a B will occur unless he also reasonably believes that what he has experienced is good reason to believe that a B will occur. But, Hume asks, how could one ever come reasonably to believe that? How is one to get a reasonable belief that a past constant conjunction between As and Bs, along with a presently observed A, is good reason to believe that a B will occur? (Stroud [1977], 63)

According to Stroud, Hume's skeptical argument is based on the idea that no one can ever have reason to believe that his past and present experience is good reason to believe

something about the unobserved. In order to be justified in holding a belief about the unobserved, I must be justified in believing that past and present observations are good reason for believing something about the unobserved. This cannot be established by demonstrative reasoning. So it must be established by probable reasoning, based on observation. But believing that certain observations are good reason to believe something about the unobserved is itself a belief about the unobserved. Hence it can only be established from observations if I am already justified in believing that past and present observations are good reason for believing something about the unobserved.<sup>26</sup>

Where is the UP in all this? The UP is the candidate for justifying [B]\*/(R). Since the UP cannot be established demonstratively, it must be established by observation. The UP, however, concerns the unobserved, since it says something about the future course of experience, so we can only have good reason to believe the UP itself if we believe that past and present observations are good reason for believing something about the unobserved. But that is what the UP was invoked to justify! Hence, we have circularity.

I believe that Stroud's reading of Hume's argument is essentially the same as mine, though Stroud makes the role of the notion of justification in Hume's argument more explicit. So, not only are Stove's textual arguments unconvincing, but there is a coherent reading of Hume's argument that preserves its skeptical force without



ascribing deductivism to Hume. This reading supports the traditional interpretation of Hume as a theoretical skeptic. For on this reading Hume shows that our ordinary inductive practices, and so the matter-of-fact beliefs based on them, are rationally unjustified, though he nevertheless employs inductive inference himself.

9

According to Stove, from the beginning Hume recognizes the possibility of only one form of good inference, valid deductive inference. Hume is, according to Stove, a deductivist. Thus Hume didn't produce an argument against the possibility of arguments whose premises probabilize a conclusion, for he doesn't even consider that as a possibility. What Hume showed was that the Resemblance Thesis is unavailable as a premise that will make experience-based arguments valid. Since there can be no non-circular deductive argument for the Resemblance Thesis, it isn't available. In other words, on Stove's view Hume argues that our inferences from experience are ultimately unjustified because there can be no non-circular support for the Resemblance Thesis, which is required to render them valid. He doesn't argue against and in fact doesn't even consider the possibility that there may be non-deductive but probabilizing support for the Resemblance Thesis.

I have argued that Stove is mistaken in his characterization of Hume as a deductivist and that Hume does

consider probabilizing support for the Resemblance Thesis. But even if one accepts Stove's claims about Hume's skeptical argument he can nevertheless hold that Hume is a theoretical skeptic with regard to our matter-of-fact beliefs. For it is central to Stove's view that Hume thinks all invalid inferences and hence all inductive inferences are no good. If this is true, then the conclusions of inductive inferences are not rationally justified by the premises from which they are inferred, and since Hume thinks that all of our beliefs about matters of fact that go beyond the immediate data of sense and memory are based on causal inference, a form of inductive inference, those beliefs are not rationally justified. So, accepting Stove's view is consistent with seeing Hume as a theoretical skeptic. Stove's analysis is at odds with the traditional interpretation only insofar as he says Hume never attempts to refute IP; it is not inconsistent with the attribution to Hume of a serious theoretical skepticism with regard to our empirical beliefs and knowledge claims. Still, I believe that consideration of Hume's texts doesn't support Stove's analysis and that Hume does attempt to refute the view Stove refers to as IP.

## Notes To Chapter III

1. In Hume (Chappell [1968]), 187-212.

2. All citations to Stove are to Stove [1968] unless otherwise noted.

3. Stove is not alone in claiming that the only distinction Hume draws between acceptable arguments is between those that are valid and those that are invalid. As David Owen points out,

The characterization of the model of probable reasoning that Hume was attacking [in what is traditionally recognized as his argument for inductive skepticism] as a deductive model has almost become orthodoxy, replacing the older view that Hume's demonstrative/probable distinction is equivalent to the deductive/inductive distinction (Owen [1995], 145).

For some examples of the almost orthodox view, see Flew [1961], 80-2 and 85, and MacIntyre [1968], 244.

4. Throughout this dissertation I will refer to one and the same principle as the "uniformity principle," the "principle of uniformity" the "UP," and, in the present chapter, the "resemblance thesis."

5. Stove acknowledges that Hume does not himself use the word "presuppose." Rather, Hume uses a number of phrases to describe the relationship between our empirical inferences and the UP. Such inferences, Hume says, are "founded on the presumption" of the UP, "proceed upon the supposition" of the UP, "suppose, as their foundation" the UP, and so on. I have adopted Stove's practice of using "presuppose" to express what Hume has in mind in such phrases.

Nevertheless, I disagree with Stove's claim that Hume uses "presuppose" in the deductivist sense Stove attributes to him.

6. For a clear discussion of rule circularity, see Wesley Salmon's The Foundations of Scientific Inference (Salmon [1967]), Chapter II, 12-17. What follows is a simplified

example of rule circularity taken from a more detailed example given by Salmon.

Consider the inductive inference rule R:

R: From "Most observed As have been B" infer "Probably, the next observed A will be B."\*

Now consider the following argument AR in support of R:

Most observed uses of R have been successful.

-----  
Therefore, probably the next observed use of R will be successful.

Now, AR conforms to rule R. The conclusion of AR, however, does not appear as a premise in the argument that establishes it. So AR does not exhibit what can be called "premise circularity." Nevertheless, the argument is circular in that in conforming to R it employs the very rule, R, whose reliability is presumably in question. Thus the argument exhibits rule circularity.\*\*

\* For the sake of simplicity I have left out qualifications that would be made in any seriously proposed inductive inference rule, such as the requirement that the observed As constitute a random sample.

\*\* There is debate about just what does constitute the supposed circularity. My purpose, however, is not to argue that all inductive attempts to support induction must be circular, nor am I arguing for a particular interpretation of rule circularity.

7. Actually, the rule circularity version of the problem of induction is more accurately described as a reconstruction rather than an interpretation of Hume's argument. Hume doesn't discuss inference rules per se, and I don't know of any Hume scholar who thinks that Hume himself had rule circularity in mind.

8. For the classic argument that every inference must conform to some inference rule yet the inference rule can't itself appear as a premise see Lewis Carroll's "What The Tortoise Said to Achilles" (Copi and Gould [1972], 117-19). The central point is that the demand that the inference rule itself appear as a premise leads to an infinite regress.

9. Stove focuses mainly on the Abstract version of Hume's argument.

10. In Stove's statement of Hume's argument, to say that a statement P is "from" a set of statements  $S_1...S_n$  is not to say that P deductively follows from  $S_1...S_n$ , but only that  $S_1...S_n$  are offered by Hume as evidence for P.

11. A "predictive inductive inferences" is simply an inference in which we infer from observed past conjunctions to the occurrence of an object or event in the future.

12. See Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature (Fogelin [1985]), 155-6.

13. See Fogelin [1985], 155.

14. In order to be open to the possibility of non-valid arguments that objectively probabilize their conclusions Hume doesn't need to have an idea of just what formal properties are essential to such arguments. One could see that in fact certain arguments are such that people who believe their premises have a degree of belief in their conclusions (without being certain of them) and one might think it an open question whether this fact depends on some property of these arguments that makes their premises objectively probabilize their conclusions, without having any idea of what that property is. In fact, just how good inductive arguments render their conclusions objectively probable, that is, what objective properties such arguments have (other than lack of validity), is a matter of debate and, it seems to me, a mystery.

15. Though I have stressed Hume's talk of probabilities as evidence that he does consider probabilizing inductive arguments, both the arguments Hume calls "proofs" and those he calls "probabilities" are in fact inductive arguments and, I believe, were recognized by Hume as inductive.

16. I think the following passage from Stove expresses the justificatory sense of "probable argument":

There exist arguments which, although not valid...necessitate, for any rational being of limited knowledge who knows their premises, belief, rather than disbelief or the suspension of belief, in their conclusions-belief to which, nevertheless, a degree of assurance attaches, less than that (maximal) degree which a valid argument necessitates (Stove [1968], 188).

17. See T, pages 5-6. Hume also presents the color-shade counterexample in the first Enquiry (See E II, 20-1), and this suggests that his admission of it in the Treatise is not simply a slip on his part.

18. Hume has been criticized on the grounds that he both treats the Copy Principle as a contingent generalization and uses it polemically to discount alleged counter-examples to the principle itself, as if the Copy Principle were a necessary truth. See, for example, Flew [1962], 25-6. According to James Noxon in Hume's Philosophical Development (Noxon [1973]), Hume's Copy Principle is neither an empirical generalization nor an arbitrary definition but is instead a prescriptive methodological principle (Noxon [1973], 144). Noxon minimizes the polemical use Hume makes of the principle, and on this point I think he goes too far. But he also overlooks the fact that even if Hume's principle is intended as a prescriptive methodological principle, Hume explicitly supports it by reference to empirical evidence. Hume, if not Noxon, seems to recognize that the Copy Principle, even as a prescription, requires some support, and the support he offers involves inductive argument. So the point that Hume himself employs inductive arguments still stands. For a defense of Hume's use of the Copy Principle as an empirical generalization see chapter 2 of Garrett [1997].

19. Hume also shows his recognition and reliance on analogical reasoning in the Treatise and in Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. In Noxon [1973], 100-108, James Noxon offers a clear and careful treatment of Hume's views on analogical reasoning. Noxon offers various examples of Hume's use of analogical reasoning and writes,

Although no formal presentation of the logic of analogy is to be found in Hume, there are incidental comments on the

rules of analogy in the Treatise, in the first Enquiry, and in the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. All of these entries reaffirm the simple principles of analogical inference formulated in Newton's first three Rules of Reasoning in Philosophy (Noxon [1973], 102).

20. Noxon writes, "Evidently Hume did not suppose that strength of conviction was an index to the probable truth of a belief" (Noxon [1973], 164). Hume's recognition of the distinction between degree of confidence with which a proposition is believed and the likelihood that the proposition believed is true fits Noxon's reading of Hume, a reading according to which, contrary to the claims of many Hume commentators, Hume came to recognize, at least in practice, the distinction between philosophical and psychological issues, between describing/explaining the genesis of a belief and judging its epistemic status.

21. In Hume (Stroud [1977]), Barry Stroud points out that it would be absurd to suggest that in our empirical inferences we are committed to the principle that the future will be exactly like the past in all respects or that every generalization which has held so far will hold in the future.

22. I have said that in our ordinary use of arguments the inference rules we employ and the principles that underwrite them do not appear as premises of the argument. But in the case of attempts to support the UP by I-probable arguments it is relevant that the UP itself justifies our acceptance of such arguments. The point is that in this case circularity is evident when the reasoning by which we're attempting to justify the UP is made explicit. So, though I don't accept the rule-circularity interpretation of Hume's argument against the possibility of probabilizing support for the UP, that is, I don't believe the UP itself functions as an inference rule, I also don't accept Stove's interpretation, on which the UP is added as a premise to our causal inferences. Rather, in terms of inference rules, the UP is a principle that we presuppose in using inductive inference rules in the sense that our belief in the UP is itself what justifies our acceptance of such rules.

23. Actually, any such argument needn't have premises themselves inferred inductively but will either have premises inferred inductively or will have premises such that somewhere in the chain of inferences leading to them an inductive inference occurs.

24. P/A1 cannot be the conclusion of a demonstrative inference because it is contingent. But it must be the conclusion of some inference if it is contingent, rationally justified and goes beyond reporting the present testimony of sense and memory. It is important that we're supposing justification of whatever premises are involved in supporting the UP, otherwise the case argument doesn't work.

25. See note 24. Mutatis mutandis, the same points apply to P/A2.

26. Stroud writes:

Since having observed a constant conjunction between As and Bs and being presently confronted with an A does not logically imply that one has reason to believe that a B will occur, any support for that conclusion must consist of a reasonable inference from observed instances to the truth of 'observed instances provide good reason to believe that a B will occur'. But every inference from the observed to the unobserved is such that it is reasonable or justified only if one has reason to believe that observed instances provide reason to believe a certain statement about unobserved instances. And therefore in particular the inference from observed instances to the conclusion 'observed instances provide reason to believe that a B will occur' is reasonable or justified only if one has reason to believe that observed instances provide reason to believe a certain conclusion about unobserved instances. But...that would be 'evidently going in a circle, and taking that for granted, which is the very point in question' (E, p.36). So no one could ever have any reason to believe that observed instances provide reason to believe that a B will occur. And since that in turn was seen to be a necessary condition of having a reasonable belief about the unobserved, it follows that no one ever has a reasonable belief about the unobserved (Stroud [1977], 66-7).



Suppose I infer FE from PE and PI. I need to believe that PE and PI are good reason to believe FE. I also need reason to believe that PE and PI are good reason to believe FE. But why do I need to have good reason to believe in general that past and present experiences are good reason to hold beliefs about the unobserved? Why can't I simply have a justified belief about this one case? In other words, granted that a reasonable belief in the UP would be sufficient for justifying my belief that PE and PI are good reason for believing FE, why is it a necessary condition?

Well, suppose I believe FE on the basis of PE and PI and I also believe that PE and PI are good reason for holding FE. How can I justify this particular inference? Let's say I justify this particular inference with a restricted uniformity principle, UP\*: The future will resemble the past with respect to A's and B's. How can I justify belief in UP\*? I can't justify it demonstratively, for no contradiction is implied by the proposition that the future will not resemble the past with respect to As and Bs. So if it is to be justified it must be justified by probable inference, on the basis of past and present experience of As and Bs. But past and present experience of As and Bs can justify my belief in UP\* (or anything about future As and Bs) only if I have reason to believe that the future will resemble the past with respect to As and Bs, or in other words, only if I already have reason to believe the UP\*. This argument, however, will apply to any particular inference from the observed to the unobserved (including of course, inferences from past and present experience to the future). Since no particular inference from the observed to the unobserved can be justified, we get the general result that inferences from the observed to the unobserved cannot be justified.

CHAPTER  
IV

HUME'S INDUCTIVE SKEPTICISM DENIED: THE BEAUCHAMP AND  
ROSENBERG INTERPRETATION AND THE GARRETT INTERPRETATION

1

I believe, as I argued in chapter III, that D.C. Stove is mistaken in denying that Hume presents the argument for inductive skepticism traditionally attributed to him. To some extent, however, this issue is secondary to my main project of arguing for the thesis that Hume is a serious theoretical skeptic. Stove himself admits that Hume is in fact a skeptic regarding our beliefs concerning contingent matters of fact. So, Stove's particular interpretation of what is usually taken to be Hume's argument for inductive skepticism, though at odds with the traditional interpretation of Hume that I in part accept, is not directly a threat to my main thesis.

There are other interpretations of what is traditionally taken to be Hume's argument for inductive skepticism that are a direct threat to my thesis. One of these is the interpretation that Tom L. Beauchamp and Alexander Rosenberg present in their book Hume And The Problem Of Causation. According to this interpretation, Hume "...is not a sceptic concerning inductive inference and the claims of reason generally" (Beauchamp and Rosenberg [1981],

33).<sup>1</sup> Rather, according to Beauchamp and Rosenberg, "Hume's only major complaint" about causal reasoning or inductive inference generally "...is that rationalists have misunderstood the nature of causation and inductive inference" (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 33).

Beauchamp and Rosenberg state the outline of their interpretation as follows:

Hume is sceptical about rationalist claims concerning the power and scope of causal reasoning, but not sceptical about causal reasoning itself....In those passages commonly said to exhibit scepticism about induction, Hume's intentions have been misinterpreted. He is concerned to show that inductive reasoning can provide neither self-evident certainty nor the logical necessity that uniquely characterizes demonstrative reasoning (a priori reasoning), and also that demonstrative reasoning cannot prove matters of fact by its own resources alone. Thus, the problem of induction, as that problem is conceived today, is simply not to be found in Hume's philosophy" (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 36-7).

## 2

According to Beauchamp and Rosenberg, the traditional interpretation, according to which Hume is an inductive skeptic, is based on one or both of the following reconstructions of Hume's arguments:

### Argument I

(1) All factual beliefs are based solely on instinct and not on justifying reasons.

(2) If all factual beliefs are based solely on instinct and not on justifying reasons, then all factual beliefs are irrational.

So, (C<sub>1</sub>) All factual beliefs are irrational.

(4) All inductively derived beliefs form a subset of the set of factual beliefs.

(5) If all factual beliefs are irrational and all inductively derived beliefs form a subset of the set of

factual beliefs, then no inductive conclusion can be rationally justified.

So, (C<sub>2</sub>) No inductive conclusion can be rationally justified.

#### Argument II

(1) The entire institution of inductive reasoning cannot be rationally justified.

(2) If the entire institution of inductive reasoning cannot be rationally justified, then no inductive conclusion can be rationally justified.

So, (C) No inductive conclusion can be rationally justified. (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 39)<sup>2</sup>

Arguments I and II share the conclusion that no inductive conclusion (that is, no conclusion which is derived through inductive inference) can be rationally justified, and according to Beauchamp and Rosenberg the weakness of each of I and II as an interpretation of Hume lies in its first premise. Hume holds, that is to say, neither that all factual beliefs are based solely on instinct and not on justifying reasons, nor that the entire institution of inductive reasoning cannot be rationally justified. And in attributing these premises to Hume the traditional view mistakenly presupposes that Hume's treatment of inductive reasoning is a demand for a general justification of inductive reasoning, that is, that it calls into question "the whole institution of inductive procedures and standards" (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 39-40).

Beauchamp and Rosenberg refer to the problem of justifying the whole enterprise of inductive reasoning as the "external problem". The external problem is to be

distinguished from "internal problems", that is, demands for justifications of particular inductive inferences made within a context where the rational justification of inductive reasoning in general is assumed. According to Beauchamp and Rosenberg,

...Hume expressly advocates standards for the resolution of internal problems. He quite clearly believes some inductive conclusions rational and others irrational as assessed by a set of appropriate inductive standards....(Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 40).

Beauchamp and Rosenberg say that if in fact the traditional view of Hume's position on the external question were correct - that if he in fact holds either premise (1) of Argument I or premise (1) of Argument II - he would undermine his own inductive methods and would thereby be inconsistent. Thus the main burden of their argument is to show that neither the claim that all factual beliefs are based solely on instinct and not on justifying reasons (premise (1) of Argument I) nor the claim that the entire institution of inductive reasoning cannot be rationally justified (premise (1) of Argument II) should be attributed to Hume. This will be to show in effect that Hume simply does not raise the external problem he has traditionally been held to raise.

Beauchamp and Rosenberg first address Argument II. According to Beauchamp and Rosenberg, Hume cannot be held to have asserted that the entire institution of inductive reasoning cannot be rationally justified. For it was simply never Hume's intention "...to question the entire institution of inductive procedures and standards" (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 41). In fact, say Beauchamp and Rosenberg,

His argument is a frontal attack on rationalist assumptions that at least some inductive arguments are demonstrative; it is not a demand for a wholesale justification of induction and a fortiori not a sceptical assault on induction (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 41).

According to Beauchamp and Rosenberg, commentators have been misled into thinking that Hume holds that no inductive inference can be rationally justified in part because they have misunderstood Hume's use of "reason" and "rational justification". In fact, they say, in what appears to be his attack on the reasonableness of our belief in the uniformity principle and beliefs based on inductive inference, Hume uses 'reason' and related terms in a narrower sense than is common today. In those passages Hume is showing merely that reason as the rationalists construed it cannot license our belief in the uniformity principle and so cannot give our inductive inferences and the matter of fact beliefs based on them the logical certainty that rationalist thinkers would like to claim for factual assertions:

...Hume's critique is directed specifically against the rationalistic conception of reason. It is not an unrestricted scepticism concerning what today we often call "reason" and "rational justification." Hume sometimes uses the word "reason" and its analogs in a narrower way than is common today..." (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 41).<sup>3</sup>

Regrettably, Hume's selectively restricted use of "reason" and related terms to refer to rationalistic conceptions has led commentators to misinterpret "...his claim that no inductive inference can be supported and hence justified rationally, in the narrow a priori sense" as "...the far different claim that no inductive inference can be justified rationally, in the broader contemporary sense of "rationality"" (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 41).

Why should we think Hume's use of "reason" and related terms is restricted in the way that Beauchamp and Rosenberg claim it is? Beauchamp and Rosenberg stress historical context:

In Hume's era pure reason was often considered capable of deriving sweeping factual conclusions....Because such views were then flourishing, a broad use of the term "reason" was anathema to eighteenth-century empiricists....The single most important rationalistic view under scrutiny in his work is the Cartesian (and even Lockean) belief that there can be synthetic a priori knowledge about the world derived from self-evident first principles....Far from being a sceptical challenge to induction, then, Hume's "critique" is little more than a prolonged argument for the general position that Newton's inductive method must replace the rationalistic model of science (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 42-3).

So, when Hume says that we have no reason for our belief in the UP and hence no justification for our beliefs

based on inductive inference, he means merely that we cannot reason deductively from principles recognized a priori to claims about the actual world. He does not mean that we have no reason or justification for our reliance on inductive reasoning and the beliefs it yields in our "broader contemporary sense" of 'reason' and 'justification'. In response to D.C. Stove, Beauchamp and Rosenberg go so far as to say that in various passages of the Treatise and first Enquiry traditionally held to express inductive skepticism Hume "...is not discussing or critically evaluating inductive reason" at all, but rather is criticizing a certain rationalistic conception of reason and reasonable inference (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 72) [Italics in original].<sup>4</sup>

Beauchamp and Rosenberg interpret the sections of the Treatise and first Enquiry traditionally thought to contain Hume's argument for inductive skepticism in the light of his allegedly restricted use of 'reason' and related terms. According to them, Hume does not raise the external problem suggested by Argument I but only argues that a priori deductive reasoning cannot justify empirical conclusions:

Hume's "sceptical doubts" center solely on the scope and powers of the understanding (the faculty of a priori reasoning), not on the justifiability of inductive reasoning (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 48).

Beauchamp and Rosenberg offer the following reconstruction of Hume's alleged argument for inductive skepticism:



Neither demonstrative nor inductive reasoning can be employed successfully to provide a proof of the supposition that the future will be conformable to the past. Since this supposition cannot be proved, it cannot legitimately serve as an intermediary that certifies the understanding to arrive at inductive inferences characterized by logical necessity. There also seems to be no other logical connecting medium that so certifies the understanding. Accordingly, inductive reasoning is not a product of the understanding and cannot provide the logical necessity that uniquely characterizes demonstrative reasoning (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 48). [*Italics in original*]

What do Beauchamp and Rosenberg say about the passages in which Hume says that inductive reasoning cannot be used to justify itself without circularity? In spite of such passages, they say, "it must not be thought that Hume is requesting a rational justification of the entire institution of inductive reasoning" (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 50). Instead, Hume is "simply requesting a justification of the supposition that the future will conform to the past," and he makes this request "not in order to question the institution of induction" but to question the rationalistic view that factual claims can be proven a priori through deductive reasoning (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 50). Hume is, in effect, questioning an assumption - the UP - that rationalists would require as a premise in order to establish causal inferences deductively: "Hume is merely arguing that this assumption is unwarranted, not that the institution of induction is unwarranted" (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 50).

It is Beauchamp and Rosenberg's contention that in Hume's time Cartesian rationalism was flourishing and that its defeat was Hume's primary concern in the passages traditionally taken to express skepticism on Hume's part. In an unpublished paper, "Hume's Skepticism," Kenneth Winkler points out that the Cartesian belief as Beauchamp and Rosenberg state it (that is, as the view that by purely deductive reasoning from self-evident principles we can derive factual knowledge of the world) was simply "...not a live presence at the time Hume wrote" (Winkler [3], 3).

Winkler's contention is supported by Mary Shaw Kuypers' Studies in the Eighteenth Century Background of Hume's Empiricism. Kuypers writes that

...by Hume's time...it was the common opinion that the a priori method of Descartes had reversed the proper order of investigation and that Newton had shown the only true way to validate scientific results (Kuypers [1966], 7).

