



A Humean Pattern of Justification

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A HUMEAN PATTERN OF JUSTIFICATION

Interpretations of Hume have tended to fall into two categories: naturalistic and sceptical. Those which fall into the former category see Hume as letting justification rest upon a system of natural beliefs which can neither be supported nor overthrown by reason. Those in the latter category see Hume's point as being essentially negative, that all attempts at justification either within or without a framework of natural belief are doomed. My aim in this paper is to argue that neither naturalistic nor sceptical interpretations do justice to Hume. Instead closer attention must be paid to a general pattern of justification which Hume uses, a pattern which does not rely on "natural beliefs" and which, obviously, since it is a pattern of justification, is not sceptical. My approach will be to avoid either of these two extremes by concentrating on a pattern of justification which equates justification with rationality. However, in order to do this, it will be necessary, first of all, to provide some account of what Hume means by rationality, especially as concerns its connection with truth. As we shall see, Hume's notion of justification requires that some basis in the truth be provided whenever we believe something to be worthy of acceptance. Second, it will be necessary to introduce the factor of foundations. As I see it, a foundation, for Hume, is a mechanism or some component of a mechanism for the production of belief in epistemic areas or of evaluation in moral and aesthetic areas. The concept of foundation is an explanative, not a justificatory, notion. But, although all references to foundations are made for the purpose of explaining why someone has a certain belief or makes a certain

evaluation, some foundations in addition provide a basis for justifying a belief or evaluation.

I

My main contention is that, for Hume, all justification depends on a judgment's truth. Truth is the sole criterion of justification. Since truth lies at the base of Hume's practice of justification, some account of his views on it must be given.

At the outset, it is vitally important to pay attention to the notions of truth and falsehood and the related notions of the truth-values, true and false. As I shall argue, when these terms function as part of Hume's semantic vocabulary, they serve to indicate what sorts of things can have a truth-value in the sense of having specifiable kinds of truth-conditions. On the other hand, when they function primarily as epistemic terms for Hume, they serve to indicate that the truth-value of some item can be known or established. Consequently, Hume must first distinguish the semantic class of entities that are potential bearers of the truth-values "true" or "false", and then he must distinguish from among the members of this class those which have the epistemic status of having known truth or falsehood, i.e., an ascertained truth-value. Let us, then, first consider Hume's semantics in order to find out what sorts of items he believes have truth-values and what sorts of truth-conditions these items may have.

In an important passage in the Treatise, Hume implicitly draws the distinction between the semantic and epistemic considerations mentioned above:

Reason is the discovery of truth or falsehood. Truth or falsehood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact. Whatever, therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of

being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason (T458).²

What sorts of things are incapable of this agreement or disagreement? Hume continues by giving this reply:

Now 'tis evident our passions, volitions, and actions, are not susceptible of any such agreement or disagreement; being original facts and realities, compleat in themselves, and implying no reference to other passions, volitions, and actions. 'Tis impossible, therefore, they can be pronounced either true or false, and be either contrary or conformable to reason (T458).

Hume obviously intends a contrast to be drawn between items which are *original facts and realities* and those which are not. These *original facts* cannot have a truth-value because they lack a feature necessary to having truth-value. This feature is what Hume calls *representative quality*:

A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification. When I am angry, I am actually possess'd with the passion, and in that emotion have no more reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high. 'Tis impossible, therefore, that this passion can be oppos'd by, or be contradictory to truth and reason; since this contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, consider'd as copies, with those objects, which they represent (T415).

Hume is clear that passions, volitions, and actions lack representative quality and so cannot refer to an object in order to agree or disagree with it. These things are, therefore, not representations, and it seems apparent that only representations can have a truth-value. But what things are representations? From the passage just cited we can see that ideas, at least, are representations which can copy and thereby agree or disagree with objects. However, it is not obvious that only ideas have this status. There may be other things that have the representative quality that

would permit them to refer to and so agree or disagree with objects. Since Hume has explicitly excluded from the class of representations impressions of reflection and has included all ideas, the only problematic classes are those of impressions of the memory and impressions of sensation. Impressions of the memory at least purport to be representations of past occurrences, so we can include these as representations. But what about impressions of sensation? Are these perceptions representations? There is good reason to think at least some species are:

As to those impressions, which arise from the senses, their ultimate cause is, in my opinion, perfectly inexplicable by human reason, and 'twill always be impossible to decide with certainty, whether they arise immediately from the object, or are produc'd by the creative power of the mind, or are deriv'd from the author of our being. Nor is such a question any way material to our present purpose. We may draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they be true or false; whether they represent nature justly, or be mere illusions of the senses (T84).

The impressions of the senses can represent justly or illusorily only if they are representations. It is certain from this passage that they are representations, and it is equally certain that impressions of the senses are possibly true or false. They are true, presumably, provided they agree with what they represent; false if they disagree. But it is important to note that what can be said to have a truth-value is not an impression of sensation. Rather, it is an impression of the senses alone that has the character of being a representation. Impressions of sensation comprise impressions of the senses as well as all bodily pains and pleasures (T275), and only the former can be said to be representations of objects. A feeling of pleasure or pain is like an impression of

reflection insofar as it is an original (non-representative) perception.

Thus far we have determined that the only things which can have truth-values are those things which can represent objects, viz., ideas and impressions of the memory and of the senses. In addition, we have established that having the truth-value "true" consists in the agreement of the representation with its object, what it represents, and that having the truth-value "false" consists in the disagreement of the representation with its object. But we have not as yet ascertained what is meant by the term "object" in this account, and surely this is an important question, since it is the object of the representation which specifies its truth-conditions. Therefore, let us turn to the issue of the truth-conditions of our representations.

If the object of a representation is what that representation can possibly agree or disagree with in order to give it a truth-value, what sorts of things can be objects? Hume has already given us the answer to this question:

Truth or falshood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact (T458).

Real relations of ideas and real existence and matter of fact are the truth-conditions of our representations. The emphasis on the term "real" is presumably to underscore that what is represented by the idea or the impression of the senses must be in reality the same as it is represented in the perception in order for the perception to be true. Thus, if an impression of the senses is to be true, there must exist in reality some matter of fact exactly answering to or agreeing with the matter of fact represented in the impression. In other words, what is represented must

agree with what is actual in order for the representation to be true. Still, we are far from clear yet what Hume has in mind when he writes of *relations of ideas* and of *existence and matter of fact*. Since I take the latter distinction to be fundamental to understanding the former, let us begin with a consideration of existence and matter of fact.

Without being able to argue the point here in detail, it is clear at least that matters of fact must be states of affairs, i.e., they are either particulars possessing properties, or two or more particulars (not properties or relations) standing in some relation such as, e.g., some particular being red, and two particulars being next to each other. Every impression, then, and every idea is a particular possessing properties or standing in certain relations and is as such a matter of fact or real existence. However, only some impressions, viz., impressions of the memory and of the senses have the interesting property of being states of affairs which are representations of states of affairs. Impressions of reflection and those impressions of sensation that are bodily pains and pleasures are non-representational states of affairs. They are facts which do not represent other facts. All ideas are states of affairs which represent states of affairs. If an idea represents an impression of the memory or of the senses, it is a representation of a representation of a state of affairs and would be, as a consequence, a copy of the impression with an identical object or represented state of affairs. An idea of any other impression is simply a representation of a state of affairs. It would be a representation of a non-representational perception. It is important to note that, although all perceptions are matters of fact or states of affairs, it need not be true in the converse

that all matters of fact are perceptions. What is true is that, of the impressions, only impressions of the memory and senses have the formal structure necessary to represent states of affairs, and only these impressions constitute immediate evidence for past and present states of affairs, respectively.