Winkler also points out that in Hume's time interest in the justification of experimental or inductively derived conclusions was exhibited by other broadly empiricist thinkers. One notable example is Joseph Butler, a thinker for whom Hume had great respect, who suggests in his Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed (published in 1736) that our only reason - that is, justification - for many of our

beliefs is a presumption of the uniformity of nature. In the passages Winkler cites, Butler certainly seems to use 'reason' not in a restricted rationalist sense but in the broader sense in which we today would use the term. For example, Butler says that "...our only natural reason for believing the course of the world will continue to-morrow, as it has done..." is the "presumption" that "all things will continue as we experience they are." This presumption of likeness or "analogy" is the foundation of many of our convictions and yet, Butler says, it is a topic which "has not yet been thoroughly considered" (Quoted in Winkler [3], 4-5). [Italics added]

As Winkler notes, if Hume uses 'reason' and related terms in the broad sense in which Butler does, then we get a natural skeptical reading of Book I of the Treatise and of the first Enquiry. Winkler refers to passages in which Hume does seem to use 'reason' not just to refer to some rationalistic conception. For example, at two points in the Treatise where Hume in footnotes contrasts reason with the imagination, he speaks of reason as including both our demonstrative and our probable reasoning and he also refers to "the understanding" as inclusive of both kinds of reasoning:

When I oppose the imagination to the memory, I mean the faculty, by which we form our fainter ideas. When I oppose it to reason, I mean the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings (T, I.III.X, 118).

To prevent all ambiguity, I must observe, that where I oppose the imagination to the memory, I mean in general the faculty that presents our fainter ideas. In all other places, and particularly when it is oppos'd to the understanding, I understand the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings (T, II.II.VII, 371).

Recall the passage from T, I.IV.VII that I quoted in chapter I in which Hume says,

After the most accurate and exact of my reasonings, I can give no reason why I shou'd assent to it; and feel nothing but a strong propensity to consider objects strongly in that view, under which they appear to me (T, 265).

Recall also that this was one of the "desponding reflections" that nearly drove Hume to despair. Why should his inability to give a "reason" for his conclusions bother Hume at all if, as Beauchamp and Rosenberg claim, he is using 'reason' in a restricted sense?

Another especially suggestive passage occurs in the Abstract. After saying that Adam, a person of full intellectual capacity, "...would never have been able to demonstrate, that the course of nature must continue uniformly the same..." (for a change in the course of nature is conceivable hence possible hence nondemonstrable), Hume says,

Nay, I will go farther, and assert, that he could not so much as prove by any probable arguments, that the future must be conformable to the past. All probable arguments are built on the supposition, that there is this conformity betwixt the future and the past, and therefore can never prove it. This conformity is a matter of fact, and if it must be proved, will admit of no proof but from experience.

But our experience in the past can be a proof of nothing for the future, but upon a supposition, that there is a resemblance betwixt them. This therefore is a point, which can admit of no proof at all, and which we take for granted without any proof (A, 651-2)

This would seem to be intended to preclude inductive attempts to support the uniformity principle, unless one insists that 'proof' be read as referring only to deductively valid arguments from self-evident premises. For if Hume is using 'proof' to refer to deductively valid arguments with contingent premises, then, as I argue in chapter III, his argument contains implicit consideration of inductive support for the UP.

As Winkler points out, however, in the eighteenth century a proof was often distinguished from a demonstrative argument, the former being a non-demonstrative argument. In fact, in "Of scepticism with regard to the senses," in a passage not mentioned by Winkler, Hume begins a footnote in support of his explanation of the role that constancy or resemblance plays in producing our belief in an external world with the following sentence:

This reasoning, it must be confest, is somewhat abstruse, and difficult to be comprehended; but it is remarkable, that this very difficulty may be converted into a proof of the reasoning (T, I.IV.II, 204-5). [*Italics added*]

Hume goes on to offer such a "proof" for his claim that the resemblance between numerically distinct but qualitatively

similar perceptions and a single uninterrupted perception leads us to mistake the first for the second. The proof that Hume goes on to give consists in pointing out that the resemblance that "the act of the mind in surveying a succession of related objects bears to that in surveying an identical object" easily leads us to confuse these two acts of the mind and thus makes it difficult for us to distinguish the objects of these resembling acts (T, 205). Whatever one thinks of Hume's explanation of our belief in an external world or his proof in support of that explanation, it is clear that this proof is not and is not intended to be a demonstrative argument. Neither premises nor conclusion are propositions expressing relations of ideas, nor, as far as I can tell, is the argument intended to be deductive.

In addition, note that Hume says that Adam could not support his belief in the UP by any "probable arguments." But Hume uses "probable argument" to refer to both valid arguments with contingent premises and inductive arguments proper.

Further evidence that Hume's skeptical arguments are not restricted to attacking rationalism comes from the first Enquiry. In Section XII, when Hume sets out the considerations that will give the skeptic reason for "triumph," it is his own view of causation and his own argument for inductive skepticism to which he refers:

The sceptic, therefore, had better keep within his proper sphere, and display those philosophical objections, which arise from more profound researches. Here he seems to have ample matter of triumph; while he justly insists, that all our evidence for any matter of fact, which lies beyond the testimony of sense or memory, is derived entirely from the relation of cause and effect; that we have no other idea of this relation than that of two objects, which have been frequently conjoined together; that we have no argument to convince us, that objects, which have, in our experience, been frequently conjoined, will likewise, in other instances, be conjoined in the same manner; and that nothing leads us to this inference but custom or a certain instinct of our nature; which it is indeed difficult to resist, but which, like other instincts, may be fallacious and deceitful. While the sceptic insists upon these topics, he shows his force, or rather, indeed, his own and our weakness; and seems, for the time at least, to destroy all assurance and conviction (E, XII.II, 159).

Contrary to the claim that Hume is not really questioning the justification of inductive inference, the possibility that the "custom or instinct" which leads us to make an inductive inference may be "deceitful" strongly suggests that what is being considered is precisely the justification of such inferences.<sup>5</sup> Note also that in the above quotation, Hume does not say that we have no demonstrative argument to support the UP, but simply that we have "no argument." This is especially important given that Beauchamp and Rosenberg claim that empiricists of Hume's time were careful to distinguish between negative claims about justification in a broader sense and such claims about justification in a narrower, rationalistic sense in which a justifying argument must be a demonstrative one.<sup>6</sup> Hume

seems to be making precisely the "no-argument argument" that Fogelin attributes to him.

Recall the distinction I drew in chapter III between V-probable arguments and I-probable arguments, both of which are nondemonstrative. I also showed there that even if Hume, in the sections of the Treatise, Abstract, and first Enquiry traditionally held to contain an argument for inductive skepticism was only explicitly considering V-probable arguments (that is, deductively valid arguments with contingent premises) for the UP, his discussion can be seen as containing an implicit rebuttal of attempts to support the UP with I-probable arguments, that is, ordinary inductive arguments. Remember that I suggested there that it would be very unlikely that Hume, who himself employs I-probable arguments, would have been unaware of the fact that his consideration of attempts to support the UP would apply to them. I repeat that suggestion here.

Against those who would still press Hume's apparent skepticism concerning induction, Beauchamp and Rosenberg argue that it would be paradoxical if Hume, "the most influential and consistent figure in modern empiricism," whose Treatise both extols and employs empirical methods, were to adopt and recommend a procedure (inductive reasoning) that he regarded as rationally unjustified. To suppose that Hume did regard inductive reasoning as rationally unjustified while himself employing it and



recommending it is, according to Beauchamp and Rosenberg, to attribute inconsistency to Hume.

The response here is straightforward: the distinction between theoretical skepticism and prescriptive/practical skepticism makes it unnecessary for one who reads Hume as an inductive skeptic to attribute inconsistency to Hume due to his use and espousal of inductive procedures.

5

Beauchamp and Rosenberg now turn to Argument I, specifically to its first premise. They claim that this premise, that all factual beliefs are based solely on instinct and not justifying reasons, seriously misrepresents Hume's view. The first part of their argument consists in stressing "...Hume's commitment to standards for the resolution of internal problems of justification..." and his commitment to the inductive procedures of empirical science (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 52). They make five main points which are intended to show this:

(1) Hume's espousal of general rules for making causal judgments, the rules stated in "Rules by which to judge of causes and effects" (T, I.III.XV) are "...expressly designed to provide inductive methods for justifying or eliminating causal beliefs" (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 52). These rules provide "warranting conditions" for causal statements and thus

...indicate that the correctness of causal inference is a matter of objective support and does not depend on animal faith or observers who acquire feelings of determination (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 53).

(2) Hume's discussion in "Of the probability of chances" (T, I.III.XI) indicates his belief that "...inductive arguments attain different degrees of evidence, some being superior to others" (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 53). Also, his distinguishing between knowledge, proofs and probabilities suggests that for Hume,

...there are two kinds of certainty--knowledge derived from the understanding through deductive reasoning and empirical proofs derived from the inductive inferences of the imagination (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 53).

(3) Hume's discussion in "Of the probability of causes" (T, I.III.XII) indicates Hume's commitment to the assumption of causal uniformity even in cases in which we might be naturally disposed to doubt such uniformity (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 54).

(4) Hume's distinction between "...inductively well-grounded beliefs and those that are purely artificial or associational" (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 54). Experience, assisted by general rules for forming judgments, enables us to replace less well-grounded with more well-grounded beliefs.

(5) Hume's distinction between beliefs based on "education", that is, beliefs based on uncritical acceptance of the assertions of others and those based on rational inquiry, that is, on rule-guided inference from experience.

The second part of Beauchamp and Rosenberg's argument involves distinguishing two claims that, they say, are often both taken to be expressed by premise (1) of Argument I and to be attributable to Hume. The two claims are:

- (A) All factual beliefs are based solely on instinct.
- (B) No factual beliefs are based on justifying reasons.

According to Beauchamp and Rosenberg,

Adherents of the received view generally attribute (B) to Hume because they hold that he argues for (A). But never does Hume argue that factual beliefs are based solely on instinct. He does indeed maintain that all factual beliefs are based on instinct, but he also regards some factual beliefs as additionally based on what are today commonly called "justifying reasons" (Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 52).

Such beliefs are those formed on the basis of proper methods of inquiry involving sufficient experience and rule-guided inference rather than on a basis of mere habit or indoctrination.

6

So, Hume articulates and endorses normative standards for inductive inference, distinguishes between better and worse inductive inferences, and takes a favorable view of

beliefs based on appropriate methods of inductive inference as opposed to those based purely on instinct or indoctrination. How, then, can he possibly be taken to be a skeptic about induction? Shouldn't an inductive skeptic see all inductive inferences and all beliefs based on inductive inference as on a par? After all, if Hume holds that all inductive inferences, and hence all beliefs based on such inference presuppose the UP and he also holds that the UP cannot itself be justified, should he not also hold that all inductive inferences are equally bad and all inductively derived beliefs equally unjustified? We can refer to this problem as the "problem of discrimination."

Kenneth Winkler raises this very problem, though he doesn't call it the "problem of discrimination."<sup>7</sup> He writes,

If I am right, Hume is an inductive skeptic. But it is also clear that Hume wants to rank instances of inductive reasoning. He wants to be able to say that some inductive arguments are better than others....The problem is this: shouldn't an inductive skeptic take all inductive arguments to be equally bad? (Winkler [2], 9)

Beauchamp and Rosenberg's external/internal distinction can itself, however, be used to answer the problem of discrimination. I believe that the texts of the Treatise and the first Enquiry support the view that Hume is raising precisely the external question he has traditionally been credited with raising: "What is the rational justification for our inductive inferences and inductively derived

beliefs?" I believe that by now it is clear that Hume's answer to this question is the following: "There is no rational justification for our inductive inferences or our inductively derived beliefs."

There are, however, other questions that we can and do ask about particular inductive inferences or even general kinds of inductive inference. These are internal questions. I may ask of a particular inductive inference, whether it is strong or weak, whether its premises do give a sufficient amount of support to its conclusion so that if I believe the premises I "ought" to believe the conclusion. And we can and do answer such questions by reference to what we take as normative standards (as the 'ought' in the previous sentence suggests). So we can and do distinguish, among our instinct-based beliefs, between those which do and those which do not conform to certain standards, or between those which in a sense are based on justifying reasons and those which are not.<sup>9</sup>

What does our answering internal questions by reference to normative standards show? Does it not show that we presume a positive answer to the external question? That depends. Perhaps as a practicing scientist a person has never even entertained the external question. In a sense she hasn't presumed a positive answer to the external question if by "presuming" we have in mind some sort of conscious belief or presupposition. But she might be said to presume a positive answer to the external question in this sense:

Insofar as she believes that her inductive conclusions are rationally justified period, she presumes a positive answer to the external question. For to be rationally justified period is to be rationally justified not simply in the sense of conforming to a set of norms of inference that are (merely) in fact accepted but in the sense of conforming to norms of inference that ought to be accepted - that are themselves rationally justified.

Now, suppose a person - perhaps a "scientist of human nature" - does raise the external question and answers it in the negative. Does this mean he can no longer raise and answer internal questions? Not in the least. For he may continue to raise and answer internal questions but without thinking that a positive answer with regard to a particular inference or belief means that the inference or belief is rationally justified period. In other words, he simply raises and answers internal questions qua internal. Further, insofar as he is inclined to "forget" his negative answer to the external question, he may find himself answering internal questions and also tacitly presuming a positive answer to the external question.

Why would such a thinker do any of these things? Why would he "forget" his negative answer to the external question and slip back into presuming that positive answers to internal questions are positive answers period? Why would he continue to raise internal questions after having given a negative answer to the external question? I believe that the

basic answer to both of these questions is, for Hume, instinct or "human nature".

We as nonphilosophers instinctively engage in inductive inference and hence (insofar as we ordinarily presume that our inductively derived beliefs are rationally justified period) instinctively presume the UP on which such inference is based. We ordinarily distinguish between better and worse inductive arguments and we ordinarily tend to think that our inductively derived beliefs are rationally justified period. The philosopher who has raised the external question and answered it in the negative is also often operating as nonphilosopher. He will then instinctively engage in inductive inference and hence instinctively presume the UP on which such inference is based. He too will ordinarily distinguish between better and worse inductive arguments and will ordinarily tend to think of his inductively derived beliefs as rationally justified period.

But suppose the philosopher has not forgotten his negative answer to the external question. He is operating as a philosopher. Why would he continue to raise and answer internal questions and espouse norms according to which they should be answered? Again, I think the basic answer, for Hume, is instinct, though a more complete answer must refer to instinct, experience, and philosophical reflection.

I believe that for Hume a factual claim may be "justified" in a secondary sense insofar as it is formed in accordance with our natural, instinctive inferential

practices when those practices have been reflected on and perhaps refined, as in scientific investigation, though those practices themselves and hence that claim too are ultimately without rational justification. When, on the basis of experience and reflection, we develop and follow norms for inductive reasoning we are doing the best we can. But the fact that we're doing the best we can doesn't entail that we get knowledge as a result.

Certain beliefs are "justified" from within the context of our instinctive practices, that is, presupposing the legitimacy of those practices, while others are unjustified even if we presuppose the legitimacy of our instinctive practices. When we hold beliefs based on observation-based inductive inference we're doing what we must given that we have no choice but to hold beliefs and draw conclusions about the world in order to live. Such beliefs, though ultimately unjustified, are "justified" relative to the inferential procedures that are instinctive to us and hence unavoidable.<sup>9</sup> But this is not a form of justification which supports a nonskeptical interpretation of Hume.<sup>10</sup>

My reasons for thinking that for Hume a factual claim may be justified in the secondary sense I have just described are these: First, Hume seems peculiarly undisturbed by what I've referred to as the problem of discrimination, yet it seems highly unlikely that he would have simply failed to recognize the tension between his argument for inductive skepticism and his espousal of



certain forms of reasoning about matters of fact. It seems reasonable to suppose that Hume had in mind some method of distinguishing between the inferences characteristic of empirical scientific investigation and those inferences concerning matters of fact that he found unacceptable.

Second, Hume does in fact suggest a plausible way of drawing this distinction. The inferences he accepts are those that exemplify our natural instinctive inferential practices, duly examined and refined. Some of the principles that result from such examination and refinement of our ordinary practices appear in T, I.III.XV, "Rules by which to judge of causes and effects."<sup>11</sup>

Toward the end of Section XII of the first Enquiry, Hume asks, rhetorically,

While we cannot give a satisfactory reason, why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall or fire burn; can we ever satisfy ourselves concerning any determination, which we may form, with regard to the origin of worlds, and the situation of nature, from, and to eternity (E, XII.III, 162)?

Note that in this passage Hume says that we can give no "satisfactory reason" for holding even ordinary beliefs derived by causal reasoning. In speaking of a "satisfactory reason" here, Hume clearly has justification in mind, for of course he thinks we can give a causal explanation of how we come to hold such beliefs. So our ordinary beliefs and our metaphysical beliefs about the "origin of worlds" are

equally lacking in justification in one sense of 'justification', that is, the sense in which providing a justification for a belief is providing a satisfactory reason for supposing that belief is true.

Hume, however, suggests this parity between ordinary and highly theoretical beliefs in the context of prescribing a limitation of our inquiries to "...common life, and to such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience..."(E, 162). According to Hume,

This narrow limitation, indeed, of our enquiries, is, in every respect, so reasonable, that it suffices to make the slightest examination into the natural powers of the human mind...in order to recommend it to us (E, 163).

So, then, we should engage in and only engage in those philosophical researches that concern "common life." Yet in pursuing these investigations we are freed from "the force of the Pyrrhonian doubt" only by "the strong power of natural instinct" (E, 162). Why, then, should we continue our inquiries? What distinguishes those investigations we should continue from those we should not? The fact that "philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected" (E, 162). Thus the methods embodied in our legitimate inquiries are an outgrowth of our instinctive inferential practices.<sup>12</sup>

I argued, in chapter III, that Hume is not a deductivist. Yet in chapter II and in the present chapter I've argued that he is an inductive skeptic. There would seem to be an inconsistency here. Am I not, in denying that Hume is a deductivist, saying that it is not the case that Hume recognized only one legitimate form of inference while also, in holding that he is an inductive skeptic, saying that it is the case that he recognized only one legitimate form of inference?

As I argued in chapter III, the claim that Hume considers inductive or probabilizing support for the Resemblance Thesis is compatible with the claim that Hume holds inductive skepticism as I have characterized it. A similar approach must be taken to the apparent inconsistency involved in denying that Hume is a deductivist while asserting that he is an inductive skeptic. To show how these claims are compatible I must again draw a distinction between arguments that probabilize their conclusions in the sense that if we believe in their premises we in fact have a degree of confidence in their conclusions and arguments that probabilize their conclusions in the sense that given the truth of their premises their conclusions are in some sense objectively probable. In the second sense, belief in the premises of a probabilizing argument rationally justifies (a degree of) belief in the conclusion.

In chapter III, I cited passages from Hume which show that Hume recognizes both the possibility and the actuality of probabilizing arguments of the first sort. But, I said, the considerations adduced in the argument for inductive skepticism show that there is not really a possibility of inductive arguments that are probabilizing arguments of the second, justificatory, sort, because the UP, which is necessary in order to justify our inductive inferences, cannot be supported by any form of argument.

I believe, however, that Hume is initially open to the possibility of probabilizing arguments of the second sort. With the skeptical argument of T, I.III.VI it becomes clear that there are no probabilizing arguments of this second sort. So, in later sections, Hume is discussing probabilizing arguments of the first, psychological sort, as the text shows. The discussion in T, I.III, sections XI-XIII is an attempt to give a psychological explanation of how we come to have a degree of confidence in a conclusion drawn from premises that do not entail it. But that doesn't show that Hume didn't entertain the possibility of probabilizing arguments of the second, justificatory, sort, earlier on. Again, I believe that Hume is initially open to the possibility of a justificatory probabilizing argument for the UP, though his skeptical considerations show that there can be no such argument.

In section IV of chapter III I gave my reasons for believing that Hume is, prior to the end of his skeptical

argument in T, I.III.VI, open to the possibility of probabilizing arguments of the second sort. I will not restate them here. But the central point is that Hume does not antecedently preclude the possibility of justificatory inductive arguments - that's why I say he is not a deductivist - but he does consequently show that inductive arguments are without rational justification - that's why I say he is an inductive skeptic.

One might, however, object that even if the above considerations are adequate as a reply to Stove's claim that Hume never even considers inductive support for the UP, they are not adequate as a reply to the charge of inconsistency that is here at issue. For, one might ask, how do we characterize Hume's position consequent to the argument for inductive skepticism? Must we not, following that argument, say that Hume is in fact a deductivist, that is, that he recognizes only one legitimate form of inference?

There are several different responses available here. The first is simply to admit that Hume is, consequent to but only consequent to the argument for inductive skepticism, a deductivist. With the appropriate distinctions made, that admission creates no problem for my interpretation. Consider the external/internal distinction of Beauchamp and Rosenberg. One might say that Hume does, qua philosopher, answer the external question concerning the legitimacy of inductive inference in the negative and the external question concerning the legitimacy of deductive inference in

the affirmative.<sup>13</sup> So, from the external point of view, Hume is a deductivist consequent to his arguments for inductive skepticism. But from the internal point of view Hume is not a deductivist even consequent to the argument for inductive skepticism. For he recognizes, employs, and discriminates among inductive inferences. The point can also be made by using Fogelin's theoretical/prescriptive distinction in a slightly different way than I have so far. Consequent to the argument for inductive skepticism Hume is a theoretical but not a prescriptive or practicing deductivist. But prior to that argument he is not even a theoretical deductivist.

Hume's discussion in "Of scepticism with regard to reason" (T, I.IV.I, 180-87), however, may create a bit of a problem for one who holds that Hume is, consequent to but only consequent to the argument for inductive skepticism, a deductivist. For that section may be seen as suggesting that Hume does not, from the external point of view, recognize even our deductive inferences as rationally justified. Perhaps Hume is not a deductivist consequent to that section. Perhaps it is not true that Hume ultimately recognizes one and only one form of inference as rationally justified because, at least from the external point of view, he doesn't recognize even one form of inference as rationally justified. Fine. Then I don't need to say that Hume is, even consequent to the argument for inductive skepticism, a deductivist. From the external point of view

he recognizes no form of inference as rationally justified, while from the internal point of view he recognizes and employs both deductive and inductive inference. Again, the same point may be made in terms of the theoretical/practical distinction.

8

Beauchamp and Rosenberg stress that Hume holds a correspondence theory of truth. A belief is not true just because we are caused to have it but because of the logical relations of ideas or the way the actual world is. Further, though initially caused to believe  $P$ , which is false, I can, on the basis of appropriate experience and inferences, come to believe  $\sim P$  and thus come to have a true belief. With this I fully agree. But according to them Hume does consider factual beliefs formed in accordance with appropriate inductive standards and experience to be warranted, that is, rationally justified, and hence to constitute knowledge. With this I disagree. For I hold and have argued that Hume is an inductive skeptic and that he both raises the "external" question and answers it in the negative. Correcting our beliefs in accord with further experience and inductive canons of inference is the best we can do given that we instinctively assume the UP and engage in the practice of inductive reasoning which presupposes it. Making that assumption we can answer "internal" questions according to standards of induction. We have, then, what might be

called a "pragmatic" justification of our inductive inferences and inductively derived beliefs.<sup>14</sup> But that does not change the fact that the assumption on which those inferences and beliefs are based is itself neither intuitive nor supportable by argument of any kind. Hence from the external point of view our inductively inferred factual beliefs are without rational justification and hence cannot constitute knowledge.

9

What is this external point of view, the point of view from which one questions the whole enterprise of inductive reasoning? I can't describe it precisely. It is, I believe, precisely the point of view Hume assumes in his chamber, before dinner and backgammon with friends. It is the point of view Hume assumes when, as he tells us, he is

...uneasy to think that I approve of one object and disapprove of another; call one thing beautiful and another deform'd; decide concerning truth and falsehood, reason and folly, without knowing upon what principles I proceed (T, I.IV.VII, 271).

The external point of view is the point of view of the theoretical skeptic. It is also, I think, the point of view one assumes when one wonders which of two metaphysical theories which perhaps serve our explanatory purposes equally well really describes the way the world is. It is the point of view from which we question the objective truth



of our beliefs. It is the point of view Descartes assumes when he introduces the unsettling specter of the evil demon.<sup>15</sup>

Why should a person be concerned with this external point of view? If Hume thinks we must and should presuppose the UP and inductive inference and that presupposing these things we can distinguish between better and worse inductive arguments and pursue empirical science according to normative standards, so what if from some "external" point of view he is a skeptic? First, Hume is doing many of the things Beauchamp and Rosenberg suggest he is. The establishment of the inductive method in the study of human nature was an important development in science. It is often said that Descartes' distinction between extended nonthinking substance on the one hand and unextended thinking substance on the other was intended to leave the human mind to the theologians and philosophers, rather than to the empirical scientists. Hume's espousal of the methods of empirical science for investigating human mental functioning thus represents a move beyond Descartes. Second, Hume's observations on the weakness of human reason should also serve the practical service of curbing dogmatism and precipitate judgment.