"Relations of ideas" I take to refer to the four intuitive/demonstrative relations of resemblance, degrees of a quality, proportions in quantity or number, and contrariety. These relations are not states of affairs, i.e., they are neither particulars possessing properties nor two or more particulars standing in a relation. But even though these relations are not states of affairs, they presuppose the existence of states of affairs. These are relations which hold (except for contrariety) between qualitative, quantitative, or relational features of states of affairs. Because these relations hold between abstract entities (properties and relations), Hume calls them *abstract relations of ideas* (T453). Our awareness of these relations is itself an idea, but different in kind from any other idea, since it does not represent one or more states of affairs, but rather how one or more states of affairs, as represented in our ideas, is qualitatively, quantitatively, or relationally constituted³ or, to put it more accurately, our awareness represents no new or additional states of affairs, but only how given states of affairs, as represented in our ideas, are constituted. This awareness is derived from an act of comparison of states of affairs and is as such an awareness of one of the truth-conditions Hume mentions. All truth-conditions reduce, then, to states of affairs and to the qualitative, quantitative, and relational constitution of states of affairs (as discerned by acts of comparison). Let us now move on from our

consideration of bearers of truth-values and of truth-conditions to a consideration of how Hume thinks that the truth-value of a given item can be established and, therefore, how truth can be attained.

Hume often speaks as if reason and truth were the same thing. For example, he asserts that *nothing can be contrary to truth or reason, except what has a reference to it* (T415, emphasis added). The fact that he speaks of truth or reason as it indicates that he either intends to identify the two concepts or at least not to distinguish them. That Hume takes truth and reason to be intimately connected, if not identical, is further confirmed by noting Hume's specification of the two kinds of truth:

Truth is of two kinds, consisting either in the discovery of the proportions of ideas, consider'd as such, or in the conformity of our ideas of objects to their real existence (T448).

Here truth is identified as a discovery, just as reason is similarly identified: *Reason is the discovery of truth or falsehood* (T458). But how is it possible that truth and reason are identical, if reason is the discovery of truth? Yet if we say that truth and reason are not identical, how can we explain the fact that they are both instances of discovery? I think the answer to these questions depends on recalling our previous distinction between two uses of the term "truth" (or "falsehood"). On the one hand, the term has a semantic use and indicates that something has a determinate truth-value: it is true (or false) in virtue of its specifiable truth-conditions. On the other hand, the term has an epistemic use and indicates that something has a discovered truth-value insofar as we have ascertained that a given item's truth-conditions actually do obtain, which is to discover *an agreement or disagreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact* (T458).

Clearly, given the above distinction, the class of things which have a truth-value need not be identical to the class of things which have a discovered or discoverable truth-value, and indeed, Hume is explicit in denying that impressions of the senses and of the memory can ever be discovered to be true or false, because what these impressions represent is inaccessible as lying beyond present states of consciousness. Only items which can be ascertained to agree or disagree with something present to consciousness can have a discoverable truth-value. And what items are these? The most plausible answer is "judgments", since Hume claims that only judgments have a reference to the truth:

... as nothing can be contrary to truth or reason, except what has a reference to it, and as the judgments of our understanding only have this reference, it must follow, that passions can be contrary to reason only so far as they are accompany'd with some judgment or opinion (T415-416).

Since Hume indicates that only judgments have a reference to truth or reason, and since we have already concluded that truth or reason is nothing but discovered truth-value, we may additionally conclude that only judgments are thought by Hume to have a discoverable truth-value, and therefore, that only judgments can be reasonable (known to be true) or unreasonable (known to be false). But what are judgments? From what has been said about truth and reason, it should be apparent that judgments are simply ideas or combinations of ideas. A judgment, such as a judgment of existence, may consist of just one idea, and so a judgment need not involve the joining or separating of ideas (T96n.).

The class of judgments, then, comprises the class of ideas which make reference to or represent formal relations and states of affairs. These judgments are capable of truth or falsity and, hence,

of reasonableness or unreasonableness to the extent that they agree or disagree with formal relations and with states of affairs. In the case of the formal relations, the relations in question are internal to the ideas constituting the judgment. Hence, the truth conditions of any judgment asserting a relation of ideas or formal relation are internal to the judgment itself. Since the truth-conditions are internal to the judgment, inspecting the ideas in that judgment is the necessary and sufficient condition for establishing its truth or falsity. Judgments about formal relations, then, constitute knowledge of necessary truths and, moreover, are the only kind of knowledge which we know we have. In other words, we not only know that $2+2=4$, we also know that we know it. Other forms of "knowledge" may yield comparable degrees of certainty, but they will lack self-evidence. Although we may be completely certain that the sun will rise tomorrow, the truth conditions of the judgment, "The sun will rise tomorrow", are external to the judgment. It is always possible that the sun will not rise tomorrow, and if it does not rise, then all my evidence is not a guarantee of truth. Only in the case of my beliefs or judgments about formal relations is there a coincidence of evidence and truth. Since the truth conditions of a judgment about formal relations are internal to that judgment, I cannot have the evidence for the formal relation without the judgment being true. In any other judgment, there must be a correspondence between the judgment and the facts or matters of fact, i.e., with observed and remembered states of affairs or impressions. These facts or matters of fact constitute evidence for the judgment of fact (E26). There are, then, two kinds of truth and corresponding to them two kinds of evidence. There is the evidence of reason, which is internal to its ideas or judgments, and there

is the evidence of sense, which is external to judgments of fact. This evidence consists in facts or matters of fact, i.e., states of affairs present to the senses or memory, i.e., impressions of the senses or impressions of the memory.

If the foregoing account is correct, we may conclude that if justification consists in showing a belief or judgment to be true, or if not true, then at least having evidence in its favor, then the only beliefs or judgments which will turn out to be justifiable for Hume are those which are judgments concerning relations of ideas and matters of fact. The only judgments which are completely justified are those which are reasonable, and only judgments which are true are, for Hume, reasonable, so only judgments concerning relations of ideas are completely justified (because self-evident) and all others, while not completely justified, still are worthy of acceptance to the degree they have evidence in their favor. The judgment or belief that the sun will rise tomorrow has all the evidence which can legitimately be expected in its favor, since the evidence can never be logically or demonstratively conclusive.

But it may be asked, where is the notorious Humean scepticism in all of this? The answer to this question will require some attention to what Hume calls "foundations". To this we now turn.

II

Hume speaks in a number of places of "foundations". He asks, e.g., about the *general foundation of Morals* (E170). He describes the four intuitive or demonstrative relations as being the *foundation of science* (T73). He describes a present impression as the *foundation of belief* (T146), and custom as the *foundation of all our judgments* about matter of

fact (T147). Hume, however, nowhere tells us exactly what a foundation is, and, as a result, we need to speculate somewhat about it. My suggestion is that a foundation is a mechanism or part of a mechanism which explains how belief (or evaluation) is generated and thereby how knowledge can be gained. A foundation is a source of belief or knowledge insofar as it enables us to have beliefs or knowledge, usually by being a factor which is the cause or part of the cause of belief.

All of the foundations may be divided into two distinct kinds, the evidential and non-evidential. As a first approximation, we can say that evidential foundations are relations of ideas and matters of fact which are given to us in institutions, demonstrations, and impressions of the memory and of the senses. Any foundation which is not included in this group is non-evidential. All of the evidential foundations are themselves beliefs (T95 and T86), beliefs in relation of ideas or in matters of fact present to the memory and senses. These beliefs function as elements in the generation of other beliefs. But the non-evidential foundations are never themselves beliefs. They are either instincts or impressions of reflection, especially sentiments. The non-evidential foundations, not being beliefs, do not constitute evidence. What they do is enable other things to be evidence by generating beliefs, without themselves being evidence or beliefs.

The principle example of a foundation which is non-evidential is, of course, custom: *All inferences from experience, therefore, are effects of custom, not of reasoning* (E43).

It is that principle alone which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom, we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact beyond

what is immediately present to the memory and senses (E44-45, emphasis added).