I think, however, that the best answer to the "So what?" response is simply this: The claim that much of what we think we know does not in fact constitute knowledge, because the relevant beliefs cannot be rationally justified

- a claim which Hume makes, as we will see, about much of our alleged knowledge and which is based in part on his inductive skepticism - is simply of intrinsic philosophical interest. If a person responds to that claim with "So what?", all one can say is that she is not a person interested in philosophical, theoretical questions. She is not sufficiently motivated by the "love of truth," that passion that is, according to Hume, "...the first source of all our enquiries" (T, II.III.X, 448). For my part, I find the thesis that much of what we think we know we in fact do not and cannot know - and in fact cannot be rationally justified in believing - both fascinating and philosophically meaningful.

10

Of course, Hume scholars who disagree with Beauchamp and Rosenberg's interpretation of what is traditionally interpreted as Hume's argument for inductive skepticism may still find reason to deny Hume's inductive skepticism. In Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy, (Garrett [1997]), Don Garrett rejects the traditional interpretation of Hume as an inductive skeptic. According to Garrett,

...Hume's conclusion...is not a direct denial of the evidentiary value of inductive inferences on any conception of them but is instead a straightforward negative conclusion, within cognitive psychology, about the causes of the mechanism of inductive inference (Garrett [1997], 78).<sup>16</sup>

Garrett points out the familiar reasons for doubting the traditional skeptical interpretation of Hume: Hume's own use of inductive reasoning, his espousal of certain standards for causal reasoning, and his distinguishing among inductive reasonings. He also points out that these facts "are not decisive by themselves" (Garrett, 78). For one might reconcile them with the skeptical interpretation by appeal to Hume's view that inductive inference of certain kinds is inevitable, as is our approval of those unavoidable forms of inference and our disapproval of others. Still, any such reconciliation of Hume's inductive skepticism with his use and espousal of inductive inference is irrelevant unless Hume does present an inductive skepticism.

Garrett himself offers two main objections to the interpretation of Hume as an inductive skeptic and the proposed reconciliation of Hume's inductive skepticism with his use and espousal of inductive methods:

(1) Though the proposed reconciliation can account for the mere fact of Hume's use and espousal of inductive inference, "...it cannot so easily account for its manner" (Garrett, 80). According to Garrett, Hume's actual discussion of inductive inference does not involve any expression of skepticism. It is only in his consideration of a different set of arguments - one of which is the argument concerning our belief in the existence of a mind-independent world of objects - that Hume expresses skeptical worries.<sup>17</sup>

According to Garrett, passages that are often taken as expressing Hume's inductive skepticism in fact express either his emotional reaction to his reflections on the psychological-instinctive basis of inductive inference, his recognition that that basis is problematic, or his recognition of the limits and imperfections of human understanding. But in none of these passages does Hume say or suggest that he has shown that all inductive inference is "without evidentiary value" or "carries no epistemic weight" (Garrett, 81).

(2) There is, in fact, "...no reason why Hume should regard the famous argument as itself sufficient to establish that inductive inferences lack evidentiary value" (Garrett, 81-2). After setting out Hume's "famous argument," Garrett writes,

The general strategy is clear: to argue (i) that "determination of" inductive inferences "by reason" requires that a certain proposition (the Uniformity Thesis) be "founded" on some argument, an argument that must be of one of two kinds—demonstrative or probable...and then to argue (ii) that neither kind of argument can do the job required (Garrett, 82).

Garrett offers an alternative interpretation of Hume's argument. According to Garrett, Hume's argument is intended to show only that our inductive inferences are not caused by the operation of reason, i.e., they are not caused by that part of the imagination that engages in inference. Thus considered, Hume's conclusion that our causal inferences are

not the result of reason is a claim in cognitive psychology, not an epistemological claim about the worth or justification of such inferences. In fact, Garrett says, "...Hume is not claiming that the reliability of induction demands justification by argument..." (Garrett, 95).

11

To begin with Garrett's claim that Hume's discussion of inductive inference does not involve any expression of skepticism: The very title of section IV of Hume's Enquiry, in which he presents his definitive statement of the argument in question, - "Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding" - suggests that Hume does have skepticism in mind. Moreover, the very next section contains Hume's "sceptical solution" to these doubts, as its title tells us. Surely Hume needn't announce, "I am a skeptic" or "The previous considerations express skepticism" directly after each skeptical consideration he presents in order for those considerations to be taken as expressions of skepticism. The very title of section IV suggests that Hume thinks the considerations presented there are in some way skeptical. Why shouldn't that be taken as an expression of skepticism, unless one already holds that the argument contained in that section is not intended to have skeptical consequences? But in that case, the occurrence or lack thereof of expressions of skepticism would be beside the point.

Further, within section IV itself Hume at least suggests that he is presenting an inductive skepticism. He begins part II of that section by reviewing two questions that arose in part I and the answers made to them. These are, "What is the basis of our reasonings about matters of fact?" Answer: They are based on our beliefs in causal connections. "What is the foundation of our beliefs in causal connections?" Answer: Experience. But then Hume goes on to ask, "What is the foundation of all conclusions from experience?" (E 32). This question, he says suggestively, may be more difficult. Hume goes on to say that for a philosopher to prevent himself from being forced to "some dangerous dilemma" he had best discover "the difficulty" himself and so "make a kind of merit" of his "very ignorance" (E, 32). This is said before Hume presents his argument about the possible bases of support for the UP. Now, if Hume doesn't present an inductive skepticism, but merely a forceful argument in cognitive psychology, as Garrett holds, exactly what would be the ignorance of which he would "make a kind of merit"?

A bit after Hume's consideration of possible sources of support for the UP, he says:

Let the course of things be allowed hitherto ever so regular; that alone, without some new argument or inference, proves not that, for the future, it will continue so. In vain do you pretend to have learned the secret nature of bodies from your past experience. Their secret nature, and consequently all their effects and influence, may change, without any change in their sensible qualities. This happens

sometimes, and with regard to some objects: Why may it not happen always, and with regard to all objects? What logic, what process of argument secures you against this supposition? My practice, you say, refutes my doubts. But you mistake the purport of my question. As an agent, I am quite satisfied in the point; but as a philosopher, who has some share of curiosity, I will not say scepticism, I want to learn the foundation of this inference. No reading, no enquiry has yet been able to remove my difficulty, or give me satisfaction in a matter of such importance. Can I do better than propose the difficulty to the public, even though, perhaps, I have small hopes of obtaining a solution? We shall at least, by this means, be sensible of our ignorance, if we do not augment our knowledge (E IV.II, 38).

Note that Hume asks what logic or argument secures us against the supposition that the course of nature may change. He then goes on to say that he wants to learn the "foundation" of the inference supporting the UP. It seems to me that Hume isn't using the language of causal explanation but rather that of justification. In fact, Hume generally uses the language of justification rather than causal explanation throughout his discussions of the "foundation" of inductive inference. He says that proposing "the difficulty" will at least make us "sensible of our ignorance" (E, 38). Again, where is the ignorance of which we are to become sensible if what has occurred is only the establishment of a principle of cognitive psychology? In that case it would seem that rather than revealing our ignorance we have augmented our knowledge and displayed our sagacity. So, both before and after Hume's "famous argument", appear expressions that seem to be expressions of inductive skepticism.

It is true that when Hume focuses more fully on skepticism in section XII of the Enquiry, he discusses not only the argument traditionally interpreted as an argument for inductive skepticism, but other arguments as well. But he never suggests that the earlier argument gains skeptical force from those other arguments. As I pointed out earlier, when Hume sets out the considerations that will give the skeptic reason for triumph it is his own view of causation and his own argument for inductive skepticism to which he refers. Moreover, he presents that argument on its own; he does not refer to the argument concerning an external world or suggest that the former argument gains skeptical force only in conjunction with the latter. Indeed, while the skeptic presses his point about our inductive inferences,

...he shows his force, or rather, indeed, his own and our weakness; and seems, for the time at least, to destroy all assurance and conviction (E, XII.II, 159).

With regard to Garrett's claim that Hume shouldn't regard his own argument as showing that our inductive inferences are rationally unjustified but instead as establishing only the claim - a claim purely of cognitive psychology - that our inductive inferences are not caused by the operation of reason: First, as I pointed out in response to Garrett's first objection, Hume generally uses the language of justification, rather than that of causation, throughout the relevant passages.



Garrett attaches great weight to Hume's use of "determination" and to his saying, in the Treatise version of the argument, that the UP cannot be derived by probable argument because the same principle "cannot be both cause and effect of another" (T I.III.VI, 90). But "determination," it seems to me, is ambiguous. If I ask, "What determined you to study philosophy?", I'm not asking for the efficient causes of your studying philosophy - such things as neuron firings, for example - but for your reasons for studying philosophy. And though Hume does use 'cause' in the passage quoted from the Treatise, it seems to me that that one use of (possibly) unambiguous causal language does not weigh equally with Hume's use of the language of justification.<sup>18</sup> Further, Hume does not express himself in that way in the Enquiry, which suggests at least that the search for causes wasn't his only object in searching for the foundation of our inductive inferences. In the Enquiry Hume argues explicitly that we cannot support the UP by probable arguments because that would involve "...going in a circle, and taking that for granted, which is the very point in question" (E IV.II, 35-6).

Second, Hume regards himself in part as refuting the views of the rationalists with regard to the foundation of our matter of fact inferences. But the rationalists' weren't primarily concerned with the causal basis of matter of fact inferences but with their security and justification. Further, to suppose that Hume is not considering the

justification of our beliefs is to suppose that despite Hume's concerns with issues of knowledge, belief, and method, his consideration of the basis of our only form of matter of fact inference, causal inference, takes place in isolation from those concerns.

Third, it is unclear how the claim that reason can't cause our belief in the UP follows from the claim that the UP can't be supported by probable or demonstrative reasoning. For the latter seems to be an epistemic fact - a fact about our lack of evidence or support for our belief in a certain proposition - not a causal one.

Fourth, if the UP, on which inductive inference depends, is neither intuitive nor supportable by any form of reasoning - which, Garrett admits, is Hume's position - then it would seem the UP is without justification. Garrett denies this. But the only plausible reason for denying this would be that one thinks Hume holds inductive inference to be justified in some other way or to be without need of justification.

The claim that Hume thinks inductive inference is justified in some other way is, I think, implausible. For what would that other way be? Inductive inferences can't be justified in the way that, perhaps, ordinary perceptual judgments can be - by appeal to the immediate data of consciousness - for those inferences are more than reports of such data. Perhaps inductive inference can be justified in terms of reliability? I think not. For justification of

inductive inference by appeal to its reliability would take as its data the experienced reliability of inductive inference. Yet projecting that experienced reliability into the future itself presupposes the legitimacy of inductive inference. Perhaps inductive inference can be justified in the way of the Scottish common-sense philosophers: our inferential faculties are the endowment of a benevolent Creator and hence are reliable and hence our inductive inferences are justified. It need hardly be noted, however, that Hume would have none of this.

Garrett himself thinks Hume holds inductive inference to be without need of justification. I find this implausible, for Hume's concern with justification, and in particular the justification of our causal/inductive inferences, is, I believe, evident throughout the Treatise and Enquiry.

## Notes to Chapter IV

1. Hereafter all references to Beauchamp and Rosenberg confined to Beachamp and Rosenberg [1981] unless otherwise noted.

2. Note that Argument II is in essence a piece of the no-argument argument that I, following Fogelin, attribute to Hume.

3. Nicholas Capaldi takes a similar view of Hume's talk about the limitations of reason. In David Hume: The Newtonian Philosopher (Capaldi [1975]), he writes,

Hume's continuing and unrelenting attack on "reason" is frequently to be viewed as an attack on the notion that we either need or can have self-certifying first principles (Capaldi [1975], 47).

4. The conception of reasonable inference at issue is in part deductivism, that is, the view that only deductively valid arguments lend any support to their conclusions. This is, of course, a view which Stove attributes to Hume and which Beauchamp and Rosenberg do not. Beauchamp and Rosenberg do, however, agree with Stove's view that Hume is an inductive fallibilist (that is, that he thinks no inductive argument is such that its premises confer a probability of 1 on its conclusion) and with his claim that "Hume's 'refutation of I.P. [inductive probabilism] is an entirely imaginary episode in the history of philosophy'," though their reasons for accepting those claims are at variance with Stove's (See Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 75).

5. Though Hume's use of "fallacious" is consistent with his comments being directed only at deductivism (that is, if we take 'fallacious' to mean invalid), his suggestion that our instincts may be "deceitful" suggests a broader target.

6. Beauchamp and Rosenberg write that, because rationalistic views were then flourishing,

...a broad use of the term "reason" was anathema to eighteenth-century empiricists, and Hume was understandable hesitant about employing the term in any way that might have rationalistic associations....It is thus easy to see why Hume restricts "reason" to a priori reason in those contexts where he directly discusses the nature of induction...(Beauchamp and Rosenberg, 42-3).

It seems to me that if Hume were carefully confining his use of terms such as 'reason', 'justification', and so on, in those contexts in which he discusses inductive inference, he would be careful about his use of 'argument' in such contexts as well.

7. Bruce Aune raises the same problem with a dash of humor. In Knowledge of the External World, Aune writes,

What course of reasoning is to be followed if no view of the world is satisfactory and experimental inferences (arguments from experience) are not rationally justifiable?

...[The skeptical] outcome is not troublesome merely because it seems to call our reasoning about matters of fact into question - the reasoning of, we believe, the wisest and most enlightened people. Worse than this, the outcome puts our reasoning about such matters on the same level with the reasoning of superstitious fanatics, astrologers, and, as Hume liked to say, ignorant and stupid barbarians who are ready to swallow even the grossest delusion. Having devoted much of his Treatise to criticizing the arguments of philosophical opponents, Hume would be in a very embarrassing position if he had to admit that his reasoning is really no better, no more acceptable, than the reasoning he criticized (Aune [1991], 81-2).

The problem has been pointed out by numerous other Hume commentators. See, for example, Flew [1961], 79-80, 90, 211-12, 246, 264-5, and 267-8, Passmore [1968], 10 and 42-64, and Noxon [1973], 180.

8. Of course, such reasons are not "justifying" reasons from the external, philosophical point of view.

9. Aune makes a similar point, expressed in terms of Hume's distinction between those principles of association and inference that are "permanent, irresistible, and universal,"

and those that are "changeable, weak, and irregular"  
According to Hume,

The former are the foundations of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life...(T I.IV.IV, 225).

Aune says,

The basic consideration is that, owing to the evident nature of the human mind, people invariably employ arguments from experience in everyday life, and they agree about their cogency in that domain. The principles they assume in these arguments...are "permanent, irresistible, and universal." No one but a philosopher ever disputes them, and philosophers actually employ them even if they dispute them (Aune [1991], 83).

Essentially the same point was made earlier by James Noxon. Noxon argues that Hume distinguishes first between those beliefs which are formed naturally and inevitably, such as the belief that the future will resemble the past, and those beliefs that are a result of "caprice and artifice." The former are distinguished from the latter by their greater stability, influence on behavior, and usefulness or even indispensibility in the affairs of life. Second, Hume distinguishes between those beliefs based on inferential practices which are or are a refinement of the practices necessarily used in everyday life and beliefs based on procedures inconsistent with the former practices. Noxon writes,

[Hume's] most distinctive doctrine...is that there can be no rational proof, no ultimate intellectual justification, of any of the beliefs which men hold, nor of their ways of acquiring them. Against this background of epistemological insecurity, however, decisions must be made, and, of course, they are constantly made without demur by men whose souls are untroubled by metaphysical scruples. But these decisions are not all equally wise, and some ground for distinguishing between them must be found. Hume found it in those elementary beliefs which men acquire unreflectively in the course of ordinary experience...(Noxon [1973], 182).

Noxon adds,

Methods of science develop out of techniques devised for solving the practical problems of everyday life, and they bear the marks of their ancestry....Although the rules of method to which empirical scientists subscribe acquire no absolute authority by virtue of their lineage, they are relatively immune to challenge by those who choose to work by other rules or, perhaps, not consistently by any rules at all (Noxon [1973], 184-5).

10. I will give further support for the claim that Hume's recognition of relative or internal justification does not support a nonskeptical interpretation of his works in chapters VI and VII.

11. Hume had a model for such rules in "Rules Of Reasoning In Philosophy," the first section of Book III of Newton's Mathematical Principles Of Natural Philosophy.

12. Nicholas Capaldi makes much the same point, though his overall interpretation of Hume differs from mine on the point of Hume's skepticism. Capaldi writes,

Hume asserts that the rules of scientific procedure are the same as our natural mode of thought when the latter is done self-consciously and consistently in order to avoid the carelessness of the imagination (Capaldi [1975], 42).

13. I am not claiming that Hume explicitly raises the external question about the justification of deductive inference. With the exception of T, I.IV.I and the possible exception of E XII.II, Hume's discussions suggest that he assumes that deductive inference is rationally justified period. Thus in Hume Terence Penelhum writes that Hume's view generally seems to be that in abstract disciplines such as mathematics "...certainty is possible and common" (Penelhum [1975], 24). According to Ruth Weintraub, Hume's distinctive contribution to the problem of induction was "...the supposition that the justification of induction is not analogous to that of deduction" and the accompanying assumption that deduction is epistemologically privileged (Weintraub [1995], 464).

14. In suggesting that Hume has in mind a "pragmatic" justification of induction I do not mean to imply that he had in mind anything like the recent pragmatic justifications of induction proposed by people such as Herbert Feigl and Hans Reichenbach. I am not suggesting that Hume had in mind anything as sophisticated or mathematically technical as, for example, what Reichenbach offers in "On the Justification of Induction."

15. In The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism (Stroud [1987]), Barry Stroud does a nice job of developing and defending the external point of view as a perspective from which much of our alleged knowledge can coherently be questioned. Especially useful in this respect are chapters I - III and chapter V.

16. Hereafter on all references to Garrett are to Garrett [1997] unless otherwise noted.

17. The argument concerning our belief in a mind-independent world of objects occurs in "Of scepticism with regard to the senses" (T, I.IV.II) and "Of the acedemical or sceptical philosophy" (E, XII.I).

18. I say that Hume uses possibly unambiguous causal language because a case can be made for the ambiguity of his use of 'cause'. Suppose I ask, "What caused you to study philosophy?" In spite of my use of 'cause' it seems that I'm asking for your reasons for studying philosophy. Also remember that in his "Advertisement" Hume referred to the Treatise as a "juvenile work," (some of) the reasoning and expression of which are corrected in the Enquiry. I noted above that in the Enquiry Hume discusses the impossibility of supporting the UP by probable arguments in terms of circular reasoning rather than in terms of the impossibility of one principle being both cause and effect of another. Perhaps this is no accident, but one of the corrections that Hume purposely made in rewriting Book I of the Treatise.



CHAPTER  
V

HUME'S SKEPTICISM WITH REGARD TO REASON AND THE SENSES

1.1

In "Of scepticism with regard to reason" (T, I.IV.I, 180-87), Hume argues that all knowledge "degenerates" into probability, and then argues that the probability of any probable judgment, when subjected to rational evaluation, will reduce ultimately to nothing. According to Hume, if we "wou'd closely pursue our reason" each judgment will be subjected to examination in its turn, and this series of examinations will in the end reduce the initial probability to nothing (T, 182-3).

An example will make Hume's point clearer: Suppose I work out an equation and I form the judgment that  $x > 3$ . This judgment, because it asserts an invariable relation, that is, "proportion in quantity or number," is an example of "knowledge", according to Hume's characterization of knowledge in "Of knowledge" (T, I.III.I, 69-73). Though the rules of algebra are "certain and infallible," we are subject to error in applying them. So, if I would proceed in accord with the dictates of reason, I must consider the probability that I have erred in working out the equation. Now, this being an empirical question about my tendency to make mistakes, there is always some probability that I have

in fact erred. Thus the probability that my initial judgment is correct is less than 1. So I estimate that there is, say, a .99 probability that my first judgment is correct. In this way, according to Hume, all knowledge reduces to probability.

Now, every probable judgment, Hume says, is also subject to evaluation. So now I must consider the probability that I have correctly estimated the probability that I erred in judging that  $x > 3$ . This new judgment, Hume says, reduces the initial probability further, by adding a new doubt. And so on, until in the end there occurs a "total extinction of belief and evidence" (T, 183).

## 1.2

There are obviously problems with Hume's argument. Suppose I judge that  $x > 3$  and I assign this proposition a probability of 1. If I then I make a higher-order judgment about my capacity to solve equations, this doesn't change the initial probability assignment. I may regard it as less than certain that I was correct in assigning a probability of 1 to the first judgment, but nevertheless the first assignment remains what it was. What Hume may be thinking is that if I engage in reflex evaluation my belief becomes conjunctive, that is, where 'J' is my initial judgment and 'J\*', 'J\*\*', and so on are my reflex judgments, I believe  $J \& J^* \& J^{**} \& J^{***}$  and so on. Then, since J\*, J\*\*, and so on consist of probable judgments, the conjunction has a

probability of  $P(J) \times P(J^*) \times P(J^{**}) \dots$ , by the restricted conjunction rule.<sup>1</sup> However, this rule doesn't apply here because it applies only to independent events, and my successive judgments of my capacity to judge correctly are not independent. Further, even if the rule did apply, the initial probability would not reduce to nothing; it would approach zero as a limit.

So what is Hume's point here? I think that perhaps what Hume has in mind is that when I make a judgment, part of my justification for that judgment is my belief in the reliability of my judgment-making faculties when properly exercised. So when I judge that  $J$ , part of my justification for believing that  $J$  is my belief that I can reliably make true judgments of the kind that  $J$  is and that I have correctly exercised my capacity to make such a judgment on this occasion. But part of my justification for this latter judgment is that I can reliably estimate my ability to make judgments such as  $J$  and that I have correctly done so on this occasion. Hume's point, I think, is simply that if we are purely rational, there is no point at which the process of justification comes to an end.<sup>2</sup>

Hume's target here seems to be at least in part the Cartesian notion of rationality, according to which each judgment should either be known by intuition or supported by justifying reasons. This is a misguided notion of rationality because even if I seem to intuit  $P$  with certainty, it is possible that I am wrong to think that  $P$  (I

don't really intuit it or my intuiting faculty is unreliable), and so I must, if I would be rational, justify my belief that I intuit P and that my intuition is reliable. But once the process of justification begins there is no rational end-point. The chain of justifications is endless, and hence ultimately there is no justification provided at all.

According to Hume, then, if our beliefs were based purely on reason, we would have no beliefs at all. But we do have beliefs. Therefore, our beliefs are not based purely on reason. Rather, "...belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures" (T, 183).

### 1.3

Now, putting aside for the moment the possibility that Hume's argument is directed solely against rationalistic conceptions of reason, Hume seems to have produced a serious skeptical argument in this section. It seems to be an argument of unrestricted scope, that is, it seems to be intended to show that all of our beliefs are ultimately unjustified and hence none of them can constitute knowledge. However, Hume also says that neither he nor anyone else was ever "sincerely and constantly" convinced of skepticism and that he has presented the arguments "of that fantastic sect" only in order to show that our causal inferences are the effect of custom, and that belief is a product of feeling

and instinct rather than of purely rational processes. Hume writes:

Shou'd it here be ask'd me, whether I sincerely assent to this argument, which I seem to take such pains to inculcate, and whether I be really one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in any thing possest of any measures of truth and falsehood; I shou'd reply, that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I, nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion. Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel; nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies, when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sunshine. Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this total scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavour'd by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind and render'd unavoidable.

My intention then in displaying so carefully the arguments of that fantastic sect, is only to make the reader sensible of the truth of my hypothesis, that all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures (T, 183).

This suggests that Hume himself is not a skeptic and that his argument is not intended to support skepticism but is indeed intended only to undermine a mistaken conception of reasonable belief, that is, the rationalist conception.

However, what Hume is responding to, I believe, is the question of whether he himself is a prescriptive or practicing skeptic. The total skepticism that it is pointless to refute is a skepticism that is contrary to the fact that nature has determined us to judge as well as to

breathe and feel. Such a skepticism is prescriptive, and one who followed its prescriptions would be a practicing skeptic. But following these prescriptions is not possible for us. So the prescriptive skeptic tells us to do what we cannot do and hence it is futile to bother refuting him. Nature refutes the prescriptive skeptic; we needn't bother. [As Hume puts the point in the first Enquiry, "Nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever" (E, V.I, 41).] But note that the fact that nature determines us to judge is consistent with the theoretical skepticism that Hume's argument seems to lead to.