The operation of custom is a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought and understanding is able either to produce or to prevent (E46-47). But although custom is itself instinctive, and as such is not evidence, it enables "our experience to be useful to us" by leading us to believe in matters of fact beyond those of the memory and senses. Custom is a non-evidential foundation which enables us to have beliefs and hence knowledge of matters of fact not observed. But it is only part cause of our belief in unobserved states of affairs. In addition to the non-evidential foundation of custom, there must be an evidential foundation:

If I ask why you believe any particular matter of fact, which you relate, you must tell me some reason; and this reason will be some other fact, connected with it. But as you cannot proceed after this manner, in infinitum, you must at least terminate in some fact, which is present to your memory or senses; or must allow that your belief is entirely without foundation (E46).

In other words, neither custom by itself, nor past experience by itself is sufficient to bring about the belief in unobserved matter of fact. Only the combination of evidential and non-evidential belief-generating mechanisms produces knowledge of the future. But even this way of putting things is not entirely accurate, and here we must make more precise our initial distinction between evidential and non-evidential foundations. The memory and senses, *i.e.*, experience, do not generate belief in unobserved facts in virtue of being evidence:

'Tis merely the force and liveliness of the perception [of the memory or senses] which constitutes the first act of the judgment, and lays the foundation of that reasoning, which we

build upon it, when we trace the relation of cause and effect (T86).

Hume is saying that the impressions of the memory and senses serve as foundations or belief-generating mechanisms, not in virtue of being evidence, but rather in virtue of the non-evidential causal factors of force and liveliness:

Thus all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. 'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy. When I am convinc'd of any principle, 'tis only an idea, which strikes more strongly upon me (T103).

It is not the content of the impression or the belief, but its feeling which generates other beliefs. Nevertheless, a belief is justified, if at all, not by its feeling aspect but by its content, since it is the content alone which can be in conformity with reality, i.e., which can make a belief true. But Hume's main point is that what makes us hold beliefs about past, present, or future is never a matter of the truth of a belief but always a matter which is utterly non-rational, i.e., an instinct such as custom or the force and vivacity of an impression, not the content of an impression of the memory and senses. What makes us believe that the sun will rise tomorrow is not the fact that it has risen on innumerable occasions in the past insofar as this is a fact. Rather, the basis or foundation of our belief is that which is not a fact and can never be true because it is not a judgment or belief, viz., custom or instinct plus the feeling aspect of impressions of the memory and senses. Reasoning, which is the discovery of truth, has no influence on this generation of belief, since it can neither produce nor prevent it (E47). Since belief in unobserved fact rests entirely on a non-evidential basis, Hume calls the solution to the problem of causal

inference *sceptical* (E40). In fact, Section V of the Enquiry is entitled *Sceptical Solution of These Doubts*. But to say that a foundation causes beliefs in virtue of its non-evidential feature is not to blur the distinction between evidential and non-evidential foundations. Those which are evidential are so because they can make a judgment true or false. Impressions of the memory and senses are evidential in this sense even though we can distinguish in an impression the aspect of it which makes a judgment true or false, i.e., its content, the represented state of affairs, from the aspect which gives it its belief-generating capacity, viz., its force and vivacity or feeling.

In effect, what Hume is urging us to do is to distinguish explanation from justification. What explains our holding a belief is always different from what justifies us in holding that belief in every case except those judgments concerning relations of ideas. We can only, e.g., conceive that $2+2=4$, and, therefore, we can only believe that $2+2=4$. In every other case, i.e., in the case of beliefs concerning matter of fact, the explanation of why we believe is independent of the truth and hence of the justifiability of the belief. I believe now that there is a piece of paper before me because of the force and liveliness of the present impression, not because of its content or the nature of the state of affairs which presents itself to me. Likewise, I believe that the sun will rise tomorrow because of factors entirely unrelated to the truth, viz., the vivacity of present impressions and the effects of custom. What explains my belief in unobserved facts is something which, not being true or capable of truth nor providing me with evidence, is that which is never the object of reason and so can never be justified. All belief, and hence all knowledge about states of affairs (as opposed to

knowledge of relations of ideas), rests on a foundation utterly incapable of justification. As Hume puts it: *The memory, senses, and understanding are, therefore, all of them founded on the imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas* (T265). This is the most profound lesson of Humean scepticism: that the explanation of factual belief is completely independent of its justification. Rather than being guilty of confusing explanation and justification, Hume is explicitly prying them apart, thereby plunging us into scepticism:

I may, nay 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 (T269).

Hume's point here is well taken. If we submit to the senses and understanding and so rely on them for reasons utterly unrelated to the truth, then we are blindly, i.e., without justification, submitting to them. And if our submission is without justification, and we recognize it as such, we are showing *most perfectly* [our] *sceptical disposition and principles*, for it is the height of scepticism to admit that we believe entirely without justification.

Thus far I seem to be siding with those who interpret Hume as being a sceptic, and, indeed, there is something in the sceptical interpretation of Hume insofar as Hume does think that the explanation of beliefs in matter of fact is completely independent of their justification, i.e., we do not hold any factual belief because it is true or justified. Still, Hume saw his view as an answer to scepticism as well. But the way in which it is an answer to scepticism is consistent with the way in which it is itself sceptical. Hume's account of the way belief in matter of fact is generated shows that belief in matter of fact does not depend on truth or justification.

Consequently, a scepticism which attempts to show that belief in matter of fact is irrational or contrary to reason or false will be ineffective, since reason can neither produce nor destroy belief in matter of fact. Hence, although we do not believe in any matter of fact because it is rational to do so, we do not cease to believe in any matter of fact because we discover that it is irrational to hold such a belief. Hume's explanation of the genesis of belief allows us to avoid pyrrhonian scepticism only at the cost of Humean scepticism. We do believe some things naturally or on the basis of human nature or instinct. But "natural belief" rescues us from Pyrrhonism only to show that these beliefs are utterly without justification.

But in spite of this seeming appearance of scepticism, I think it untrue that Hume's position is entirely sceptical. However, in order to see this we must recall that Hume has at least two theories of belief, or at least two criteria of what makes something a belief. Hume says that in the case of the impressions of the memory and senses, which are beliefs in matter of fact, *the belief or assent, which always attends the memory and senses, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present...* (T86). In these instances, what makes us believe is an aspect of the presented state of affairs different from its content. But in the case of judgments about relations of ideas, *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, either immediately or by the interposition of other ideas* (T95). In other words, the person assents because he grasps a relation between ideas, which relation, as Hume puts it, is *invariable, as long as our idea remains the same* (T69). Since the relation depends on the content of the ideas, the grounds for the belief are related to the content of

the ideas, and so the belief has a foundation in truth. We are sensible that our judgment could not be what it is, a certain relation of ideas, without being true, and so we grasp it as being necessarily true. Belief here is the simple awareness that one cannot conceive contrary to one's judgment and what one cannot conceive one cannot believe.

Given that beliefs are of these two disparate sorts, we can see that there is nothing in Hume's system which entails scepticism, if scepticism is understood as the view that knowledge of necessary truths or of truths concerning matters of fact is impossible. *Truth, writes Hume, is of two kinds, consisting either in the discovery of the proportions of ideas, consider'd as such, or in the conformity of our ideas of objects to their real existence (T448).* Truth, then, is only a property of our ideas or judgments, as has already been shown. And since reason is the *discovery of truth or falshood (T458)*, all knowledge, i.e., all discovery of truth, is by reason alone. The senses and memory are not knowledge but only sources of knowledge, because they provide the evidence in the form of immediate beliefs in matter of fact. These immediate or basic beliefs can be explained but never justified, since they can never be known to be true or false, i.e., it can never be known whether they accurately represent the world. In the case of impressions of the senses:

We may draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they be true or false; whether they represent nature justly, or be mere illusions of the senses (T84).