When Hume responds to the objection that on his own system there should also be a total extinction of belief he does not say that we should not engage in reflex evaluations of the kind involved in his seemingly skeptical argument. Rather, he says that after the first few reflex judgments the action of the mind becomes forced and the reflex judgments influence the imagination less forcefully than do our "common judgments and opinions" (T, 185). This too suggests that the argument is not directed solely at a Cartesian conception of rationality. We continue to have beliefs not because reflex judgments are no longer demanded by reason or because our ordinary judgments have been justified and theoretical skepticism refuted, but merely because of the mind's inability to invest sufficient force in reflex judgments. It is merely a happy fact that "nature

breaks the force of all sceptical arguments in time..." (T, 187).

Of course, even though Hume's argument is not directed solely against the rationalist conception of belief, it is opposed to that conception, both for the reasons given above and because on that conception skepticism can be refuted and reason vindicated, while for Hume theoretical skepticism cannot be refuted. But Hume's opposition to rationalism shouldn't obscure the fact that the text of T, I.IV.I strongly suggests that for Hume, reason left to itself is self-defeating, not self-justifying or even self-correcting.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.1

In "Of scepticism with regard to the senses" (T, I.IV.II, 187-218) Hume considers why we suppose that the ordinary objects we perceive by means of our senses - objects such as tables and chairs - have an existence distinct from and independent of our minds. In Hume's discussion, the terms 'object' and 'perception' are both applied to the things of which we take ourselves to be aware in ordinary sense perception - tables, chairs, elephants, etc., that is, what Berkeley referred to as "sensible objects."

Hume's answer to the question of why we suppose sensible objects to have a distinct and independent existence is, in outline, this: According to Hume, the

sensible objects to which we attribute a continued existence are those which display a "constancy" of appearance and a coherence in their changes. For example, I consider the tree outside my window a continuously existent object even though the various perceptions which I regard as perceptions of the tree are interrupted and, as perceptions, numerically distinct. The different perceptions I regard as perceptions of the tree generally resemble one another closely, and where they do not they undergo changes in a regular manner. Thus I am led to feign a continuous object, the tree, to explain the resemblance and regularity among my perceptions:

Here then I am naturally led to regard the world, as something real and durable, and as preserving its existence, even when it is no longer present to my perception (T, 197).

Here then we have a propensity to feign the continu'd existence of all sensible objects; and as this propensity arises from some lively impressions of the memory, it bestows a vivacity on that fiction; or in other words, makes us believe the continu'd existence of body (T, 209).

## 2.2

Hume prefaces his discussion of our belief in an external world by noting that it is pointless to ask whether or not there is such a thing as "body", that is, independent and continued sensible objects, or as Hume also puts it, "external existences", for nature has not left this to our choice. Yet though we have no choice but to believe that body exists, we "cannot pretend by any arguments of



philosophy" to support or justify this belief, according to Hume (T, 187).

Hume begins his discussion by drawing a distinction between the question of why we attribute a continued existence to objects when they are not present to our senses and the question of why we attribute a distinct and independent existence to objects. The latter is the question of why we believe some objects to exist distinct from and independent of minds and their perceptions. Though these are distinct questions, they are, Hume says, "intimately connected," for objects have a continued existence if and only if they have a distinct and independent one. Hume seems to presuppose that if a person believes one side of this biconditional he will also believe the other, so that explaining how the belief in continued existence arises is sufficient for explaining how the belief in distinct and independent existence arises, and vice versa. In attempting to answer the question of what causes us to believe in the continued and independent existence of objects Hume will look at three faculties - the senses, reason, and the imagination - as possible sources of this belief.

### 2.3

Hume first considers the senses as a possible source of the belief in the continued and independent existence of objects. The senses, he says, cannot give rise to the notion of the continued existence of their objects after those

objects no longer appear to the senses, so if the senses produce this belief they must do so by producing a belief in the distinct and independent existence of objects.

In order for the senses to produce the belief in the distinct and independent existence of objects, they must either present sense impressions as representations or as the distinct and independent external objects themselves. According to Hume, the senses cannot present sense impressions as representations or images of something distinct, for "they convey to us nothing but a single perception, and never [by themselves] give us the least intimation of anything beyond" (T, 189). Nor can the senses present sense impressions as the distinct objects themselves. In order to do this the senses would themselves have to be able to distinguish between external objects and the self. But the self is not, Hume says, an object of the senses:

Now if the senses presented our impressions as external to, and independent of ourselves, both the objects and ourselves must be obvious to our senses, otherwise they cou'd not be compar'd by these faculties. The difficulty, then, is how far we are ourselves the objects of our senses.

'Tis certain there is no question in philosophy more abstruse than that concerning identity, and the nature of the uniting principle, which constitutes a person. So far from being able by our senses merely to determine this question, we must have recourse to the most profound metaphysics to give a satisfactory answer to it; and in common life 'tis evident these ideas of self and person are never very fix'd nor determinate. 'Tis absurd, therefore, to imagine the senses can ever distinguish betwixt ourselves and external objects (T, 189-90).

Hume turns from the question of whether it is possible for the senses to present our perceptions as distinct from ourselves, that is, as external to and independent of us, a question which he has answered in the negative, to the question of whether the senses do in fact deceive us in this way. Though the answer to the latter question must be negative given that the answer to the former was negative, Hume wants to show that even if it is possible for the senses to represent their objects as distinct from us, they do not in fact do so. For (1) the senses do not themselves represent their objects as external existences, and (2) the independence of the immediate objects of sense is not itself an object of the senses but must be determined from experience and observation, which in fact suggest the dependence of those objects on us. Hume concludes that "...the opinion of a continu'd and of a distinct existence never arises from the senses" (T, 192).

#### 2.4

Hume next considers reason as the source of our belief in an external world. He quickly rejects this alternative. In fact, he says, most people believe in the continued, distinct, and independent existence of objects without consulting reason or understanding any philosophical arguments in support of that belief. Philosophy informs us that all we are directly aware of is perceptions and that these are interrupted and dependent on minds, but "the

vulgar" nevertheless suppose that the objects of which they are immediately aware are the external objects themselves. This belief is unreasonable, so it must arise from a source other than reason. Further, reason is incapable of supporting the belief in continued, distinct, and independent objects even if we follow the philosophers in distinguishing the immediate objects of perception, perception contents, from the external objects which cause our perceptions and which they supposedly represent. So reason neither does nor can assure us of the continued and distinct existence of body.

## 2.5

Since neither reason nor the senses give rise to our belief in an external world, this belief "must be entirely owing to the IMAGINATION..." (T, 193). Hume says that because "all impressions are internal and perishing existences and appear as such," the notion of the continued and distinct existence of some of the objects of sense perception must arise from a concurrence of qualities peculiar to certain impressions with certain qualities of the imagination (T, 194).

Hume thinks that in fact the belief in the continued existence of objects comes first, and the opinion of their independence then follows. According to Hume, what makes us attribute a continued and hence a distinct existence to the objects of certain impressions is neither the

involuntariness nor the superior force and vivacity of the impressions. Our pains, pleasures, and passions are themselves involuntary and forceful, yet we don't ascribe continued and distinct existence to them. Rather, "...the opinion of the continu'd existence of body depends on the COHERENCE and CONSTANCY of certain impressions..." (T, 195). The objects to which we attribute a distinct and continued existence are those which are marked by a certain degree of constancy in their appearance and a coherence in their changes.

How do the qualities of coherence and constancy give rise to "so extraordinary an opinion" as that of the continued existence of body? With regard to coherence, Hume says that our observations would often contradict the beliefs in causal regularities we've come to hold on the basis of past experience unless we suppose that the objects of sense continue to exist and operate when not perceived. Hume gives the following example:

...I hear on a sudden a noise as of a door turning upon its hinges; and a little after see a porter, who advances towards me. This gives occasion to many new reflexions and reasonings. First, I never have observ'd, that this noise cou'd proceed from any thing but the motion of a door; and therefore conclude, that the present phaenomenon is a contradiction to all past experience, unless the door, which I remember on t'other side the chamber, be still in being. Again, I have always found, that a human body was possest of a quality, which I call gravity, and which hinders it from mounting in the air, as this porter must have done to arrive at my chamber, unless the stairs I remember be not annihilated by my absence. But this is not all. I receive a letter, which upon opening it I perceive by the hand-writing and subscription to have come from a friend, who says he is

two hundred leagues distant. 'Tis evident I can never account for this phaenomenon, conformable to my experience in other instances, without spreading out in my mind the whole sea and continent between us, and supposing the effects and continu'd existence of posts and ferries, according to my memory and observation. To consider these phaenomena of the post and letter in a certain light, they are contradictions to common experience, and may be regarded as objections to those maxims, which we form concerning the connexions of causes and effects. I am accustom'd to hear such a sound and see such an object in motion at the same time. I have not receiv'd in this particular instance both these perceptions. These observations are contrary, unless I suppose that the door still remains, and that it was open'd without my perceiving it... (T, 196-7).

According to Hume, at almost every moment we find ourselves compelled to suppose the continued existence of objects in order to "connect their past and present appearances" and to preserve the regularities that we have "found by experience to be suitable to their particular natures and circumstances" (T, 197). Thus I am "naturally led to regard the world, as something real and durable, and as preserving its existence, even when it is no longer present to my perception" (T, 197).

But this conclusion from the coherence of appearances to the continued existence of objects differs from our ordinary causal reasoning derived from custom based on past experience of regularities. For all that is present to the mind is its perceptions. [Hume clearly places weight on the theory of ideas here.] Hence any degree of regularity in these perceptions "can never be a foundation for us to infer a greater degree of regularity in some objects, which are not perceiv'd..." (T, 197). Why, then, do we make this

leap? Because of a feature of the imagination akin to inertia:

...the imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse (T, 198).

In other words, once the mind has observed a uniformity in the objects of sense experience, it renders that uniformity as complete as possible by the supposition of their continued existence.

Hume thinks, however, that the partial coherence of the objects of sense and the inertial character of the imagination will not by themselves explain our belief in the existence of external physical objects. We must also take into account the constancy displayed by certain sense objects. I will discuss the role that constancy plays in producing our belief in an external world in section 2.7. First, however, I will discuss Hume's view that "perceptions" are the immediate "objects" of our awareness.

## 2.6

In his discussion of the genesis of our vulgar belief in the continued and independent existence of sensible objects, Hume refers neutrally to sensible objects as "objects" and as "perceptions." Hume says that since the vulgar do not distinguish between sense perceptions and objects of sense perception, in accounting for the vulgar

belief in the continued and independent existence of sensible objects he will

...at first suppose; that there is only a single existence, which I shall call indifferently object or perception, according as it shall seem best to suit my purpose, understanding by both of them what any common man means by a hat, or shoe, or stone, or any other impression, convey'd to him by his senses (T, 202).

On Hume's theory of ideas all that we are immediately aware of are our own perceptions, and so sensible objects, insofar as we are immediately aware of them, must be perceptions. Though Hume expresses his theory of ideas by saying that all that we are immediately aware of are our own perceptions (and that hence sensible objects, insofar as we are immediately aware of them, must be perceptions), I think that Hume means that all that we are immediately aware of are perception contents. Hume generally uses 'perception' to refer to the content of perception, rather than to the mental act of perceiving or the psychological vehicle (whatever that might be) that somehow conveys a content before the mind.

Why do I say that it is the content of the perception that Hume generally refers to simply as a "perception"? In part because of Hume's stress on limitations in the ideas we can possess and his polemical use, in attacking various philosophical concepts and theories, of the principle that our ideas are copies of impressions. Hume's genetic account of our ideas is much more concerned with the what with which



we can think than with how we come to have the what. Hume's conceptual attacks on, for example, the notion of a propertyless substance and the notion of a unified self are based on his beliefs about limitations in content. Hume's beliefs about such limitations also drive his attempts to explain various important ideas, such as the idea of causal necessity, in terms of the limited resources of perception. It is because we are immediately aware of perception contents that we can, according to Hume, never conceive anything specifically different from perceptions - not because we are limited to thinking of mental entities or acts as such, but because all of the content with which we think comes from perception contents. In other words, all of the (simple) qualities we can conceive a thing as having must be qualities we have at some point perceived.

Hume is concerned with the genesis of our ideas almost entirely insofar as that genesis has a bearing on what ideas we can possess. As soon as Hume thinks that the question of genesis no longer has such a bearing, he leaves off pursuing it, with the observation that "The examination of our sensations belongs more to anatomists and natural philosophers than to moral..." (T, I.I.II, 8).

But setting aside the question of whether Hume generally uses 'perception' to refer to perception content, if Hume, in the context of the argument of T, I.IV.II, really meant to speak of perceptions as mental acts of perceiving or as vehicles of content, then the claim that

our perceptions of what we ordinarily take to be continuing objects are in fact numerically distinct would be rather unsurprising. Obviously any two different acts of perceiving or any two psychological vehicles of content are just that - two. The observation that two such acts or vehicles are not identical need not lead to worries about the continued and independent existence of physical objects. For perhaps two different acts of perceiving can be directed upon the same object even though they are two acts, just as two different acts of touching can both be directed upon the same object - my coffee mug, say. And two different vehicles might convey contents that are related to a single enduring object. Those contents, though carried by numerically distinct vehicles and themselves numerically distinct, might nevertheless bear features that allow one to recognize that one is perceiving a single enduring object. Further, the mere fact that the vehicles are numerically different doesn't even entail that their contents are. I, one and the same human being, have ridden in buses, trains, elevators, automobiles, and boats, just to mention a few of the vehicles that have carried me as content. So, merely observing that perceptions as acts or vehicles are distinct would be rather jejune. It is because Hume believes that in perceiving sensible objects we are in fact immediately aware of numerically distinct mental contents - contents which themselves bear no features that demonstrate their connection with the same enduring object - that the problem of the external world arises for him.

There is, however, a problem with what I've just said about Hume's focus on the content of sense perceptions: Hume does seem to think that one and the same intentional content can be present to the mind in different ways. For according to Hume the difference between an idea believed and an idea merely entertained is simply that an idea believed feels different than an idea merely entertained.<sup>4</sup>

It is not clear, however, that in Hume's view identity of content holds for the contents of sense perceptions. According to Hume's theory of ideas, ideas are copies of impressions. So, two ideas that differ as mental acts or vehicles may nevertheless be copies of a single impression content and thereby have the same content. But the contents of sense perceptions are not copies and hence cannot be identical by virtue of being copies of the same thing. If Hume thinks identical contents can be present in different perceptions why does he speak only of the similarity of perceptions and why does the problem of the external world arise for him? Why should the fact that I only intermittently perceive certain contents be worrisome if I believe on reflection that the content I perceive at various times is a single identical thing? Finally, even if Hume is committed to the view that two different sense perceptions can have literally the same content, what he says about the problem of the external world seems to commit him to the view that even qualitatively identical sense contents are nevertheless different and hence we are not in sense aware

of independent, continuous objects. If Hume does commit himself to both the view that two different sense perceptions can have literally the same content and the view that even qualitatively identical sense contents are nevertheless different, then the problem lies in Hume's lack of consistency rather than in my interpretation of him.

Now, having made the point that by "perception" Hume usually means to refer to perception content, in the interests of simplicity I will mainly use Hume's own word, 'perception', to refer to perception contents, except where I think the more accurate phrase will make things clearer.

## 2.7

In sum, Hume's explanation of the vulgar belief is this: We find a constancy in certain perceptions, for example, in our impressions of the sun. This constancy consists in the fact that the perceptions we regard as perceptions of the sun closely resemble one another. This constancy leads us to consider the interrupted perceptions as "individually the same", that is, identical (T, 199). Yet their interruption also leads us to regard the resembling perceptions as different. In order to remove this contradiction, Hume says, we remove the interruption "by supposing that these interrupted perceptions are connected by a real existence, of which we are insensible" (T, 199). This supposition acquires force and vivacity from the memory of the preceding similar impressions and the consequent

propensity we have to consider them identical. Hence it becomes a belief.

According to Hume, four features of this account require explanation: (1) the principle of identity, (2) the reason the resemblance of interrupted perceptions induces us to attribute an identity to them, (3) the propensity this "illusion" of identity gives to unite the interrupted perceptions by the supposition of a continued existence, and (4) the force and vivacity of the conception that results from the propensity.

(1) What is the notion of identity involved in our belief in the continued and independent existence of sensible objects? Identity, Hume says, is the invariableness and uninterruptedness of an object through time:

We cannot, in any propriety of speech, say, that an object is the same with itself, unless we mean, that the object existent at one time is the same with itself existent at another....

Thus the principle of individuation is nothing but the invariableness and uninterruptedness of any object, thro' a suppos'd variation of time... (T, 201).

(2) How does the resemblance or "constancy" we find among our perceptions lead us to judge them identical? The constancy of our perceptions makes us consider them identical in spite of their being interrupted because we confuse (i) the action of the mind when it contemplates a single, unchanging, uninterrupted object with (ii) the

action of the mind when it considers a number of numerically different but resembling objects. We confuse these actions of the mind due to their similarity to one another. We confuse the objects of these different acts as well, for whatever objects put the mind in similar dispositions are apt to be mistaken for one another. Hume writes:

We find by experience, that there is such a constancy in almost all the impressions of the senses, that their interruption produces no alteration on them, and hinders them not from returning the same in appearance and in situation as at their first existence. I survey the furniture of my chamber; I shut my eyes, and afterwards open them; and find the new perceptions to resemble perfectly those, which formerly struck my senses. This resemblance is observ'd in a thousand instances, and naturally connects together our ideas of these interrupted perceptions by the strongest relation, and conveys the mind by an easy transition from one to another. An easy transition or passage of the imagination, along the ideas of these different and interrupted perceptions, is almost the same disposition of mind with that in which we consider one constant and uninterrupted perception. 'Tis therefore very natural for us to mistake the one for the other (T, 204).

(3) How does the attribution of identity to our resembling but interrupted perceptions lead us to the supposition of continued and independent objects? According to Hume, the natural or vulgar view is that the perception or image is the external body. Hume's point is simply that our natural view is that we are directly aware of external objects themselves; we don't naturally hold the philosophical "double existence theory," that is, the theory of indirect realism. On the vulgar view the theoretical distinction between perception and external object is not

explicitly drawn; we naturally consider only sensible objects. Hence Hume must consider how we come to attribute continued existence to these objects in spite of their interruptedness.

Again, in our vulgar state we regard perception and object as one, that is, we only consider sensible objects. Now, certain perceptions display a constancy or resemblance which makes us consider them identical. Yet their interruptedness leads us to deny that they are identical. This conflict gives us an uneasiness which we overcome by "feigning" a continued being (which in Hume's account of the vulgar belief is the perception-content itself) to fill up the gaps which otherwise militate against the ascription of identity to resembling but undeniably interrupted perceptions. Hume writes:

The smooth passage of the imagination along the ideas of the resembling perceptions makes us ascribe to them a perfect identity. The interrupted manner of their appearance makes us consider them as so many resembling, but still distinct beings, which appear after certain intervals. The perplexity arising from this contradiction produces a propension to unite these broken appearances by the fiction of a continu'd existence...(T, 205).

(4) Why do we believe in the feigned continued object? Because the propensity to feign the continued existence of "all sensible objects" arises from "lively impressions of the memory" and can thus transfer enough force and vivacity to the idea of a continued object to render that idea a belief. Hume writes:

Our memory presents us with a vast number of instances of perceptions perfectly resembling each other, that return at different distances of time, and after considerable interruptions. This resemblance gives us a propension to consider these interrupted perceptions as the same; and also a propension to connect them by a continu'd existence, in order to justify this identity, and avoid the contradiction, in which the interrupted appearance of these perceptions seems necessarily to involve us. Here then we have a propensity to feign the continu'd existence of all sensible objects; and as this propensity arises from some lively impressions of the memory, it bestows a vivacity on that fiction; or in other words, makes us believe the continu'd existence of body (T, 208-9).

## 2.8

So, according to Hume we are quite naturally led to attribute a continued existence to "...sensible objects or perceptions which we find to resemble each other..." (T, 210). Yet "a very little reflection and philosophy is sufficient to make us perceive the fallacy of that opinion" (T, 210). By a propensity of the imagination we come to believe in the continued existence of the objects of perception. But objects have a continued existence if and only if they have an independent existence. Hume says, however, that "the doctrine of the independent existence of our sensible perceptions is contrary to the plainest experience" (T, 210). For by a variety of simple experiments we come to see that the sensible objects of which we are aware are dependent for their existence and qualities on factors such as our constitution and situation. So the objects of sense perception have neither an independent nor



a continuous existence. Our vulgar or ordinary belief in the continued and distinct existence of sensible objects is a "fiction," that is, the fiction of continued existence, built on a "falsehood," that is, the false belief in the identity of resembling but in fact distinct perceptions (T, 209).

Philosophers, recognizing the above reasoning, develop the "double existence" theory: the theory that there are objects that are not themselves perceptions but which cause our perceptions and are represented by (some of) them. These supposed objects are thought to exist continuously and independently, though our perceptions of them are interrupted and dependent. The philosophical theory is the theory of indirect realism. John Locke, for example, expresses the basic points of this theory in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Locke writes,

Our Senses, conversant about particular sensible Objects, do convey into the Mind, several distinct Perceptions of things, according to those various ways, wherein those Objects do affect them...(Locke [1975], 105).

By real Ideas, I mean such as have a Foundation in Nature; such as have a Conformity with the real Being, and Existence of Things, or with their Archetypes....Not that they are all of them the Images or Representations of what does exist....For these several Appearances, being designed to be the Marks, whereby we are to know, and distinguish Things, which we have to do with; our Ideas do as well serve us to that purpose, and are as real distinguishing Characters, whether they be only constant Effects, or else exact Resemblances of something in the things themselves: the reality lying in that steady correspondence, they have

with the distinct Constitutions of real Beings (Locke [1975], 372-3).

When-ever the Mind refers any of its Ideas to any thing extraneous to them, they are then capable to be called true or false. Because the Mind in such a reference, makes a tacit Supposition of their Conformity to that Thing...(Locke [1975], 385).

Unfortunately, Hume says, the philosophical theory suffers from the weaknesses of the vulgar view and others besides. According to Hume, there are no principles of reason or imagination which lead us directly to this theory; we arrive at the double existence theory only by first accepting the vulgar view. Moreover, the former gets its influence from the latter.

Why is the double existence theory not supported by reason? The only things of the existence of which we are immediately aware, Hume holds, are perceptions. The only means we have for concluding that something exists of which we are not immediately aware (by sense or memory) is causal reasoning. But causal reasoning is based on experience of regular conjunction. Since the only things ever present to the mind are perceptions, we can only observe constant conjunctions between perceptions, not between perceptions and extra-mental objects. Thus, Hume says, "`tis impossible, therefore, that from the existence or any of the qualities of the former, we can ever form any conclusion concerning the existence of the latter..." (T, 212). We cannot support the supposition that external objects exist by causal

reasoning; a fortiori, we cannot support the supposition that there are external objects that resemble and cause our perceptions by causal reasoning.

This seems strong support for a skeptical interpretation of Hume. Causation is constant conjunction. We maintain the supposition of particular such conjunctions only by presupposing the external world. But we can't prove that such a world exists by causal or any other reasoning. So our belief in causal connections, that is, invariable conjunctions, can't support our belief in the external world, since in the relevant cases it presupposes it. Nor can our belief in the external world support our belief in causal connections, since the only way of arguing to the existence of an external world is by using causal inference, which in this case is not only circular but impossible, for we never experience the objects themselves in conjunction with our perceptions.

The double existence theory is also not supported by the imagination, according to Hume. What exactly Hume means by this is not fully clear. I take him to mean that the belief in the double existence theory is not one of those beliefs that we naturally and inevitably form. It is important for Hume's skepticism that the theory of double existence isn't supported by the imagination, for this shows that it is not just Cartesian reason that comes up short.

How and why do we come to formulate and hold the double existence theory? What happens is this: The initial conflict

between our attribution of identity to resembling perceptions and our recognition of their interruptedness is overcome on the vulgar level by the view that perceptions have a continuous existence. On reflection, however, we see that perceptions can have a continuous existence only if they have an independent existence, which they clearly do not. Hence there is a second conflict, a conflict between what we naturally believe (the continued existence of our perceptions) and what on philosophical reflection we see to be true. To set ourselves at ease we contrive the double existence theory, which seems to accommodate the beliefs arising from both imagination and reason. We regard our resembling perceptions as interrupted and dependent and the objects as continuous and independent. Hume writes:

The imagination tells us, that our resembling perceptions have a continu'd and uninterrupted existence, and are not annihilated by their absence. Reflection tells us, that even our resembling perceptions are interrupted in their existence, and different from each other. The contradiction betwixt these opinions we elude by a new fiction, which is conformable to the hypotheses both of reflection and fancy, by ascribing these contrary qualities to different existences; the interruption to perceptions, and the continuance to objects (T, 215).

But again, the double existence theory is not supported by reason. It is in principle rationally unjustifiable. Even if the notion of justification is expanded to include beliefs resulting from the regular operations of the imagination, the double existence theory remains

unjustified. Further, so does the vulgar belief, for by ordinary empirical reasoning we can see that our perceptions are dependent and hence that the vulgar belief is false.

## 2.9

Hume ends the section by saying that though he initially thought we should trust implicitly in our senses he is at this point inclined to repose no faith in his senses or imagination rather than place full trust in them. He tells us that he

...cannot conceive how such trivial qualities of the fancy, conducted by such false suppositions, can ever lead to any solid and rational system. They are the coherence and constancy of our perceptions, which produce the opinion of their continu'd existence; tho' these qualities have no perceivable connection with such an existence (T, 217).

The philosophical system is not only unjustified but, Hume adds, it both denies and asserts the vulgar position. The philosophical system arises in part from a recognition of the interruptedness and dependency of our sense perceptions. But the philosophical system arbitrarily supposes a second set of perceptions as the uninterrupted and independent objects, for we can distinctly conceive objects only insofar as they are "the same with" perceptions:

Philosophers deny our resembling perceptions to be identically the same, and uninterrupted; and yet have so great a propensity to believe them such, that they arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions, to which they attribute these qualities. I say, a new set of perceptions: For we may well suppose in general, but 'tis impossible for

us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions (T, 218).

Hume asks, "What then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falsehood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief we repose in them?" (T, 218). The skeptical doubt, Hume says, can never be radically cured, and this doubt "arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection" on reason and the senses: "'Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or senses and we but expose them farther when we endeavor to justify them in that manner" (T, 218). According to Hume, the only remedy for skepticism, the remedy that he himself relies on, is "carelessness and in-attention" (T, 218).

Now, it is possible that Hume thinks that our senses and reason do provide the knowledge which the skeptic denies they do and that it is the attempt to justify them that we must avoid. But what he actually says strongly suggests otherwise. Our natural belief in the external world as a world of continued and independent perceptions is clearly false. The philosophical supposition of a world of continued and independent objects of which our perceptions are representations is in principle unjustifiable. [It seems that the double existence theory is either without content (if it purports to posit something essentially different from perceptions) or else it's absurd (for insofar as it

posits objects which are essentially the same as perceptions it both denies and affirms the vulgar theory).]

I think that belief in the existence of an external world is a prime example of a belief that for Hume is both unjustifiable and, for any extended period, unavoidable. It is thus an example of Hume's implicit recognition, in the Treatise, of the theoretical skepticism v. prescriptive skepticism distinction. Note that Hume is not denying the existence of an unobserved external world. Hume does not make a knowledge claim with regard to the existence or non-existence of an external, material world. Such a claim would, as Galen Strawson points out, be at odds with Hume's theoretical skepticism.<sup>5</sup> Hume's skeptical claims about what we can know must not be mistaken for nonskeptical claims about what exists. Hume makes many important claims of the former kind but few claims of the latter kind. It also seems that Hume is not limiting the inability to justify this belief to rationalist approaches to justification. There is no sign of such limitation in these passages.

Hume says that conflicting beliefs arise from the imagination and that reason and the imagination conflict. It is significant that the natural workings of the imagination lead to a conflict of beliefs which is overcome only as a result of "trivial qualities of the fancy" operating in conjunction with false suppositions. This suggests that imagination is not a source of justification and is not itself to be trusted implicitly.

The upshot is that Hume presents a powerful theoretical skepticism with regard to all beliefs and knowledge claims the truth of which requires that sensible objects have a continued and independent existence or that there exist some other independent material objects of which the sensible objects we directly apprehend are the effects and representations. This, I take it, qualifies as a serious theoretical skepticism with regard to knowledge of the external world.

3

Unfortunately, a serious interpretive problem exists with regard to my characterization of Hume's views in T, I.IV.II, a problem which is directly relevant to the issue of Hume's skepticism. I have presented Hume as a theoretical rather than a conceptual skeptic with regard to our beliefs about the external world. But this requires that he hold, with regard to a certain class of statements, that belief in those statements is rationally unjustified (and hence cannot constitute knowledge). But this seems to require that those statements at least be meaningful. To be a theoretical skeptic with regard to a matter of fact statement  $S$  is to hold that  $S$  may be true and  $S$  may be false but we cannot be rationally justified in believing or asserting  $S$  or in believing or asserting  $\sim S$ . But if  $S$  can be true or false then  $S$  must be meaningful. So, if statements about the existence of external material objects are meaningless, then



they cannot be either true or false. Hence they cannot be an appropriate target of theoretical skepticism.

In T, I.IV.II Hume says that the "vulgar"

...confound perceptions and objects, and attribute a distinct continu'd existence to the very things they feel or see (T, 193).

Hume also says that ordinary people do not distinguish, as the philosophers do, "betwixt the objects and perceptions of the senses" (T, 202), but instead "suppose their perceptions to be their only objects" (T, 205) and "suppose that the very being, which is intimately present to the mind, is the real body or material existence" (T, 206).

What Hume means is that the vulgar believe that they are, in perception, immediately aware of external objects as they are in themselves. So the vulgar believe that the immediate objects of perception are continued and independent. It is this that philosophy shows to be false - according to the philosophers, the immediate objects of perception, sensible objects, are mental contents or intentional objects, which are dependent for their existence and nature on the minds that perceive them.

But when we compare experiments, and reason a little upon them, we quickly perceive, that the doctrine of the independent existence of our sensible perceptions is contrary to the plainest experience (T, 210).

Now, if Hume holds that the immediate objects of perception are mental contents and that these cannot exist

independently of us, then it would seem that he is not skeptical about the issue - for he holds that we can know that the immediate objects of perception do not constitute an "external world".

According to Hume, the philosophers hold an alternative theory, the theory of "double existence". According to the "double existence theory", though the immediate objects of perception are mental contents, these contents are caused by and (at least in some of their features) represent independent objects having only primary qualities. Since objects having only primary qualities are inconceivable, the claim that such objects exist is conceptually empty. [See "Of the modern philosophy," T, I.IV.IV, 227-231.] So here too there is no theoretical skepticism, though there is a conceptual skepticism.

I think, however, that in "Of Scepticism with regard to the senses" Hume actually has in mind at least one other alternative theory, a theory that the philosophers inadvertently share with the vulgar. [He also considers a further candidate for continued and independent object in "Of the antient philosophy", T, I.IV.III, 219-25.]

To begin with the ordinary person's view: I said that Hume thinks the ordinary person draws no distinction between perception and object, but simply regards himself as being, in sense perception, immediately aware of independent objects as they are in themselves. But that is not a fully accurate statement of Hume's view. It can't be fully

accurate because Hume says things that show that his view is more complicated and more true to our ordinary way of thinking than my initial statement of it suggested.

In T, I.IV.II, discussing the distinction between primary, secondary, and tertiary qualities, Hume says, "Both philosophers and the vulgar...esteem the third [that is, tertiary qualities] to be merely perceptions; and consequently interrupted and dependent beings" (T, 192). This clearly suggests that the vulgar draw some distinction between objective and purely subjective elements in sense perception. Hume also says, in dismissing philosophical arguments as the source of our ordinary belief in an external world, that it is not by these arguments that ordinary people "are induc'd to attribute objects to some impressions, and deny them to others" (T, 193).

I believe that such statements as those quoted in the last paragraph show that Hume does allow the ordinary person a more sophisticated view than some of his other statements suggest. Hume's view is not that the ordinary person thinks that in sense perception he is immediately aware of independent objects as they are in themselves period. The ordinary person recognizes, of course, that he sometimes dreams, that he sees things from different perspectives as having properties that are not consistent with one another, that he sometimes drinks too much (or, perhaps, too little) and sees pink elephants that don't really exist, and so on. Hume could be charged with grossly overestimating the

ordinary person's naiveté and credulity if he didn't allow that we recognize that sometimes things are not as we perceive them, and I think it unlikely that Hume would be so unaware of how we ordinarily think.

I believe that the view that Hume attributes to the vulgar is the view that in at least some cases of sense perception - cases of ordinary, non-hallucinatory, perception - we are immediately aware of independent objects as they are in themselves. And of course this is denied by those philosophers who hold the double existence theory, for according to that theory we are never immediately aware of independent objects in this way. The double existence theory, insofar as it denies that we are ever immediately aware of independent objects, is not the contrary but rather the contradictory of the vulgar view.

Now, according to Hume the immediate objects of perception are mental contents (what he calls "perceptions") which in fact are mind-dependent. The vulgar do not believe that perceptions so conceptualized, possess an independent existence. This would be an absurd view. Rather, the vulgar believe of these immediate objects of perception, which are in fact dependent and interrupted, that they continue to exist when not perceived. And it can be shown that this is in fact false. The objects of which we are immediately aware are dependent on us for their existence. The vulgar, however, can also be said to believe that there are objects which have the kinds of properties - colors, smells, etc. -

of which we are immediately aware in perception and that these objects have a continued and independent existence. This belief is both meaningful (the idea of such an object has impression-content, unlike, say, the idea of a propertyless substance) and such that we cannot know it to be true or false (that there are such objects is a matter of fact to which we have no access, immediate or inferential). We can call this belief the "vulgar theory." It is this belief or theory, which I think we ordinarily do hold, that is the appropriate object of Hume's theoretical skepticism.

What about the philosophical double existence theory? This theory, if taken as including the view that the objects which cause our perceptions are bare substances or substances having only primary qualities, lacks determinate content and so is the appropriate object of Hume's conceptual skepticism. However, Hume seems to think that this theory often is held in a form in which it is virtually identical with the vulgar theory I described above. Why do I say this? For one thing, at the end of the section, Hume writes:

Philosophers deny our resembling perceptions to be identically the same, and uninterrupted; and yet have so great a propensity to believe them such, that they arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions, to which they attribute these qualities. I say, a new set of perceptions: For we may well suppose in general, but 'tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions (T, 218). [Also see "Of the idea of existence and of external existence", T, I.II.VI, 66-68.]

If the theory of the philosophers is to have any content, that content must come ultimately from perceptions, thus if they believe in the existence of independent objects, then insofar as that belief has determinate content those objects must have the kinds of qualities of which we are aware in perception. But the view that there are independent objects having the kinds of qualities of which we are immediately aware in perception is the "theory" of the vulgar.

Why should we think Hume does allow determinate content to the double existence theory? Well, besides his words quoted above, to the effect that philosophers invent a new set of perceptions to play the role of independent and continued objects, there is the fact that he presents a skeptical argument to show that we cannot infer the existence of independent objects from our perceptions because (i) the existence of such objects is a question of fact, and (ii) we cannot causally infer that such unobserved objects exist because we never experience the conjunctions of independent objects with perceptions necessary for causal inference to get going. Now, if Hume thinks that the theory of double existence is, in all its forms, meaningless, why would he say that the existence of its objects is a question of fact and why would he bother producing an argument to show that we cannot have knowledge of the existence of such objects?

So, I think there are really three main views Hume is considering in "Of scepticism with regard to the senses" and that he has a different attitude toward each:

(i) What Hume considers false is the view that in sense perception we are immediately aware of independent objects as they are in themselves.

(ii) What Hume considers unintelligible and what is hence the object of conceptual skepticism, is the view that there are objects that are specifically different from the immediate objects of perception (and which cause them).

(iii) What is the object of theoretical skepticism is the view that there are mind-independent objects specifically like the immediate objects of perception (and which cause them). This is the vulgar theory, which is also inadvertently held by the philosophers.

4

There is, however, still a problem. I have said that Hume would be attributing an absurd view to the vulgar if he did attribute to them the view that mental contents can exist independent of a mind. But does not Hume himself say that a perception can exist apart from any mind? There are several passages in which Hume suggests this, but he explicitly states this possibility in T, I.IV.II itself:

...we may observe, that what we call a mind, is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united

together by certain relations, and suppos'd, tho' falsely, to be endow'd with a perfect simplicity and identity. Now as every perception is distinguishable from another, and may be consider'd as separately existent; it evidently follows, that there is no absurdity in separating any particular perception from the mind; that is, in breaking off all its relations, with that connected mass of perceptions, which constitutes a thinking being (T, 207).

But the ordinary person can think coherently of sensible objects as existing independently of any mind just insofar as he conceives physical external objects as the immediate objects of perception, that is, just insofar as he holds the mistaken theory of direct realism. The ordinary person, insofar as he considers his perceptions as non veridical, as hallucinations or dreams, say, cannot coherently believe that those perceptions can exist independently, for in distinguishing dreams, etc., from ordinary cases of perception we ordinarily conceptualize dream-objects as mind-dependent in contrast to the supposedly mind-independent objects of ordinary sense perception. It is Hume himself, employing the theory of ideas, who can conceive of dream-objects existing independently of any mind, for Hume sees that in all cases of perception we are immediately acquainted with a mental content. Hume as a philosopher can assume an ontologically neutral stance with respect to sensible objects that the ordinary person does not. Hume announces his assumption of the neutral stance when he says that he will refer to a sensible object indifferently as either an "object or



perception", depending on which best suits the purpose of explaining our ordinary belief in continued and independent objects (T, 202).

Still, Hume is explaining how the vulgar themselves come to believe in continued and independent existence. So shouldn't his claims about the independence of perceptions be ascribed to the ordinary person? I think not. The possibility Hume is considering when he talks about the distinguishability and separability of perceptions is logical/conceptual possibility. It is logically/conceptually possible that the content of a perception exist apart from any mind. Because the content of a perception is logically/conceptually independent of a mind it is possible for the ordinary person to conceive that content independently of conceiving a mind. But in fact, Hume says, we find that such contents, as far as we can know, are dependent on our minds: "...our conclusions from experience are far from being favourable to the doctrine of the independency of our perceptions" (T, 191). As Hume explicitly (over) states the point, an "infinite number of...experiments" show that "...our sensible perceptions are not possess of any distinct or independent existence" (T, 211). Or, as he puts it somewhat more moderately,

But when we compare experiments, and reason a little upon them we quickly perceive, that the doctrine of the independent existence of our sensible perceptions is contrary to the plainest experience (T, 210).

So, the logical/conceptual independence of perception contents allows the ordinary person to conceive the actual independence of such a content and to believe, mistakenly, in that actual independence.

Consider the following:

X believes that:

(B): Perception p is mind-dependent and mind-independent.

(B) would be an absurd belief, and insofar as the ordinary person considers certain of his perceptions mind-dependent he doesn't also believe that they are mind-independent. But consider:

X believes that:

(B\*): Perception p is mind independent.

It is possible for the ordinary person to hold (B\*) without absurdity even when p is in fact mind-dependent. For it might be that he simply does not recognize p's mind-dependence. The ordinary person's belief that mind-dependent perceptions are mind-independent must, in other words, be interpreted de re, not de dicto. While it is often true that there is some mind-dependent perception content such that its perceiver believes it to be mind-independent, it seems it would seldom if ever be true that a perceiver believes

that there is some mind-dependent perception content that is mind-independent.

The fact that the logical/conceptual independence of perception contents allows the ordinary person to conceive the actual independence of such a content and to believe, mistakenly, in its actual independence, does not mean that the ordinary person explicitly grasps the logical/conceptual possibility of the content existing by itself, though it is that logical/conceptual possibility that allows him to mistakenly believe in the actual independence of the immediate objects of perception, that is, sensible objects. So neither an absurd belief such as B nor the sophisticated philosophical belief in the logical/conceptual independence of perception contents need be ascribed to the vulgar.

I said that the ordinary person's belief that mind-dependent perceptions are mind-independent must be interpreted *de re*, not *de dicto*. One might object that reading a *de re/de dicto* distinction into Hume is not only anachronistic but misleading, given Hume's theories of idea formation and belief. For on Hume's view belief is vivid conception rather than an "attitude" toward a proposition. Hence, one might say, there is no room for the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* belief. For me to have a belief of some in fact mind-dependent mental content that it is mind-independent would be for me to vividly conceive (that is, have a vivid idea of) that content as mind-independent. So I would have to be able to represent its mind-

independence, which is something that Hume's theory of idea formation would seem to preclude. For what feature of the idea of what is in fact a mental content could represent mind-independence?

I think, however, that (i) to make sense of what Hume says in T, I.IV.II we must employ the de re/de dicto distinction even at the risk of anachronism, and (ii) we can employ that distinction in a way that fits with Hume's theory. Consider again an ordinary person's belief that a certain sensible object has an independent existence. For Hume, that belief consists in a vivid conception of that object (a conception that in addition is involuntary and may have behavioral consequences). That object is in fact mind-dependent. But the ordinary person's belief that it is mind-independent consists in a vivid conception of that object that does not include a conception of a mind or perceiver. This is the de re belief. No extra element is required to represent mind-independence. Recall that I said the ordinary person's belief should be interpreted de re, not de dicto. I did not say that there had to be a de dicto interpretation of the belief. On Hume's theory, there could be no de dicto version of such a belief. For a de dicto version of the belief in mind-independent sensible objects would be contradictory and hence not a possible vivid conception because not a possible conception at all.

Still, one might say, in order for me to have a belief in the existence of an object X independent of something Y

it is not sufficient that I have a vivid conception of X that does not include a conception of Y. That is, I think, true. But that points to a problem with Hume's theory of belief itself rather than my interpretation of T, I.IV.II. Generally, Hume's official theory of belief lacks a recognition and account of what is sometimes called the "logical structure" of thought. For example, the belief that an apple exists at a specific time differs from the simple conception of an apple in ways other than its phenomenological "force", but Hume's official theory of belief doesn't adequately account for or even explicitly recognize those differences.<sup>6</sup> Again, however, this is a problem with Hume's theory of belief that any interpretation must recognize.

## Notes To Chapter V

1. The Restricted Conjunction Rule is a rule of the probability calculus. It states:

RCR: Where P and Q are independent,  $\text{Prob}(P\&Q) = \text{Prob}(P) \times \text{Prob}(Q)$

2. Fogelin suggests this point in saying that if we reject Hume's mistaken claim that all probabilities ultimately reduce to nothing, Hume's argument becomes simply a version of an ancient skeptical regress argument. See Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature (Fogelin [1985]), 19-20.

3. Fogelin makes the same point. He writes,

Hume is thus uncompromising in saying that understanding - when it acts alone - is thoroughly self-destructive. Understanding is not self-correcting (Fogelin [1985], 21.).

Fogelin notes that Hume's explanation of how we nevertheless have beliefs refers to the "balancing of causal factors" (p.21), not to any solution to the skeptical problem which would show our beliefs to be rationally justified. According to Fogelin,

...even if Hume's argument does not show what it is supposed to show, his intentions are plain. He holds that there is no rational response to the skeptical argument he has produced. He accepts a theoretical skepticism that is wholly unmitigated (Fogelin [1985], 22).

4. The claim that for Hume the difference between an idea believed and an idea entertained is a matter of feeling must be qualified. As I said in chapter I, though Hume officially characterizes belief as vivid conception, he also characterizes belief in terms of its fixedness and its influence on behavior. Recall that in the "Appendix" to the Treatise Hume says that the manner in which the ideas composing a belief are conceived,

...gives them more force and influence; makes them appear of greater importance; infixes them in the mind; and renders them the governing principles of all our actions (T, 629).

Hume states the point in virtually identical language in E, V.II.

5. See The Secret Connection (Strawson [1989]), especially 11-14, and 275-84. This point is made also by David Fate Norton, in David Hume: Common-Sense Moralism, Sceptical Metaphysician (Norton [1982]). Norton writes that in Hume's skepticism

...doubting and denying are not only thought to be quite different activities, but fundamentally antithetical activities as well (Norton [1982], ix).

6. Though Hume's official theory of belief doesn't adequately account for the kind of reference to particular times and places that often is essential to a belief, he does recognize that such reference is involved in many of our beliefs. In the first Enquiry, Hume discusses his belief that a person is presently in the next room. Though he doesn't observe the person, he infers that he is currently there from the sound of his voice. Hume writes,

This impression of my senses immediately conveys my thought to the person, together with all the surrounding objects. I paint them out to myself as existing at present... (E, V.II, 50).

CHAPTER  
VI

HUME AS METASKEPTIC: THE BAIER INTERPRETATION

1

In A Progress of Sentiments (Baier [1991]), Annette Baier argues that the only skepticism that can truly be attributed to Hume is "metascepticism", that is, "scepticism turned on itself, diffidence about the sceptic's conclusions" (Baier [1991], 302).<sup>1</sup> Baier rejects Fogelin's attribution to Hume of a theoretical but not prescriptive skepticism with regard to causal inference:

The theoretical sceptic takes all causal inferences to be without warrant, but, unlike the prescriptive sceptic, continues to make them. This sounds like the hypocritical rather than the true sceptic, and I do not see Hume as having any toleration for such a split between habits and acknowledged norms (Baier, 57).

According to Baier, Hume's "true" skeptic prescribes diffidence but nevertheless attempts to find "habits that are endorseable." Hume, as a true skeptic, does not abandon norms of reasoning but rather finds and adheres to new norms - endorseable habits: "Hume's eventual true "sceptic" is...one who is attempting to bear his own survey, to find habits that are endorseable" (Baier, 58).

Baier puts great weight on the fact that Hume employs causal inference and explanation throughout the Treatise. She says that "...if Hume really *distrusts* causal inference,



and the inductions on which, if he is right, it rests, then he must distrust his own *Treatise*" (Baier, 55). Baier also puts great weight on "Rules by which to judge of causes and effects" (T, I.III.XV), in which Hume presents rules to guide us in making causal judgments. Noting that Hume refers to these rules as a "Logic," Baier asks, "Can this be scepticism?" It can be, she answers, "Only if the whole of section XV can be treated as a piece of particularly sustained and heavy irony" (Baier, 56).

In fact, Baier says, in T, I.III.XV Hume seems to be "...endorsing eight rules and telling us that by using them we can find out what really causes what" (Baier, 59). According to Baier, Hume is giving an account of how custom and the associative unions it forms in our imaginations "can have 'equal weight and authority'...with the 'arguments' of 'reason'" (Baier, 59). Again, Baier puts emphasis on the fact that Hume continues to engage in causal reasoning after T, I.III.VI. She writes:

The true sceptic must wonder what sort of reasoning it might be that can continue without implicit deference to norms of reasoning, without any inference warrants. Hume seems to take himself to be able, in good faith, to continue (Baier, 59).

For Baier, then, Hume does not deny that causal inferences are warranted or rationally justified; rather, "Hume's bold and interesting question is what a warrant is like when it comes from sources other than the human

intellect" (Baier, 59). Only those skeptics whose model of reason is rationalistic

...will dismiss all the apparent evidence of Hume's constructive normative enterprise, his 'rules,' his claims about the 'authority' of custom, the 'foundation' of our causal inferences, of our ability to find 'real causes,' as ironical (Baier, 59).

2

According to Baier, though Hume eventually uses "reason" to refer to various "endorseable thought transitions," Hume's argument in T, I.III.VI and his argument in T, I.IV.I, are directed only against reason as a tracer of intelligible connections or relations of ideas:

If we read Section VI of Part III carefully, we will find that the negative conclusions concern "intelligibility" in the narrow sense in which it means what we would call interdeducibility. The "reason" whose limits Hume draws in Section VI is the tracer of "intelligible" connections (Baier, 61).

Baier argues that Hume, having shown that causes do not imply their effects, argues further in Section VI that "...it is only experience, not deductive reason even when that is helped by experience" that is responsible for our belief in the conclusions of causal inferences (Baier, 64). According to Baier, Hume is merely trying to show, in T, I.III.VI, that it is experience and the associative principles of the imagination, rather than reason "as the rationalists construe it" that produce our causal inferences. Baier claims that when Hume says we have no

reason to determine us to make causal inferences, that should not be taken to mean that we have no warrant for those inferences. On Baier's interpretation, when Hume says we have no reason to make these inferences he means only that deductive reason is not the cause or part of the cause of our making them. Hume's supposed skeptical argument concerning induction, Baier writes,

...is introduced by the causal question, "Whether experience produces the idea by means of the understanding or of the imagination; whether we are determin'd by reason to make the transition, or by a certain association and relation of perceptions" (T.88-89). The "idea" here is the lively idea that is the conclusion of the causal inference. It is already established that the transition to this idea is "founded on past experience" and on some sort of memory of the constant conjunctions we have experienced. Now the question is how this memory influences or determines our inference. Is it by some explicitly formulated generalization, along with deductive inference from that to a conclusion about the current case? It is to this question that Hume gives us a negative answer. It is no more sceptical an answer than that given to the parallel question of Section III, namely whether we can get a sound deductive inference to the conclusion that every event has some cause (Baier, 67).