The impressions or ideas of the memory can likewise never be known to be true, *it being impossible to recal the past impressions, in order to compare them with our present ideas, and see whether their arrangement be exactly similar (T85).* Knowledge is possible only if ideas can be seen

to agree with, i.e., resemble by being a copy of, objects as represented by impressions of the memory and senses.

Now Hume's position is that our basic beliefs or impressions of the memory and senses are utterly without rational foundation. By the same token, any basic belief in matter of fact derived from these other basic beliefs by causal inference is equally without rational foundation, since we draw the inference without any help from the evidence or truth. Custom itself is a non-evidential foundation. Consequently, what is immediately believed through an impression of the memory and senses, or what is causally inferred from it, is without rational justification. Hume's naturalism is not opposed to Hume's scepticism; it is the source from which it is derived. But, paradoxically, what rescues us from Humean scepticism or scepticism about the foundations of our knowledge of matter of fact is not instinct. That rescues us from Pyrrhonism. What rescues us from Humean scepticism is reason, by which is meant abstract or demonstrative reasoning and intuition. For Hume, it makes no important difference that our basic beliefs, our immediate impressions of the memory and senses, and our causal inferences therefrom do not have a rational foundation, i.e., are not believed because they are true. What is important is that they are believed, not why they are believed. Insofar as we have a basic belief we take something to be a fact or matter of fact. To the extent to which our judgments correspond to what we take to be facts our judgments are true, and since we are aware of this correspondence we know them to be true. Hence, whatever beliefs we have which are capable of justification at all are those which involve judgments which can be ascertained to be rational,

i.e., discovered to be true by abstract reason. Any other beliefs, such as the basic beliefs in past, present, or future matter of fact, are incapable of justification, cannot be shown to be true, and so are capable only of explanation not justification.

Hume's position is, then, a kind of scepticism, but as he himself calls it, a mitigated scepticism (E162). As contrasted with Pyrrhonism, which doubts the possibility of knowledge on any matter either of reason or matter of fact, mitigated scepticism does not deny the possibility of any knowledge whatsoever. The mitigated sceptic agrees with the Pyrrhonian that

mankind ... 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 (E160).

The mitigated sceptic is aware that the foundations are incapable of rational justification, but it is only because they are incapable of being justified that attacks on their justifiability by Pyrrhonian sceptics can never succeed. What Hume as mitigated sceptic suggests we do is ignore any attempt to refute the Pyrrhonian, since that is unnecessary, or to justify the foundations of our beliefs, since that is impossible. Instead, we should limit *our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding* (E162). And what are these subjects? By now it should be obvious: a correct judgment confines our enquiries to relations of ideas and matters of fact and real existence. Ethics and criticism or aesthetics are subjects of knowledge to the extent that we can make correct judgments about matters of fact such as the general tastes of mankind. Anything else is but "sophistry and illusion". A

correct judgment confines our enquiry to judgment about relations of ideas and about matters of fact.

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1. Perhaps the best example of the sceptical interpretation is found in Richard H. Popkin's "David Hume: His Pyrrhonism and His Critique of Pyrrhonism", The Philosophical Quarterly I (1951), reprinted in Hume, ed. V.C. Chappell (London, 1968), pp. 53-98. In the same vein, see also Terence Penelhum's Hume (London, 1975) and D.C. Stove's Probability and Hume's Inductive Scepticism (Oxford, 1973). The dominant figure on the side of the naturalistic interpretation is, of course, Norman Kemp Smith. His The Philosophy of David Hume (London, 1960) remains the seminal work.
2. In accord with common practice, I use the following abbreviations for works of Hume: E = Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1902); T = A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1888). All references are incorporated into the body of the text, with the letter abbreviated being followed by the page number.
3. Again, with the exception of the relation of contrariety, which does not conform to this pattern. Contrariety needs separate, detailed treatment, which goes beyond the scope of this paper and does not affect the argument presented here.