Hume refers to probability in the supposedly skeptical argument of T, I.III.VI, Baier says, only in order to see whether rationalist reason "can get assurance of the principle of induction by other means" (Baier, 67). According to Baier, the appeal to probability violates only the rationalists' demand for non-circular justification: "It is reason that needs a "principle," spelled out and ready to serve as part of a demonstration" (Baier, 68).

Baier, like Stove, sees Hume's argument in T, I.III.VI as directed solely against attempts to provide deductive support for the uniformity principle:

...the argument here concerns the evidence, or rather the lack of evidence, for an explicit principle that is needed, or thought to be needed, for a valid demonstrative argument whose conclusion would be, "This fire will burn my hand painfully, if I put it in the fire." It is not an argument about the presuppositions of inferences not purporting to be demonstrative (Baier, 68).

Baier, however, differs significantly from Stove in that while Stove saw Hume as committed to a rationalist/deductivist notion of justification according to which my belief in Q justifies my belief in P only if Q entails P, Baier sees Hume as rejecting such a notion. According to Stove, Hume from the outset thinks there is only one form of good inference, deductive inference. According to Baier this is one of the rationalist views to which Hume is explicitly opposed. Still, the interpretations of Baier and Stove are similar in that both see Hume's argument of T, I.III.VI as directed only against the possibility of deductive support for the uniformity principle. According to Baier, Hume's conclusion is simply that

Reason, using reason's rules of evidence and proof, cannot establish the "principle" that reason needs, to provide a reason-cause of the conclusions of our causal inferences (Baier, 68).

Baier emphasizes that T, I.III.VI occurs as part of a larger project of analyzing causal inference. She also emphasizes Hume's use of causal inference to explain our causal inferences and how causal association differs from other forms of association in producing "constancy in our mind set" after we've had "constancy in past experience" (Baier, 73). The project of analyzing causal inference will result, in Section XV, in an endorsement of rules for making causal inferences, according to Baier. Baier denies that Hume is a skeptic with regard to causal inference. She claims that even in discussing probabilities Hume shows a "resolute adherence to faith in that familiar maxim that a cause is always necessary" (Baier, 84).

According to Baier, Hume considers causal inference justified by its *reflexivity*. Causal inference is reflexive in that we can successfully provide causal explanations for our causal inferences themselves. This is, of course, just what Hume does in the Treatise. Hume explains causal inference as the effect of a present impression, experience of regular conjunction, and a habit of association involving transfer of vivacity, which together cause a person to form a certain vivid idea.

According to Baier, Hume's much-discussed and often-criticized double definition of 'cause' itself captures the reflexivity of causal reasoning. How? By itself displaying a "meta-causal" relation between the "foreign objects" of the

first version of the definition, previously experienced conjunctions, and the "foreign object" of the second version of the definition, the union of the ideas of the conjoined objects in the human mind. The causal relation between the "foreign objects" of the first version of the definition and the foreign object of the second version has been traced throughout Part III, as Hume has shown how experience of constant conjunction, together with the mind's habits of association and vivacity transfer and the occurrence of a new appropriate impression determine the mind in causal inferences. The impression of this determination itself gives rise to the idea of necessity which forms a part of our concept of cause. This idea of cause can then be used in giving a causal explanation of its own genesis, as Hume has done in the Treatise Part III. In this way, the concept of cause captured by Hume's double definition is successfully reflexive:

Hume can be confident that his definition does present the truth about our concept of cause, precisely because the definition displays how the concept, under this analysis, can successfully be turned on itself. It is a self-demonstrating and self-verifying real definition, arrived at by a causal investigation into our concept of cause... (Baier, 91).

Baier, like Beauchamp and Rosenberg, makes much of Hume's presentation, in "Rules by which to judge of causes and effects" (T, I.III.XV, 173-6), of rules for judging when seemingly causally related objects "really are so."

According to Baier, Hume regards these rules as having normative force precisely because reasoning that conforms to them is successfully reflexive:

The acceptability of the definition of cause depends upon its reflexivity, and that encapsulates the reflexivity of the reasoning leading up to it. The rules that Hume enunciates and endorses in the following section also get their normative force from the fact that reasoning conforming to them has just been demonstrated to be capable of being turned successfully on itself (Baier, 93).

In fact, Baier claims, Hume has shown that this is so in the previous sections of the Treatise, for he has himself been following these rules in his reasoning. Importantly, Hume has followed these rules in arriving at and confirming "...his hypotheses concerning what causes our ideas, our inferences, and our degrees of belief and disbelief" (Baier, 93). In other words, the rules for causal reasoning which Hume espouses in T, I.III.XV have been followed in Hume's investigation of causal reasoning itself, an investigation which culminates in his endorsement of those very rules as normative.

For Baier, the whole Treatise is a search for "mental operations that can bear their own survey," a search for "norms with the sort of grounding that a reflective naturalist can accept" (Baier, 97). According to Baier, Hume has not abandoned normative principles but has articulated new normative principles based on endorseable habits of

belief formation. Beliefs formed through the operation of such habits are rationally justified. Baier says that Hume

...in Part III, ...thinks he has found mental causes that do not "shoulder aside reasons," indeed that he has discovered which mental causes are good reasons. *They are those which exhibit the workings of habits of belief-formation which can "bear their own survey"...* (Baier, 96).

The inferences or mental transitions that we can endorse are "the ones that can become successfully reflexive. *Successful reflexivity is normativity*" (Baier, 99-100). So, since causal inference (in accord with certain norms) is successfully reflexive, it is endorseable, and beliefs formed through causal inference are rationally justified.

4

I will begin my response to Baier with a few minor points. Baier states the issue as if those who interpret Hume as a skeptic must say that he "distrusts" causal inference. But that is silly. You show that you trust a form of inference by being willing to use it. Hume is willing to use causal inference; he thinks we can't help using it. In fact, on Hume's view our trust in causal inference is instinctive. That does not mean, however, that he thinks it is rationally justified.

Baier says Hume only distinguishes "true" from "false" and "smiling" from "unsmiling" skepticism in the Treatise. I don't think that's true. In "Of the antient philosophy" (T,



I.IV.III, 219-25) Hume distinguishes the true philosophers, who are marked by their "moderate skepticism," from those philosophers who take refuge in meaningless terms such as "*faculty and occult quality*" and from "the people," that is, the non-philosophical majority of mankind (T, 224). Hume's words here explicitly suggest a distinction between moderate and immoderate skepticism. What are these two types of skepticism? It is not clear exactly what distinction Hume has in mind, but the moderate skepticism of the true philosopher is at least in part a result of his having recognized that terms such as "occult quality" and "substance" are "...wholly insignificant and unintelligible" (T, 224). So it seems that the moderate skeptic holds a *conceptual* skepticism with regard to statements containing certain philosophical terms. Now, Hume does seem to think that we can refrain from engaging in the use of meaningless philosophical jargon. So the contrast between the immoderate skeptic and the moderate skeptic is not that one is a conceptual skeptic and the other is a prescriptive skeptic with regard to claims involving terms such as "occult quality." The immoderate skeptic, it seems plausible to suppose, would either be a person who proposes to extend the conceptual skepticism which is correct with regard to certain bits of philosophical terminology to ordinary discourse or a person who holds a prescriptive skepticism with regard to our ordinary beliefs and claims.

Beyond the moderate/immoderate distinction in T, I.IV.III, Hume, in T, I.IV.VII, strongly suggests the distinction between theoretical skepticism and prescriptive skepticism. As I noted in Chapter I, the skepticism which Hume says we ought to preserve "in all the incidents of life," the skepticism which is displayed in "blind submission" to human nature, cannot be a prescriptive skepticism. For Hume says that he has no choice but to act and judge even after his skeptical ruminations. So the skepticism displayed in submission to human nature must be theoretical. In contrasting his true skepticism with a vain attempt to refrain from judging, Hume employs the distinction between theoretical and prescriptive skepticism, though he does not himself use the terms "theoretical skepticism" or "prescriptive skepticism."

Baier also says that Hume sees it as a manifest contradiction to live by habits when we can't establish that we ought to live so. On this basis she rejects the attribution to Hume of a theoretical but nonprescriptive skepticism, which she regards as hypocritical. Baier supports this claim by reference to T, I.IV.VII, where Hume says

Very refin'd reflections have little or no influence upon us; and yet we do not, and cannot establish it for a rule, that they ought not to have any influence; which implies a manifest contradiction (T, 268).

But Hume says this as a response to and rejection of the suggestion that skepticism can be avoided by distinguishing between the "trivial" and the "more establish'd" properties of the imagination. His conclusion in the paragraph in which he speaks of a "manifest contradiction" is that we have "...no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at all" (T, 268). It seems to me that Hume's words here can hardly be taken as suggesting the possibility of endorseable habits. Rather, he seems to be pointing out the inescapable epistemological predicament we humans are in.

The distinction between theoretical and prescriptive skepticism not only allows us consistently to hold that certain views and practices are not rationally justified without prescribing their abandonment, it also allows us consistently to prescribe policies for which we can provide no rational justification. This does, perhaps, sound uncomfortably close to hypocrisy. But in what way is Hume (or a person who accepts Hume's skeptical conclusions and also prescribes following the rules for causal reasoning that Hume espouses) a hypocrite so long as he himself is doing as he says should be done? In no way, as far as I can see.

Baier notes that Hume says it is superfluous to disavow total skepticism since no one could be such a skeptic. But this total skepticism that is impossible for us and hence

superfluous to disavow is *practical* skepticism. In the relevant passage Hume writes:

Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel; nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon their customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies, when we turn our eyes toward them in broad sunshine. Whoever has taken pains to refute the cavils of this *total* scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavour'd by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and render'd unavoidable. (T, I.IV.I, 183).

Hume's response here is clearly to the suggestion that we should "forbear" judging, but that suggestion is made by the *prescriptive* skeptic, not the *theoretical* skeptic. The fact that Hume says this kind of skepticism is impossible doesn't support the claim that he disavows the kind of *theoretical* skepticism that Fogelin and I attribute to him.

5

Baier, like Stove, Beauchamp, and Rosenberg, claims that the argument usually identified as Hume's argument for inductive skepticism is in fact not directed at inductive inference at all. Baier seems to think it significant that Hume introduces his argument with a "causal question." For if Hume is seeking the *cause* of our inferences, perhaps he is not constructing a skeptical argument concerning causal inference. But this is really just the same old issue of how Hume can engage in causal inference throughout the Treatise

if he is a skeptic about inductive and hence causal inference. It is easily answered in terms of the distinction between theoretical skepticism and prescriptive skepticism, and by reference to Hume's determinist theory of belief.

Baier, like Stove, and Beauchamp and Rosenberg, sees Hume's argument as directed only against deductive arguments for the UP. So, many of the same considerations that applied to their interpretations apply to hers as well. Two that seem especially relevant to Baier are the following.

(1) Throughout Hume's texts we see a concern with arguments which are "probable" in the sense that their premises do not entail their conclusions - what I've called "I-probable" arguments. Further, causal inference, the only form of inference which can take us outside the confines of present perception and memory, is probable in this sense. So, it seems implausible that Hume is not concerned with the legitimacy of causal inference and is not considering the possibility of I-probable arguments in T, I.III.VI.

(2) Even if Hume is only explicitly considering valid arguments for the UP, inductive support for it is excluded by the fact that at least one premise of any valid argument having the UP as its conclusion will either itself be a conclusion of an inductive inference or will be such that somewhere in the chain of justification leading to it a statement derived by inductive inference occurs. Such an inference will, on Hume's view, presuppose the UP. Hence any

such attempt to justify the UP by an I-probable argument will be question begging.

## 6.1

Perhaps because Baier, unlike Stove, sees Hume as an anti-deductivist, she insists that Hume's argument is directed only against "rationalist" reason, reason as a "tracer of intelligible connections." In fact, throughout Progress of Sentiments, Baier reads Hume's seemingly skeptical arguments and claims as directed solely against a rationalist position. So, according to Baier, when Hume says that "reason" cannot justify a belief or practice, he does not mean that no warrant or rational justification can be provided for it, but only that no warrant can be provided on a rationalist basis.

What Baier seems to have in mind as the rationalism that she thinks is the target of Hume's attack is a view such as this: Knowledge must be based on a foundation of statements which are "seen" to be true by intuition. An acceptable knowledge claim must concern either an intuited statement or statements or a statement or statements inferred from intuited statements via a valid form of inference. Of course, on this view not all acceptable knowledge claims need be directly inferred from intuited statements, but the set of intuited statements provides the starting point and foundation of knowledge, and the only acceptable form of inference is deductive inference.<sup>2</sup> So,

according to Baier, Hume's seemingly skeptical arguments in the Treatise and the first Enquiry are actually directed only against the rationalist view I've just sketched and are intended to show only that rationalism does not provide the support for various beliefs or knowledge claims that its adherents claim it does.

Perhaps the strongest evidence that Hume's skepticism is not restricted to showing the inadequacies of rationalism is his consideration of our belief in the continued and distinct existence of material objects, in "Of scepticism with regard to the senses" (T, I.IV.II, 187-218). Skepticism concerning the external world perfectly fits Hume's analysis of causal inference combined with his view that "...nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions" (T, I.IIVI, 67). We can make causal inferences only on the basis of experienced conjunctions. We don't experience the conjunctions of perceptions with independent objects necessary for causal inference to apply; we directly experience only perceptions. Therefore, we have no way of knowing that an independent world of material objects corresponding to our perceptions exists. So, even if Hume did not hold an inductive skepticism and did hold that causal inference, being self-reflexive, is rationally justified, given his view that we directly apprehend only perceptions, we cannot have any basis to infer the existence of an independent world of material objects. We simply lack the "data base" necessary for the employment of causal

inference. In the first Enquiry, Section XII, Part I, Hume says there is no argument from experience to support the existence of objects corresponding to our impressions and ideas. This too tells against Baier's claim that Hume's skeptical pronouncements are directed only against rationalism, not those ways of inferring, such as causal reasoning, that can "bear their own scrutiny."

Further evidence is provided by the argument in "Of scepticism with regard to reason" (T, I.IV.I, 180-87), which applies to both probable and demonstrative reasoning. It is an argument concerning the understanding considered as "the general and more establish'd properties of the imagination," as Hume himself describes it later, in T, I.IV.VII. When left to itself the understanding undercuts itself:

For I have already shewn, that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life (T, I.IV.VII, 267-8).

But if we don't limit our reasonings to those resulting from the most general features of the imagination, we are led to error and absurdity, Hume argues in T, I.IV.VII:

Nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers (T, 267).

We either do or do not so limit our reasonings, and in either case we get a skeptical result.



Baier dismisses T, I.IV.I as evidence of any real skepticism on Hume's part. What Hume is doing in this section, Baier says, is once again merely showing the limits of rationalism. According to Baier the reflexive probability judgments Hume considers in this section are only minimally experience-informed, unlike the probability judgments of the experience-informed Humean reasoner. In developing the notion of the process of reflex evaluation, however, Hume writes

'Tis certain a man of solid sense and long experience ought to have, and usually has, a greater assurance in his opinions, than one that is foolish and ignorant, and that our sentiments have different degrees of authority, even with ourselves, in proportion to the degrees of our reason and experience. In the man of the best sense and longest experience, this authority is never entire; since even such-a-one must be conscious of many errors in the past, and must still dread the like for the future (T, 182).

Thus it seems that the "man of solid sense and long experience" is as vulnerable to the skeptical argument to follow as any rationalist philosopher shut up alone in his stove-heated room. Of course, one might say that such an experience-informed reasoner is vulnerable to the skeptical argument only on the rationalist view of reason and that Hume's purpose here is precisely to show that rationalism cannot provide a sound basis for such a reasoner. However, Hume himself says that his point here is

...to make the reader sensible of the truth of my hypothesis, *that all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and that belief*

is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures (T, 183).

Hume's main point has been to show that belief is not "...a simple act of the thought, without any peculiar manner of conception, or the addition of a force and vivacity...", but is instead precisely a particular manner of conceiving ideas - with force and vivacity (T, 184).

Now, for Hume to have shown that belief is a matter of force and vivacity of conception "which 'tis impossible for mere ideas and reflections to destroy" may be for him to have shown that the rationalist conception of belief as mere "clear and distinct perception" is mistaken. Even so, this does not support the claim that the skeptical argument of this section applies only to rationalists. One can employ a skeptical argument to show that one theory of belief is incorrect and another is correct without thereby showing that the correct theory avoids the skeptical implications of the argument. On Hume's theory, belief differs from mere conception in force and vivacity; belief is not mere clear conception. Further, on Hume's theory, our beliefs, being perceptions, are caused by other perceptions. But this does not suggest that on Hume's theory our beliefs are rationally justified nor does it show that we are not vulnerable to the skeptical argument Hume uses to support his theory of belief.

An alternative to Baier's reading is available. In a prior chapter, I said that Hume's own (consequent) notion of probability is subjective probability - degree of confidence. Now, according to Hume, if we follow reason, which he later refers to as simply the more general and established features of the imagination, we engage in a reflex evaluation of our judgments which at each step diminishes the probability of our first-order judgments, eventually reducing that probability to zero. So, if we follow reason, eventually our confidence in our initial judgment will be extinguished - we will no longer believe whatever it was we started out believing. But this "total extinction of belief and evidence" does not in fact occur. Why? Because we don't follow reason! Hume writes:

...after the first and second decision; as the action of the mind becomes forc'd and unnatural, and the ideas faint and obscure; tho' the principles of judgment, and the balancing of opposite causes be the same as at the very beginning; yet their influence on the imagination, and the vigor they add to, or diminish from the thought, is by no means equal (T, 185).

So, it is just a lucky fact about us - that we run out of psychological steam when we engage in reflex evaluations - that saves us from total doubt. Note, however, that the reflex evaluations are demanded by *the most general features of the imagination* and that Hume never says they are not so demanded. It is not merely that on some unrealistic view of

reason reflex evaluation should occur; it is in our nature to require such evaluation. Fortunately for us, it is also in our nature to be unable to invest the same amount of psychological force in extended reflex evaluations as we do in our lower-order judgments. But that fact does not, as far as I can see, mean that we have somehow solved the problem raised by Hume's argument nor does it show that that problem is not a problem for the non-rationalist, Humean thinker.

Of course, it would be easier to decide whether or not Hume's seemingly skeptical arguments really are skeptical if we could be sure of what he means by 'reason' in each case in which he uses the term. If we had a general principle we could apply in order to decide just what Hume means by each particular use of 'reason', we could apply it to those passages traditionally taken to present Hume's skeptical views and arguments to determine whether or not they do present skeptical arguments. Baier follows Beauchamp and Rosenberg in claiming that in the arguments that are usually interpreted as skeptical Hume's target is rationalist reason. Baier claims that as the Treatise continues Hume moves from using 'reason' to refer to rationalist reason to using it to refer more broadly to the human capacity for making inferences and gaining knowledge. This capacity, Baier says, involves sentiment, and Hume's conception of this capacity is a corrected conception of reason. Hume

reaches this enlarged conception of reason through showing the insufficiency of the rationalist conception of reason.

It seems to me, however, that there is no general principle by reference to which we can determine just what Hume does mean by 'reason' in the many different places he uses the term. In "Moral Distinctions not deriv'd from Reason" (T, III.I.I, 455-70), Hume speaks of "reason, in a strict and philosophical sense" as including causal reasoning, that is, reason insofar as "...it discovers the connexion of causes and effects..." (T, 459). In the same section Hume also says:

If the thought and understanding were alone capable of fixing the boundaries of right and wrong, the character of virtuous and vicious either must lie in some relations of objects, or must be a matter of fact, which is discovered by our reasoning (T, 463).

Baier would, I think, take this as evidence of Hume's having by this point reached his enlarged and corrected conception of reason. Yet it seems just as reasonable to take such passages as evidence that Hume's earlier seemingly skeptical arguments are not simply directed against a rationalist conception of reason but rather are directed against reason inclusive of experience-informed causal reasoning (as the passages stressed by Winkler indicate) and hence really are skeptical.

I believe that Baier's claim that Hume regards causal inference as rationally justified because successfully reflexive is not supported by Hume's texts. Though Baier presents a compelling reconstruction of Hume, her new and improved Hume is, I believe, not the historical Hume. Baier lays great stress on T, I.III.XV as evidence of Hume's nonskeptical view of causal inference. It is true that Hume's apparent endorsement of the rules in T, I.III.XV raises a problem for the traditional interpretation of Hume as a skeptic. But there are reasons for thinking that Hume's endorsement of these rules does not mean that he is not a theoretical skeptic. For one thing, if Hume regards the rules of T, I.III.XV as normative epistemological principles, then why do these rules for causal reasoning not appear in the first Enquiry, the work which Hume himself wished to be taken as presenting his mature views on topics in metaphysics and epistemology?<sup>3</sup> Baier cautions against reading into the Treatise the "preoccupations" of the Hume of the first Enquiry. But since the first Enquiry is a reworking of those parts of the Treatise that Hume thought of most worth and it is his later statement of his philosophical views, it seems the first Enquiry is a good source of evidence for deciding whether or not Hume was a serious skeptic.<sup>4</sup>

Baier seems to think that the only choice for those who see Hume as a skeptic is to read T, I.III.XV as ironic.

But there is another interpretation open to those who attribute a theoretical skepticism to Hume. The rules propounded in this section may present in systematic form the inferential practices of experienced reasoners who have set aside the "external" questions about induction with which the philosopher is (at least sometimes) concerned. Experienced reasoners will follow certain general rules for causal reasoning. Why? For at least two reasons. First, from the definition of cause and effect we can lay down certain rules which will help prevent error in certain circumstances. These rules are negative tests for the cause-effect relation.<sup>5</sup> For example, the first and second rules Hume states are

1. The cause and effect must be contiguous in space and time.
2. The cause must be prior to the effect (T, p.173).

Thus from these rules we know that when two event types E1 and E2 are related in such a way that tokens of E2 sometimes occur without being preceded by spatially or temporally contiguous tokens of E1, E1 tokens do not cause E2 tokens.

Second, we can lay down rules the actual following of which has in the past led to success. Hume's sixth rule is an example of such a rule:

The difference in the effects of two resembling objects must proceed from that particular, in which they differ (T, 174).

Does the past success of inferences made according to these rules show that the rules themselves and the inferences made in accordance with them are rationally justified? No! The argument for inductive skepticism precludes such justification of general rules. In other words, there is no positive test for the cause-effect relation. Further, in "Of unphilosophical probability" (T, I.III.XIII, 143-55) Hume says that the general rules we form to guide our inquiries themselves conflict. So the formation of such rules doesn't provide a way out of skepticism. He writes:

The following of general rules is a very unphilosophical species of probability; and yet 'tis only by following them that we can correct this, and all other unphilosophical probabilities (T, 150).

What Hume may have in mind in endorsing the rules for causal reasoning is, as I suggested in chapter IV, a kind of *pragmatic* justification of them.<sup>7</sup> Given our inability to rationally justify causal inference, we are "justified" in following canons of reasoning that have been successful in the past. We are justified, however, only in the sense that we have no alternative method that we have reason to believe is more reliable than the method codified in those previously successful rules, not in the sense that we have good reason to believe that the conclusions of our causal inferences will be true more often than not. In other words, given that we are committed by our very natures to making causal inferences, once we assume the UP on which they



depend we can articulate and endorse rules for settling, in Beauchamp and Rosenberg's terminology, *internal* questions about induction. But again this does not mean that we are justified from the *external* point of view, the point of view of the philosopher - Hume - in his study.

Besides the interpretation of T, I.III.XV I've just offered, one might reply to Baier's claim in this way: Even if it were true that the only way of maintaining the traditional interpretation of Hume is by reading this section as ironic, if we don't interpret Hume as a skeptic we are also left with irony of gigantic proportions in his various seemingly skeptical pronouncements. In my opinion, many of Hume's skeptical pronouncements simply do not seem to be ironic. This I will leave to the decision of the reader. However, if we are to take Hume's skeptical pronouncements (including those which suggest a theoretical skepticism) as ironic, then we must maintain that for some reason Hume made a very large number of such statements in contexts in which his substantive arguments would to many appear to support skepticism. This from a man who is, as philosophers go, an extraordinarily clear writer and who was concerned with the reception of his work and with literary fame. Further, we must explain the seeming fit between Hume's serious substantive analyses of topics including probable reasoning and causation and his "ironic" skepticism. Of course, it may be that there are such reasons and explanations. But I don't think that the claim that Hume

wanted to undermine rationalism supplies a sufficient explanation of why Hume would so often make seemingly skeptical pronouncements in the context of serious discussions of epistemological and metaphysical issues, nor do I know of any other convincing explanation for Hume's making remarks that would mislead his readers with regard to his epistemological views.

8

Baier's proposed "successful reflexivity" justification of causal inference seems very like the inductive justification of induction offered by Max Black and others.<sup>8</sup> Baier's notion of "meta-causal" explanations of causal inferences is very like the notion of higher level inductive arguments for lower-level inductive inference rules. In general, the inductive justification of induction goes like this: There is a distinction between *levels* of inductive argument. Our ordinary inductive arguments about objects or events in the world are licensed by a first level of inductive rules. So, for example, the argument "All observed copper conducts electricity; therefore, all copper conducts electricity" will be licensed by the rules of inductive inference for level 1. Perhaps the level 1 inference rule licensing the inference about copper would be

M/N observed A have been B

-----  
M/N A are B.

The rules of level 1, however, will be justified by an argument on level 2, such as

Arguments on level 1 which are permitted by the rules of level 1 have usually been successful in the past.

-----  
Arguments on level 1 which are permitted by the rules of level 1 will usually be successful in the future.

Or, more briefly,

Level 1 inductive rules have been reliable in the past.

-----  
Level 1 inductive rules will be reliable in the future.<sup>10</sup>

Now, the argument on level 2 will be licensed by the rules of level 2. The rules of level 2, however, will be justified by a higher level inductive argument on level 3 which will be licensed by the rules for level 3. Generally, for an inductive argument on level  $n$ , there will be level  $n$  rules which license that inference, and there will be an inductive argument on level  $n+1$  which is licensed by the rules of level  $n+1$  and the conclusion of which states that the rules of level  $n$  will be reliable in the future.

Of course, for the level  $n+1$  argument which justifies the rules of level  $n$  to be a justification it must have true premises. But an important feature of the attempt to justify induction inductively is that it might turn out that the premise of the  $n+1$  argument which states that the rules of level  $n$  have been reliable in the past is *false*. So, the

justification may not go through. This fact, that is, that the success of the justification depends on the way the world is and is not guaranteed beforehand, is taken as showing that the inductive justification of induction is not circular. The inductive justification of induction does not involve the assumption of an intended conclusion as a premise nor the employment of an inference rule in an argument intended to justify employment of that very rule. For the argument offered as justification for a rule on level  $n$  is licensed, not by the rules of level  $n$ , but by the rules of level  $n+1$ .

There is, however, a serious problem with the inductive justification of induction. The problem is that counterinductive rules can be justified by the same approach. Consider the level 1 counterinductive argument:

All observed samples of copper have conducted electricity.  
-----  
The next sample of copper to be observed will not conduct electricity.

Now, this counterinductive argument is licensed by the following level 1 counterinductive inference rule:

All observed As have been Bs  
-----  
The next A to be observed will not be a B.

But the level 1 counterinductive inference rule can be justified on the next level by the following argument:

Rules of level 1 have been unreliable in the past.

-----  
Rules of level 1 will be reliable in the future.

Moreover, the premise of the level 2 counterinductive argument will be true just when the premise of the level 2 inductive argument is. Both arguments are coherent with the facts. This will remain true as we ascend through levels of inductive and counterinductive arguments for lower-level rules. So, if the inductivist can provide an inductive justification for his inductive inference rules, the counterinductivist (supposing he survives!) can provide a parallel counterinductive justification for his own counterinductive inference rules.

It seems to me that a similar problem exists for the successful reflexivity defense of causal inference that Baier attributes to Hume. It may be that a necessary condition of an acceptable form of inference is that one can apply it reflexively to itself.<sup>11</sup> The attempt to justify induction inductively, for example, requires the possibility of making inductive inferences about inductive inferences. Similarly, Baier's view seems to be that causal inference is justified because one can make causal inferences about causal inferences and provide causal explanations for causal inferences. But it seems that such reflexivity is not a *sufficient* condition for justifying a form of inference, as is shown by the possibility of justifying counterinductive inference rules by counterinductive arguments.<sup>12</sup>

Accepting that causal inference can be successfully applied in predicting our causal inferences, what then? First, this might involve a kind of rule circularity if causal inference cannot plausibly be thought of as different forms of inference at different levels. If we are not justified in making causal inferences, how can the making of further causal inferences provide justification? Second, even if the "meta-causal" inferences we make about lower-order causal inferences can be thought of as analogous to higher level inductive arguments, then, just as in the case of the inductive justification of induction, this would only serve to justify our adherence to causal inference and explanation if no other form of inference inconsistent with causal inference can be similarly justified (that is, by its own reflexivity).

Now, Baier does seem to think that Hume has excluded other forms of inference that might compete with causal inference, for these other forms of inference are not, according to Baier, successfully reflexive. Still, the claim that Hume has excluded these other forms of inference from the class of rationally justified forms of inference because they are not successfully self-reflexive is only important for deciding the issue of Hume's skepticism if he has not also excluded causal inference itself from the class of rationally justified forms of inference. I believe, however, that my arguments have shown that Hume does exclude causal inference from that class, even if he does not exclude it on

the basis of failure of reflexivity. Or, to return once more to the terminology of Beauchamp and Rosenberg, I believe that I have shown that Hume both raises the "external" question about induction and answers it in the negative.

## Notes To Chapter VI

1. Hereafter all references to Baier are to Baier [1991] unless otherwise noted.

2. Descartes seems to be the most likely example of such a rationalist, and Hume does, in both the Treatise and the first Enquiry, make reference to Descartes and the Cartesians.

3. Hume does endorse certain methodological principles for empirical reasoning in the Enquiry. For example, in "Of A Particular Providence And Of A Future State" (E, XI, 132-48) Hume says,

When we infer any particular cause from an effect, we must proportion the one to the other, and can never be allowed to ascribe to the cause any qualities, but what are exactly sufficient to produce the effect (136).

But if the rules that appear in T I.III.XV were, as Baier suggests, normative principles that both encapsulate Hume's methods and complete his epistemology, then, it seems likely, the statement of them would be a central feature of the Enquiry.

4. As I noted in the Introduction, in the "Advertisement" which Hume wrote to be attached to the Enquiries, he refers to the Treatise as a "juvenile work" and says explicitly that he wishes his Enquiries to be taken as his final word on the relevant topics. [See E, 2]. The first Enquiry may be said to support the traditional view of Hume as a skeptic in its focus on epistemological issues and its avoidance of many of the ontological issues with which Hume was concerned in Book I of the Treatise. A. H. Basson suggests that it is likely that Hume omitted from the Enquiry many of the ontological discussions of the Treatise Book I precisely because "...he was chiefly interested in establishing a sceptical theory of knowledge..." (Basson [1958], 16).

5. Strictly speaking, there is no more a negative test for the causal relation than there is a positive one. For though



we may find that two events do not appear to be related in the way necessary for causal connection, it may be that their regular conjunction has been interfered with by "the secret operation of contrary causes" (T, 132). Hume discusses "secret" causes in "Of the probability of causes" (T, I.III.XII, 130-42).

6. Hume moves away from requiring spatial contiguity of cause and effect later on, in "Of the immateriality of the soul" (T, I.IV.V, 232-51).

7. Again, I'm not suggesting that Hume had in mind the kind of technical "pragmatic" defense of induction proposed in this century.

8. See, for example, chapter 11 of Problems of Analysis (Black [1954]).

9. What is meant by saying that arguments permitted by a rule are usually *successful* is that such arguments, when their premises are true, have true conclusions more often than not.

10. What is meant by saying that a rule is *reliable* is that arguments permitted by this rule usually are successful.

11. In his review of Baier's Progress of Sentiments, Kenneth Winkler makes a similar point with regard to Baier's claims about the role of reflexivity in Hume's theory of causal inference and belief. See Winkler's review of Progress in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 4 (October 1994)

12. Of course, one may object that reading a recognition of the lack of sufficiency of reflexivity-based or inductive justifications of inductive inference into Hume's texts is a stretch. It seems, however, that if we employ a principle of charity in reading philosophical texts it is no more of a stretch to suppose that Hume would see the lack of sufficiency of the reflexivity/inductive justification of induction than it is to suppose that he had in mind the

reflexivity/inductive defense of induction proposed by  
Baier.

CHAPTER  
VII

SCIENCE, NATURALISM, AND HUME'S SKEPTICISM

1

In "Hume's New Science of the Mind," John Biro writes that in the two centuries following its publication

The barrage of arguments in the first book of the Treatise, apparently questioning the very possibility of knowing anything about the world and about ourselves, was seen as directed not against various philosophical doctrines on these subjects (as these arguments are construed, increasingly, today) but against the very possibility of such knowledge. That such skepticism is on the face of it incompatible with the project Hume announced in the Introduction to the work was either not noticed or dismissed as unproblematic by the simple expedient of not taking him at his word (Biro [1993], 37).

In a footnote to this passage, Biro says that though it may be that Hume was simply contradicting himself, it is more plausible that some of his pronouncements - those which seem to espouse a serious skepticism - were ironic.<sup>1</sup>

Biro's comments here are very much in line with the current tendency to downplay the skeptical aspects of Hume's philosophy. Biro points to the apparent incompatibility of Hume's espousal of empirical, scientific method with the skepticism that traditionally has been attributed to Hume and which I have attributed to Hume. Recall Beauchamp and Rosenberg's similar complaint, which I addressed in chapter IV. Of course, as I said there, the distinction between

theoretical skepticism on the hand, and prescriptive and practicing skepticism on the other resolves any outright inconsistency involved in espousing the pursuit of empirical science while also espousing a serious (theoretical) skepticism.

Still, a certain worry remains. For if Hume really is a theoretical skeptic with regard to our ordinary and scientific inductive practices, why should he favor those practices over alternative methods of forming beliefs? If our accepted inductive methods are themselves totally without rational justification, why should Hume prefer and prescribe those methods as opposed to, say, the counterinductive methods I mentioned in chapter VI? There seems to be a certain awkwardness in Hume's espousal of empirical science, if he is in fact a skeptic.

Though I've argued that Hume is a serious skeptic, I must admit that an awareness of the tension created by attributing skepticism to Hume while recognizing his commitment to and faith in empirical science provides a strong motivation for scholars to provide a nonskeptical reading of Hume. Yet, as I've argued in chapters I-VI, I don't think that such a reading fits Hume's texts as well as the traditional, skeptical reading does. So, how would I resolve this tension?

The simplest and most straightforward resolution of this problem comes, I think, from simply restating Hume's point that it is human nature to engage in inductive

reasoning but it is not human nature to engage in, for example, counterinductive reasoning. So, Hume can espouse the methods of empirical science because those methods are by and large an outgrowth of our ordinary patterns of inductive reasoning, and hence, like that reasoning, not to be avoided for any sustained period. Nor can Hume himself avoid putting his faith in those methods that are an outgrowth of our instinctive reasoning practices.

But I think one can also offer a slightly less straightforward but nevertheless convincing answer - an answer that acknowledges Hume's positive, scientific endeavors and his general enthusiasm for empirical science - while retaining one's interpretation of Hume as a serious theoretical skeptic. Though Hume is a theoretical skeptic with regard to our ordinary and scientific beliefs based on inductive reasoning, he is not in general a prescriptive skeptic with regard to those beliefs, and though Hume thinks our beliefs and claims about unobserved matters of fact are ultimately unjustified, he does not say that we should stop holding those beliefs or making those claims. Hume was a proponent of the empirical approach to science and was opposed to both superstition and Cartesian rationalism. Hume could distinguish between those practices, such as observation-based induction, which are instinctive, and supposed sources of knowledge such as mysticism. Hume would also distinguish between, for example, Newton's physics and Descartes' more ambitious metaphysical claims.

How would Hume make these distinctions? As I said in chapter IV, I believe that for Hume a factual claim may be "justified" in a secondary sense insofar as it is formed in accordance with our natural, instinctive inferential practices when those practices have been reflected on and perhaps refined, as in scientific investigation, though those practices themselves and hence that claim too are ultimately without rational justification. Certain beliefs are justified from within our instinctive practices, that is, presupposing the reliability of those practices, while others are unjustified even if we presuppose the reliability of our instinctive practices. When we hold beliefs based on observation-based inductive inference we're doing what we must given that we have no choice but to hold beliefs and draw conclusions about the world in order to live. Such beliefs, though ultimately unjustified, are justified relative to the inferential procedures that are instinctive to us and hence ultimately unavoidable. In short, while I concede to Baier that there is a sense of 'justified' in which Hume thinks our scientific beliefs are justified, this is not a form of justification which supports a nonskeptical interpretation of Hume.

Of course, if one were inclined to read Hume wholly as a proponent of *naturalism* one would be inclined to insist that Hume is not concerned with issues of ultimate justification but only with providing naturalistic explanations of mental phenomena.<sup>2</sup> David Pears, in Hume's System: An Examination of the First Book of his Treatise (Pears [1990]), claims that Hume is not a skeptic but rather a "cautious naturalist." According to Pears, Hume

...is not a sceptic about causation, because the extra content of causal statements about which he might have been a sceptic is<sub>3</sub> eliminated by his theory of meaning (Pears [1990], 64).

Yet, Pears says, Hume is not a reductionist about causal statements, that is, Hume does not think that a causal generalization such as "A's cause B's" is simply equivalent in meaning to the claim that thus far all observed A's have been followed by B's. Rather, though the evidence a person has for a causal generalization and a particular predictive inference made on the basis of such a generalization "can only be a limited set of observed conjunctions...", if we ask what the person *means* by the generalization, Hume's answer

...must be that he means something audacious: he is claiming that the conjunction is constant for ever, and, therefore, includes the *further* case about which he is now drawing the conclusion...Hume is not making causal inferences safe by confining them to a limited set of observed conjunctions... (Pears, 80).

So though Hume puts a restriction on the type of evidence--it will be more and more instances of the same conjunction--he never reduces the content of the general causal belief to any finite sequence of instances. The belief is always audacious...(Pears, 86).

According to Pears, though Hume leaves a gap between our causal beliefs and the evidence we have for them, the test of whether Hume believes in causal necessity is "whether he is prepared to make audacious causal inferences," which, of course, he is (Pears, 79). Pears writes,

...his belief in causal necessity is manifested in his readiness to make audacious causal inferences and in his approval of the same readiness in others (Pears, 78-9).

I find Pears' treatment of Hume somewhat puzzling. On the one hand, Pears wants to say that Hume is not a skeptic. On the other hand, in considering Hume's treatment of causation and induction, and our knowledge of the external world, Pears concludes that in each case Hume's theory yields skeptical results. It seems, however, that because he thinks Hume is not a skeptic, Pears has to see Hume as trying and failing at the project of providing sufficient rational grounds for our inductive inferences and beliefs within the context of a naturalistic theory. According to Pears, Hume's empiricist theory simply leaves him with insufficient resources for accounting for our causal inferences and beliefs.



There is a general issue of textual interpretation raised by Pears' interpretation of Hume. Pears says that Hume started out to answer philosophical questions in the light of naturalistic, psychological theories. Yet he doesn't see the fact that Hume's answers to certain philosophical questions support skepticism as evidence that Hume is in any way a skeptic. It is as if Pears thinks that Hume either simply didn't recognize the skeptical results of his investigations or recognized them but didn't take them seriously. I find this reading implausible in general. For it seems to me that Hume would have and did in fact recognize the skeptical results of his investigations. It also seems that Hume took these results seriously as theoretical results. Hume's recognition of the skeptical results of much of his philosophizing and his appreciation of the theoretical importance of those results are manifested in many passages throughout the Treatise and the first Enquiry. I have quoted many such passages throughout this work and will not repeat them here.

As I see it, there are three main specific claims made by Pears that must be addressed:

(1) Pears' claim that Hume's willingness to make audacious causal claims shows that he is not a skeptic about causal necessity.

(2) Pears' claim that Hume's theory of meaning eliminates the alleged extra content of causal statements that would allow for skepticism.

(3) Pears' claim that Hume recognizes the audacious character of causal generalizations and singular causal inferences.

Consider (1). Pears' claim that Hume's willingness to make audacious causal claims shows that he is not a skeptic about causal necessity is answered in terms of the distinction between theoretical, prescriptive, and practical skepticisms. Hume's willingness to make audacious causal claims and his approval of such willingness in others shows only that he is not generally a prescriptive or a practicing skeptic. It does not show that he is not a serious theoretical skeptic. In fact, reading Hume as a theoretical but (in general) not a prescriptive or practicing skeptic makes sense of a central fact that Pears himself recognizes: Hume employs and endorses beliefs and forms of reasoning which he thinks, on the basis of his own philosophical views, cannot be rationally justified. Reading Hume in light of such a distinction is, I believe, far more plausible than supposing that he somehow failed to recognize or failed to take seriously the skeptical results of much of his reasoning.

I will address points (2) and (3) together. First, (2) is, of course, controversial. Galen Strawson, for example,

holds that Hume does believe that there is such a thing as objective necessary connections or "causal powers" in the world (powers which are responsible for the regularities we observe) but that Hume thinks that we have only a relative idea of objective necessity or causal power, have no access to it, and therefore have no way of verifying any claim that such a connection holds.<sup>4</sup> According to Strawson, it is Hume's recognition of the extra content of causal beliefs - a content involving a reference to an objective necessity of which we have no impression-contentful idea - that allows him to be a skeptic with regard to our alleged knowledge of causal connections.<sup>5</sup>

Second, Pears himself says, correctly, that Hume does not reduce causal statements to reports of hitherto observed conjunctions and that Hume sees our causal claims as "audacious." So, we need not get into the issue of whether or not Hume believes in objective necessary connections or thinks we can have even a relative idea of such connections. For we can see that the issue of content is irrelevant to Hume's skepticism about our causal claims. The claim that A's cause B's entails, on Hume's view, the claim that all A's and B's, past, present, and future, are conjoined. But how can we justify such a claim? Only by presupposing the UP. But how can we justify the UP? We can't! So, we can't justify the claim that A's cause B's even when that is not taken to involve claims or pseudo-claims about objective necessary connections. The central point is that given Hume's argument for inductive

skepticism and his characterization of causation in terms of constant conjunction, we can never be sure that we have a real case of causal connection on the basis of which we can make inferences.

## 2.2

Of course, one might reject Pears' reading of Hume but nevertheless see Hume purely as a proponent of *naturalism*. One might insist that "relative justification" is justification *period*, because that's all the justification we can hope to get. Still, though Hume, pursuing his science of man, provides naturalistic, psychological explanations of beliefs, I see no reason to think that Hume thought the only legitimate questions regarding rational justification are those that take for granted the legitimacy of our scientific, inductive practices. I believe that reading Hume as a 'naturalist' as that term is used today is a mistake.

Why do I believe that reading Hume as a modern-day naturalist is a mistake? Before I answer that question, I should clarify what I mean by 'naturalism' and 'naturalist'. There are many different philosophical positions that fall under the heading of 'naturalism', but here I am speaking of what may be called 'epistemological naturalism', that is, naturalism as applied to epistemological issues. I cannot discuss here the details of the positions of particular epistemological naturalists. Epistemological naturalism is associated with people such as Willard Quine, Alvin Goldman,

and Hilary Kornblith, among others. Many if not most of those who consider themselves naturalists with regard to epistemology would not accept Quine's view that epistemology as a normative enterprise should be abandoned in favor of descriptive psychology, and again, I cannot discuss details of competing epistemological naturalisms. But I will state three basic principles that I believe are characteristic of epistemological naturalism and which jointly constitute a relatively uncontroversial characterization of generic epistemological naturalism.

Epistemological *naturalism*, as I understand it, is characterized by the following three basic principles:

(1) (i) Normative epistemic facts supervene on nonnormative, descriptive facts and (ii) The concept of justification is to be analyzed in such a way that normative concepts and evidential considerations are not employed in the analysis as primitive. In other words, normative concepts are to be used in analyzing the concept of justification only if a further analysis of those normative concepts in non-normative terms is or at least can be provided.<sup>6</sup>

(2) Justification of beliefs is *external*. The factors that justify a belief are not necessarily something to which the believer has access. For these factors may include, for example, a psychological or neurophysiological state or process of the person himself which is not available on

reflection, or facts about the reliability of perceptual processes measured in terms of ratio of production of true to false beliefs, to which the believer has no access.

(3) Empirical science must at some stage play a role in the project of epistemology and hence it is legitimate to employ (that is, we are rationally justified in employing) scientific induction in showing that certain kinds of beliefs are rationally justified.<sup>7</sup>

A person who holds (1) - (3) would, then, be an epistemological naturalist, though not everyone who would be considered an epistemological naturalist would hold all of (1) - (3). But as I understand epistemological naturalism, all naturalists would hold (3). It is the turn to empirical sciences such as psychology, neuro-science, and physiology (either as replacements for traditional epistemology or as contributors to epistemological investigation) that marks off naturalists from more traditional epistemologists.

So, again, why do I believe that we should not read Hume as a modern-day epistemological naturalist? Throughout the Treatise and the first Enquiry Hume asks for the rational justification of our beliefs and practices. Though he finds that many of our beliefs and practices have, ultimately, no rational justification, that result doesn't alter the fact that Hume pursues the traditional epistemological project of assessing beliefs and inferential

practices in terms of evidence and rational justification. Hume is not doing only psychology in these works. So Hume is not a Quinean naturalist.

The "relative" justification of our beliefs based on inductive inference does not seem to be the only sort of justification Hume was searching for, even though in the end that's all he finds. Further, Hume's argument for inductive skepticism is itself motivated by the search for the justification of inductive inference, so it clearly doesn't take place only from within a science that accepts such inference without question. So Hume would, I believe, reject (3), the epistemological naturalist's appeal to empirical science as a legitimate part of an epistemological project seeking to show that certain kinds of beliefs are rationally justified. For the claims of empirical science are not themselves rationally justified, on Hume's view.

Hume would also reject (2), the view that justification is external. Hume's examinations of our beliefs proceed on the assumption that if a person is justified in believing P, he has access to whatever it is that justifies him in believing P, whether that is another belief or an experience. For example, when Hume finds, in considering his causal inferences, that neither his reasoning or reason-based beliefs nor his experiences or experience-based beliefs justifies his belief in the UP he concludes not that its justification must lie elsewhere but that it cannot be

justified. Hume, then, falls on the internalist side of the externalist/internalist distinction.

In Naturalizing Epistemology, Hilary Kornblith has argued that since our cognitive processes are by nature biased toward true beliefs, in general "the processes by which we arrive at beliefs just are those by which we ought to arrive at them" (Kornblith [1987], 5). Far from suggesting, a la Kornblith, that those beliefs we naturally form are likely to be true or are those we "ought" (in a full-blown, non-relative, normative sense) to form, Hume thinks that many of our important natural beliefs are, though unavoidable, either false or lacking rational justification.<sup>8</sup>

Though Hume himself engages in a *posteriori* explanation of beliefs, this is not part of a project of analyzing the concept of justification or of showing that certain beliefs are justified. Far from asserting that beliefs formed through, for example, scientific induction, are justified, Hume explicitly says that such beliefs are unjustified. Hume does not suggest that justification in some way supervenes on the natural psychological properties and processes he describes and employs in his explanations of our beliefs and inferential practices. The *a posteriori* project is undertaken by Hume primarily when the project of justifying a set of beliefs has, according to Hume himself, failed.<sup>9</sup> Hume does not then go on to say that the natural, psychological properties and processes he refers to in his



explanations themselves give rise to epistemic properties such as justification or reasonableness. In fact, he laments the fact that "trivial qualities" of the imagination and "false suppositions" give rise to some of our most important beliefs, such as the belief in a continued and independent world of material objects (T, I.IV.II, 217).

So, though it is not clear that Hume would reject (ii) of (1), he certainly does not seem to commit himself to it. Hume also does not tell us that he holds (i) of (1), though for all I know he may.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, Hume does not seem to commit himself to any one of (1)-(3), the three principles that are characteristic of epistemological naturalism. Moreover, his actual procedures suggest that he rejects (or would reject if he considered) both (2) and, most importantly, (3). At any rate, the main issue I have been discussing is whether Hume thinks that relative justification is rational justification period. And I think that the answer is no, for again, Hume's argument for inductive skepticism is itself motivated by the search for the justification of inductive inference, so he does not accept such inference without question. And, of course, his verdict with regard to the rational justification of inductive inference is negative.

3

In "Of The Academical or Sceptical Philosophy" (E, XII, 149-65), Hume takes up the theme of skepticism and our

alleged knowledge of the external world. Hume makes several distinctions between different kinds of skepticism. Hume first distinguishes between *antecedent skepticism* and *consequent skepticism*. *Antecedent skepticism* is a form of skepticism in which prior to philosophizing one employs a universal doubt with regard to all of one's beliefs and cognitive faculties and then attempts to allay that doubt through philosophizing. Hume suggests that unqualified antecedent skepticism was proposed by Descartes, and he rejects this form of skepticism. According to Hume, if we antecedently doubt all of our beliefs and the reliability of all of our belief-forming faculties we can never get beyond the stage of doubt.<sup>11</sup> Hume writes,

The Cartesian doubt, therefore, were it ever possible to be attained by any human creature (as it plainly is not) would be entirely incurable; and no reasoning could ever bring us to a state of assurance and conviction upon any subject (E, 150).

Though Hume rejects unqualified antecedent skepticism, he thinks a moderate form of it is reasonable and even necessary as a preparative to research. This moderate antecedent "skepticism" is basically a matter of being careful in reasoning and diffident with respect to our beliefs.

*Consequent skepticism* is a form of skepticism in which after and as a result of epistemological inquiry one realizes that our human cognitive faculties are not fit to reach the truth in metaphysics and that even in science and

common life our beliefs are ultimately lacking rational justification (E, 150). Hume does hold a form of consequent skepticism which I will specify more fully in the course of this chapter.

Hume also distinguishes *skepticism with regard to reason* from *skepticism with regard to the senses*. *Skepticism with regard to reason* applies to our supposed a priori knowledge based on reasoning about relations of ideas as well as to our supposed a posteriori knowledge based on inductive inference. Insofar as it is directed at our alleged a posteriori knowledge skepticism with regard to reason is based on Hume's argument for inductive skepticism, which I have already treated at length in chapters II, III, IV, and V. Skepticism with regard to reason arises with reference to our alleged a priori knowledge largely from puzzles concerning our ideas about space and time. Hume's attitude toward skepticism concerning our alleged a priori knowledge is not clear.<sup>12</sup> He writes,

How any clear, distinct idea can contain circumstances, contradictory to itself, or to any other clear, distinct idea, is absolutely incomprehensible; and is, perhaps, as absurd as any proposition, which can be formed. So nothing can be more skeptical, or more full of doubt and hesitation, than this scepticism itself, which arises from some of the paradoxical conclusions of geometry or the science of quantity (E, 157-8).

*Skepticism with regard to the senses* consists in the view that the senses provide us with no basis for claiming

knowledge of an external world. This skepticism arises from the Humean analysis of causation combined with the theory of ideas. As we saw in chapter V, according to Hume, in our instinctive or common-sense view we don't distinguish between an immediate or direct object of perception and a mediate or indirect object of perception. Ordinarily we think that in sense perception we are immediately aware of objects that exist independently of us. Our ordinary view, in other words, is that in normal cases of observation we are immediately aware of mind-independent external objects. This view is often called *naive or direct realism*. Hume says that we

...always suppose the very images, presented by the senses, to be the external objects, and never entertain any suspicion, that the one are nothing but representations of the other. This very table, which we see white, and which we feel hard, is believed to exist, independent of our perception, and to be something external to our mind, which perceives it (E, 151-2).

But, Hume says, only a bit of reflection is sufficient to show us that our ordinary view is not correct; nothing can be present to a mind but a perception. Why should we think that we have direct access to perceptions only? The main reason to which Hume refers in the Enquiry is perceptual relativity. He writes,

The table which we see, seems to diminish, as we remove farther from it: but the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration: it was, therefore, nothing but its image, which was present to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason; and no man, who reflects, ever doubted, that the existences, which we

consider, when we say, *this house* and *that tree*, are nothing but perceptions in the mind...(E, 152).

At any rate, reflection on the weakness of the common-sense view gives rise to a philosophical theory according to which we are immediately aware of our own perceptions but these correspond to independent material objects that cause them. The philosophical theory is the representative or indirect realism of, for example, John Locke.

But the philosophical theory itself has skeptical consequences. The existence of independent material objects which cause our perceptions of them is a question of fact. On the philosophical theory we are not directly aware of these objects. So if we are to know of their existence we must infer that they exist from what we are directly aware of, our perceptions. But our only basis for inference to unobserved entities is causal reasoning, which requires experience of the regular conjunction of things of two kinds. But in the present case we have experience of the perceptions only. So we have no experience of a constant conjunction between supposed independent material objects and our perceptions. So we have no experiential basis for inferring the existence of a world of independent material objects. Hume writes,

It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects resembling them: How shall this question be determined? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent. The mind has never anything present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach

any experience of their connexion with objects. The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning (E, 153).

In other words, the claim that in addition to mind-dependent perceptions there are mind-independent material objects that cause them is a claim of fact. But there is no way to confirm it. The only way to confirm such a claim is by causal reasoning but causal reasoning requires that we have experience of both the cause, in this case the alleged mind-independent material object, and the effect, in this case the perception. But we have no access to mind-independent entities. So the philosophical theory is groundless.

Hume rejects what he refers to as the more "trite" observations concerning misleading sense experiences, those that "...are derived from the imperfection and fallaciousness of our organs..." such as "the crooked appearance of an oar in water..." (E, 151). Descartes' Dreaming argument in the Meditations and Hume's skeptical argument in Section XII both make the same basic point: All of the empirical (perceptual) evidence we could ever get would be consistent with the hypothesis that there is no external material world at all. Hume's rejection of "trite" observations concerning the occasional deceptiveness of sense experience parallels Descartes' move, in the first *Meditation*, from the argument from sense deception - the observation that "...from time to time...the senses deceive,

and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once" - to the dreaming argument (Descartes [[1984] (1641)], 12). Neither Descartes nor Hume wants to base the skeptical doubt concerning an external world merely on the claim that the senses are sometimes deceptive.

For Descartes, the problem of justifying our beliefs about the existence and nature of the external world on the supposition that we are immediately aware only of perceptions can be overcome through proof of the existence of a nondeceiving God. But Hume dismisses Descartes' argument for mind-independent material objects.<sup>13</sup> For Hume, with his empiricist view that causation is our only means for discovering unobserved matters of fact and that causal relations can only be discovered empirically, this problem is theoretically unsolvable. On this topic "the profounder and more philosophical sceptics will always triumph," according to Hume (E, 153).

So our instinctive view is clearly incorrect. But we cannot confirm our reflective theory at all. We can have no empirical evidence for its truth. So we can choose between a false view and a view for which we can amass no evidence whatsoever. Thus Hume, in the Enquiry, which he wished to be taken as his last word on epistemological and metaphysical topics, produces a skeptical argument concerning our alleged knowledge of the external world.<sup>14</sup> This argument, moreover, is based on his own views about perception and causal

inference and it is one which "will always triumph," according to Hume himself.

4

What kind of skeptic is Hume? It is perhaps better to ask what kinds of skeptic Hume is. The particular forms of skepticism Hume holds are determined by his views on many topics, including the genesis of our ideas, the lack of rational justification of inductive inference, and his theory of belief. Hume's view of human nature largely determines the forms of skepticism he accepts and the forms of skepticism he does not accept. It is not that there is some *a priori* logical relation between, say, theoretical and consequent skepticism that determines exactly what forms of skepticism Hume holds. It seems to me that the theoretical/prescriptive and consequent/antecedent distinctions are largely independent, with one exception: If one held an unmitigated antecedent prescriptive skepticism and followed one's own prescriptions, then presumably one would not engage in the theoretical work needed to produce a consequent skepticism.

So, again, what kinds of skeptic is Hume? Hume accepts *moderate antecedent* skepticism. But this isn't really much of a skepticism. Antecedent skepticism is basically a commitment to careful inquiry. But Hume is more of a skeptic than this. Hume also adopts *consequent* skepticism: Hume thinks that our faculties do not fit us to have justified



beliefs in metaphysical matters that go beyond the range of experience. According to Hume we can show that a thing exists only by perceiving it or reasoning from some object which is its causal correlate, the existence of which we know independently - ultimately on the basis of impressions. And our knowledge of cause and effect comes only empirically. So all of our justified existence claims must, directly or indirectly, be anchored in impressions. We lack any justification for asserting the existence of anything that cannot be so anchored. Hume would not, for example, accept Descartes' ontological argument for the existence of God.<sup>15</sup> Hume would also reject Plato's claims about the existence of Forms. Claims about necessary connections are also unjustified; we have no basis in logic or experience for asserting that there are necessary connections between objects considered in themselves. And of course, realism with regard to a mind-independent material world is also rationally unjustified.

But Hume's consequent skepticism extends further than metaphysics. Even our ordinary everyday and scientific claims are ultimately without rational justification insofar as they are based on moral and hence inductive inference and hence presuppose the UP. For we have no way whatsoever of justifying our belief that the UP is true.

Note, however, that in saying that the beliefs in mind-independent material things, necessary connections, forms, etc., are unjustified Hume is not himself asserting or

claiming to know that such things do not exist. His point is that we can't know or even have good reason to believe that such objects *do* exist.

The kind of skepticism Hume does not accept is *Pyrrhonism*. Pyrrhonism is, according to Hume, an extreme form of skepticism which not only holds that all of our beliefs are without rational foundation but prescribes suspension of belief and judgment.<sup>16</sup> Hume says that this form of skepticism, insofar as it prescribes suspension of belief and judgment, is impossible for us. We must believe and judge; there are certain things which it is simply not in our power to refrain from believing.

Hume thinks that it is not in our power to effect the suspension of belief prescribed by the Pyrrhonists. Even if it were, such a suspension of belief could lead to nothing but our ruin. But even though Hume rejects the skepticism of the Pyrrhonists, he says that we must "act and reason and believe," not because our beliefs are rationally justified, but in spite of the fact that ultimately we cannot support our beliefs. The supposed Pyrrhonist, when he is awakened from his Pyrrhonistic dreams by the demands of life, will laugh at himself because he will recognize

...the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they are not able, by their most diligent enquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundation of these operations, or to remove the objections, which may be raised against them (E, 160).

In short, we must hold and act on beliefs which are ultimately without rational justification.

So, clearly Hume's consequent skepticism is not Pyrrhonian. But one might still wonder: just what is Hume's attitude toward skepticism? After all, some scholars claim that Hume is not really a skeptic and, as I said earlier, there is a *prima facie* plausibility to the suggestion that if Hume really thought that our beliefs are ultimately without rational justification he could not consistently espouse the pursuit of empirical science, in particular, the science of human nature. Doesn't Hume's espousal of empirical scientific investigation show that he was not himself a serious skeptic?

The answer to that question requires, once again, the distinction between *theoretical skepticism* (the view that the members of a certain general class of beliefs or claims are not rationally justified and hence cannot constitute knowledge) and *prescriptive skepticism* (the view that we should abstain from holding certain beliefs or making certain claims because those beliefs or claims lack rational justification). The Pyrrhonists (accepting Hume's characterization of them) were prescriptive skeptics and tried to be practicing skeptics (that is, they tried to follow the prescriptions of prescriptive skepticism, and hence to refrain from holding certain beliefs or making certain knowledge claims).

One can, without inconsistency, be a theoretical skeptic without being a prescriptive or practicing skeptic. As I said in chapter I, the claim that a certain class of beliefs are unjustified does not commit one to the further claim that people should refrain from holding such beliefs. One can be a theoretical skeptic in holding that beliefs and claims about, say, the existence of a mind-independent external world are ultimately rationally unjustified without prescribing or engaging in a suspension of beliefs and claims about that world.

Hume strongly suggests the distinction between theoretical and prescriptive/practicing skepticism and further suggests that his own skepticism is theoretical, in "Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding" (E IV, 25-39). After presenting (what I interpret as) the argument for inductive skepticism, Hume addresses a likely objection:

My practice, you say, refutes my doubts. But you mistake the purport of my question. As an agent, I am quite satisfied in the point; but as a philosopher, who has some share of curiosity, I will not say scepticism, I want to learn the foundation of this inference (E, IV.II, 38).<sup>17</sup>

Hume is a theoretical skeptic with regard to our beliefs in and claims about unobserved matters of fact. As I pointed out in chapter IV, when Hume sets out the considerations that will give the skeptic reason for triumph it is his own view of causation and his own argument for inductive skepticism to which he refers:

The sceptic, therefore, had better keep within his proper sphere, and display those philosophical objections, which arise from more profound researches. Here he seems to have ample matter of triumph; while he justly insists, that all our evidence for any matter of fact, which lies beyond the testimony of sense or memory, is derived entirely from the relation of cause and effect; that we have no other idea of this relation than that of two objects, which have been frequently conjoined together; that we have no argument to convince us, that objects, which have, in our experience, been frequently conjoined, will likewise, in other instances, be conjoined in the same manner; and that nothing leads us to this inference but custom or a certain instinct of our nature; which it is indeed difficult to resist, but which, like other instincts, may be fallacious and deceitful. While the sceptic insists upon these topics, he shows his force, or rather, indeed, his own and our weakness; and seems, for the time at least, to destroy all assurance and conviction (E, XII.II, 159).

As I pointed out in chapter V, skepticism concerning the external world perfectly fits Hume's analysis of causal inference combined with his view that "...nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception" (E, 152). We simply lack the "data base" necessary for the employment of causal inference.

When Hume makes comments suggesting that there are no skeptics, he means that there are no *Pyrrhonists* - because a total suspension of belief and judgment is not possible for us. Hume refers to the "excessive principles of scepticism" as *Pyrrhonism*, and he says that what defeats *Pyrrhonism* is our need to act: "The great subverter of *Pyrrhonism* or the excessive principles of scepticism is action, and employment, and the occupations of life" (E, 158-59). This suggests that *Pyrrhonism* is defeated insofar

as it prescribes abstaining from judgment, not insofar as it makes the theoretical claim that our beliefs lack rational justification.

Though Hume is a theoretical skeptic with regard to our ordinary and scientific beliefs in unobserved matters of fact he is not in general a prescriptive skeptic. Though Hume thinks our beliefs and claims about unobserved matters of fact are ultimately unjustified, he does not say that we should stop holding those beliefs or making those claims. In fact, Hume was a proponent of the empirical approach to science and was opposed to superstition, and Cartesian rationalism. Hume could distinguish between those practices such as observation-based induction which are instinctive, and supposed sources of knowledge such as mysticism. Hume would distinguish between Newton's physics and Descartes' more ambitious metaphysical claims.

How would Hume make these distinctions? As I said earlier, I believe that for Hume a factual claim may be justified in a secondary sense insofar as it is formed in accordance with our instinctive inferential practices when those practices have been reflected on and perhaps refined, as in scientific investigation, though those practices themselves and hence that claim too are ultimately without rational justification. Certain beliefs are justified from within our instinctive practices, while others are unjustified even if we presuppose the reliability of our instinctive practices. When we hold beliefs based on

observation-based inductive inference we're doing what we must given that we have no choice but to hold beliefs and draw conclusions about the world in order to live.

The useful, mitigated prescriptive skepticism that Hume accepts prescribes diffidence or anti-dogmatism with respect to our beliefs, carefulness in drawing conclusions, and limiting our inquiries to those subjects our minds are fit to deal with: math, logic, empirical science, and the study of human nature. (See E, XII.III, 161-5) Hume is a prescriptive and practicing skeptic only with regard to claims which involve terms that are without meaning because they do not stand for any idea that is derivable from impressions, metaphysical and theological claims which go beyond the limits of experience and yet are not instinctive, and claims which are made on the basis of noninstinctive inferential practices such as crystal ball gazing.<sup>18</sup> So though Hume is a serious theoretical skeptic he holds only a limited prescriptive skepticism. So Hume is a moderate prescriptive antecedent skeptic, a mitigated prescriptive consequent skeptic, and an unmitigated theoretical consequent skeptic with regard to our beliefs about unobserved matters of fact.

5

I believe, then, that examination of the texts of Hume's Treatise, Abstract, and first Enquiry supports the traditional interpretation of Hume as a serious theoretical

skeptic. This is not to say that one need not be careful in attributing skepticism to Hume. In attributing skepticism to Hume one must distinguish between theoretical, prescriptive/practical, and conceptual skepticisms, in order to do justice to Hume's thought. Hume is a skeptic of each of these kinds to some extent. But while Hume's theoretical skepticism is extensive, his conceptual skepticism and his prescriptive/practical skepticism are, though important, much more limited. It is Hume's theoretical skepticism, especially insofar as it is directed at our inductive inferences and our belief in a mind-independent world of material objects, that should lead us to regard Hume as perhaps the most formidable skeptic in the history of Western philosophy.



## Notes to Chapter VII

1. As I said in chapter VI, in my opinion Hume's skeptical pronouncements simply do not seem to be ironic. Again, I will leave this to the decision of the reader. But as I said earlier, if we are to take Hume's skeptical pronouncements as ironic, then we must maintain that for some reason he made very many such pronouncements in contexts in which his substantive arguments would suggest support for skepticism. This, despite the fact that he was generally a clear and straightforward writer concerned that his work be well-received. Further, we must explain away the seeming fit between Hume's serious substantive analyses of topics including probable reasoning and causation and his allegedly ironic skepticism.

2. As David Fate Norton points out (Norton [1982]), Hume is a naturalist in several ways: for example, he follows the methods of the other natural sciences, and he provides explanations appealing to human nature which are devoid of theological principles. But Norton argues that Hume was both a naturalist and a skeptic. One may interpret Hume as a naturalist of some kind without denying his skepticism. [Wade L. Robison also makes the point that Hume is both naturalist and skeptic. See Robison [1976].] That is why I say that if one were inclined to interpret Hume wholly as a naturalist one would be inclined to deny his skepticism.

3. All references to Pears are to Pears [1990] unless otherwise indicated.

4. See The Secret Connection, (Strawson [1989]).

5. I am not convinced by Strawson's claim that Hume recognizes our possession of referential but not impression-contentful ideas. For a forceful critical response to Strawson's interpretation of Hume see "The New Hume" (Winkler [1991]).

6. Again, not all of those who would consider themselves proponents of naturalized epistemology would accept my characterization in all its respects. According to Willard Quine, the normative concepts of traditional epistemology should be abandoned in favor of purely descriptive concepts of a scientific, naturalized epistemology. This new epistemology will seek not justification of our beliefs but rather scientific explanation of how those beliefs are produced on the basis of sensory input. So analyzing the normative concepts of traditional epistemology won't be a part of naturalized epistemology at all, for Quine. See his "Epistemology Naturalized," (Quine [1969]).

7. I say that epistemological naturalism includes the view that empirical science must at some stage play a role in the project of epistemology because epistemological naturalists differ as to just where empirical investigation comes into the epistemological project. For example, for Quine science comes in at the very beginning of a naturalized epistemology, but for Alvin Goldman science comes in only in the last of three stages of epistemological investigation, after an a priori investigation which in its first two stages (1) establishes the relationship between justification and justificational rules, and (2) specifies a criterion for the correctness of a system of justificational rules. The criterion for the correctness of a system of justificational rules is, for Goldman, reliability. Only at the third stage - the stage at which it is to be determined what in fact are the reliable cognitive processes available to humans - does empirical science enter the picture. See the introduction to Goldman's Epistemology and Cognition (Goldman [1986]), especially page 9.

8. Our belief in an external world of material objects and our belief that nature is uniform are two prime examples of beliefs that according to Hume are natural, unavoidable, and without rational justification. Our common sense belief that in sense experience we are directly acquainted with mind-independent objects is a prime example of a belief that according to Hume is natural and yet false.

9. I am not claiming that Hume's philosophical and his psychological investigations are fully unrelated. In "David Hume: Naturalist and Meta-sceptic," Wade Robison argues forcefully that Hume's theory of association is intended to

show how various kinds of empirical judgments are possible. Robison writes,

...Hume's Newtonian pretensions have a philosophical point: how are certain empirical judgments possible? They are possible, Hume is claiming, only if some of our thought are tied together by some natural relations.

If we cannot even make certain judgments unless certain of our thoughts are related by the principle of association, the traditional splitting off of Hume's psychological from his philosophical concerns is mistaken (Robison [1976], 25).

Note, however, that to allow that Hume's psychological theories have this philosophical point is not to deny that one can distinguish logical and psychological theses in Hume's philosophy. For example, the distinction between propositions stating relations of ideas and those stating matters of fact can be presented as a nonpsychological logical and epistemological principle which is logically independent of the theory of association. Nor does acceptance of Robison's point require abandoning the interpretation of Hume as a skeptic. Robison himself regards Hume as a skeptic. According to Robison, Hume's skepticism, if correct, is "devastating to our pretensions of rationality" (Robison [1976], 27).

10. As a nonnaturalist who accepts (i) the view that normative epistemic facts supervene on nonnormative, descriptive facts Hume would not be alone. Roderick Chisholm accepts both (i) and (ii) the view that the concept of justification is to be analyzed in such a way that normative concepts and evidential considerations are not employed in the analysis as primitive. Yet Chisholm is ordinarily regarded as an opponent of epistemological naturalism - largely because he rejects the claim that empirical science plays a role in normative epistemology.

11. Hume suggests that Descartes proposed unqualified antecedent skepticism. But Descartes' reliance on the "Light of Nature" and beliefs recognized thereby suggests that he recognized the point Hume is making about unmitigated antecedent skepticism and did not put literally *all* of his cognitive faculties and beliefs in doubt. So Hume's imputation to Descartes of unmitigated antecedent skepticism as Hume characterizes it is, I think, inaccurate.

12. Hume's apparent ambivalence about skepticism with regard to a *a priori* reasoning may be, as Flew suggests, a result of his unwillingness to give comfort to those who would employ paradox to humble human reason in order to press the interests of religious faith. See Flew [1961], 255-6.

13. Hume writes,

To have recourse to the veracity of the supreme Being, in order to prove the veracity of our senses, is surely making a very unexpected circuit. If his veracity were at all concerned in this matter, our senses would be entirely infallible; because it is not possible that he can ever deceive. Not to mention, that, if the external world be once called in question, we shall be at a loss to find arguments, by which we may prove the existence of that Being or any of his attributes (E, 153).

14. When I say "Hume, in the Enquiry... produces a skeptical argument concerning our alleged knowledge of the external world," I don't mean to suggest that this argument is new. The argument presented in the Enquiry is basically the same as that presented in the Treatise, I.IV.II.

15. Hume writes,

Whatever *is* may not be. No negation of a fact can involve a contradiction. The non-existence of any being, without exception, is as clear and distinct an idea as its existence. The proposition, which affirms it not to be, however false, is no less conceivable and intelligible, than that which affirms it to be (E, XII.III, 164).

16. Various commentators have pointed out that Hume misrepresents the Pyrrhonists. For example, in Skepticism (Hookway [1990]), Christopher Hookway claims that Hume's criticism of the Pyrrhonists is misplaced. According to Hookway, when the Pyrrhonists prescribe a suspension of belief they are not using 'belief' in our sense but in a more limited sense. In this more limited sense the Pyrrhonists prescribe a suspension of belief insofar as

belief is *dogma*. Dogma, as I understand Hookway, involves a presumption of final truth about the way things really are as opposed to the way they seem. Hookway claims that the Pyrrhonist's view is that one can eschew belief as dogma though one has beliefs in a wider sense, that is, opinions about such things as one's surroundings and the ways to satisfy one's desires. Belief in this wider sense does not involve a presumption of final truth or of cognitive access to reality as opposed to appearance. We might say that in this sense the skeptic regards all of his beliefs as concerning only appearances and as defeasible. Also see Norton [1982], 255-269.

17. Hume also suggests the distinction in a footnote to his discussion of the skeptical implications of the primary quality/secondary quality distinction. Hume says that Berkeley's arguments "form the best lessons of scepticism," and that the skeptical character of those arguments is apparent from the fact that "...they admit of no answer and produce no conviction" (E, XII.II, 155). Hume means, I believe, that like his own arguments concerning our inductively derived beliefs and our belief in an external world, Berkeley's arguments produce no *stable, long-lasting* conviction. They cannot undermine our instinctive beliefs for any extended period. Still, these arguments, far from being faulty, according to Hume, "admit of no answer."

18. I think that Hume's objection to a practice such as foretelling the future through crystal ball gazing would be based on its lack of success. If in fact the predictions rendered through crystal ball gazing were regularly true, Hume would, I believe, have to admit crystal ball gazing as a legitimate means of inquiry. But note: If crystal ball gazing regularly yielded true predictions then our acceptance of it as a means of inquiry would simply be another application of our instinctive inductive practices. For then our acceptance of the deliverances of the crystal ball gazer would be based on the past regular conjunction of crystal ball gazings with true predictions.

Of course, even in the absence of regular success, inferences from, e.g., "The crystal ball says such-and-such will occur" to "Such-and-such will occur" are inductive inferences, that is, inferences from premises that do not entail a statement to that statement. And of course they are also "natural" in the sense that they are nonmiraculous. But these inferences are not the kinds of inferences we

naturally or instinctively make in that they (presumably) are not based on observation of regularities.

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