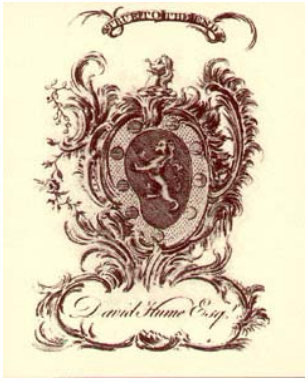

Hume's Scepticism About Reason
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HUME'S SCEPTICISM ABOUT REASON*

Hume features an extended sceptical argument of apparently unlimited scope in the puzzling opening section of Book I, Part IV of the Treatise.[1] He claims that our use of reason cannot even generate belief, much less knowledge. The argument is generally regarded as enigmatic if not downright embarrassing. Most of his recent interpreters, especially those who stress 'Hume's naturalism', avoid this section altogether.[2] Those who do mention the argument describe it as "unsuccessful," "notoriously unclear," and "unpleasant."[3] Even a sympathetic recent expositor calls it a "morass,"[4] while another commentator, obviously less sympathetic, regards the argument as "not merely defective, but one of the worst arguments ever to impose itself on a man of genius."[5]

This is unfortunate, for Hume's discussion in "Of Scepticism with Regard to Reason" fits into the general structure of the Treatise in ways that nicely "illustrate and confirm" the more familiar "preceding part of this discourse" (T 263). Hume intimates that it should do so as he moves to the last section of Book I, where he remarks that his "miscellaneous way of reasoning" in Part IV has "fully explain'd the nature of our judgment and understanding."[6] Section I of Part IV should contain a significant part of that explanation. In this essay, I show that it does. On my reading, Hume's notorious argument turns out to be not only an integral part of his project, but a successful part of it as well. Section I vindicates the claims I think Hume made for it in his Abstract[7] of the Treatise, that it

> give[s] us a notion of the imperfections and narrow limits of human

> understanding. Almost all reasoning is there reduced to experience; and the belief, which attends experience, is explained to be nothing but a peculiar sentiment, or lively conception produced by habit. (A 657)

1. From Knowledge to Probability

Hume's argument begins abruptly: "In all demonstrative sciences the rules are certain and infallible; but when we apply them, our fallible and uncertain faculties are very apt to depart from them, and fall into error" (T 180). This announces that the argument's focus is not on the proof procedures of the "demonstrative sciences" themselves, but rather on those who use them in hopes of acquiring knowledge. Hume reminds us of our fallibility, which we rarely consider when our concern is demonstrative reasoning. But as rationally reflective epistemic agents,[8] we should take our fallibility into consideration whenever we produce a proof. We ought to consider not only the status of the rules of proof, we should also assess our ability to apply the rules correctly.

To remind ourselves of our intellectual infirmities, we should try to "enlarge our view to comprehend a kind of history of all the instances, wherein our understanding has deceiv'd us ..." (T 180). We should recall those past times when we thought we had proved something and were wrong. This should lead us to be less confident that we have, on any particular occasion, actually produced a proof. As rationally reflective epistemic agents, we will -- or should -- not be content to rest with our initial confidence. We should instead "... form a new judgment, as a check or controul on our first judgment or belief" (T 180).

This "new judgment" should also convince us to back off from our original confident claim to knowledge. We must realize that the exercise of reason alone does not insure its success. Even if there is nothing wrong with our faculty of reason as such, there are other factors which can and sometimes do intervene to flaw the result. We are not guaranteed truth or knowledge just because the objects of our inquiry are in the realm of the demonstrative. Instead

> [our] reason must be consider'd as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect; but such-a-one as by the irruption of other causes, and by the inconstancy of our mental powers, may frequently be prevented. (T 180)[9]

A perfect intellect might employ a set of rules infallibly. We aren't and don't. So we should only regard it as <u>likely</u> that our calculations have produced a proof.[10] We might justifiably be more confident with simple and familiar proofs than we are with complex new ones. We may realize that we are reliable provers in some circumstances and unreliable in others. But all this concerns how <u>likely</u> we are to be correct. If we accept our fallibility and remember our past failures, then no matter how confident we remain when we have reviewed the possible sources of error, we have merely increased our assessment of the <u>probability</u> that we are right after all. It remains a probability, and as such cannot produce knowledge. So,

> [b]y this means all knowledge degenerates into probability; and this probability is greater or less, according to our experience of the veracity or deceitfulness of our understanding, and according to the simplicity or intricacy of the question. (T 180)

This may seem an incredible result, and one achieved all too quickly. Hume seems aware of this. His next two paragraphs supplement this statement of the argument.

First he asks us to look at what experts in demonstration do. Their behavior confirms the reflective recognition of our fallibility that Hume thinks is required of us as rationally reflective epistemic agents. Mathematicians, for instance, surely experts at demonstration if anyone is, don't place complete confidence in a proof they've just constructed of some previously unknown result. Instead, they wisely regard their proof as "a mere probability" (T 180). Then they check it themselves, get their colleagues to read it, and finally submit it to a journal, where it is exposed to the scrutiny of the entire mathematical community. As the proof passes through each successive stage of this review process, the mathematician rightly becomes more confident in his result. But there is always the possibility that further review might discover a flaw in the proof. After all, the history of mathematics is filled with such episodes. So even the mathematician's "gradual encrease of assurance is nothing but the addition of new probabilities" (T 180). His confidence "is deriv'd from the constant union of causes and effects, according to past experience and observation" (T 180-181). This confidence may quell the mathematician's doubts about his proof, but it cannot give him knowledge. The source of his certainty is enough to show <u>that</u>.

The mathematician's attitude doesn't just reflect the neurotic skittishness of academics. Even those who must act from calculations in practical matters -- accountants, for instance -- recognize

their fallibility, especially "in accompts of any length or importance" (T 181).[11] The same is true of the reasonable person faced with ordinary calculations in everyday life, especially where they are long and difficult, or where the subject's state is less than optimal, or where the circumstances are unpleasant or distracting.

One might object at this point that, in very simple cases, in the best of circumstances, one simply intuits the result without any need for calculating. Surely this can yield knowledge. And if this is possible in the simple arithmetical cases, it should also be possible whenever we deal with simple intuitions of relations between ideas.

Fogelin offers just this reply. He thinks that Hume "ignores the possibility that our grasp of a simple proposition concerning numbers may not involve calculations at all ... [so] the fallibility that infects our calculations need not touch our intuitive understanding" (Fogelin 1985, p. 15).

Assessing this objection demands that we also assess its account of what Hume's argument is. Fogelin treats it as if Hume were claiming that it isn't possible to determine where demonstration shades off into intuition, so that it is equally impossible to determine where probability ends and knowledge begins. This takes the argument to be a version of the Sorites Paradox, as if the difficulty here were akin to that of determining when a pile of sand becomes a heap, or a tadpole a frog.

Hume encourages this when he says that "by gradually diminishing the numbers ... we shall find it impracticable to shew the precise limits of knowledge and of probability, or discover that particular

number, at which the one ends and the other begins" (T 181).

This does sound like the Sorites. But this remark quickly gives way to Hume's real argument. He notes that any long calculation can be broken down into parts, each involving "an addition of two single numbers" (T 181). We may regard those 'additions' as intuitive. But if we do, then we can regard the entire calculation as the product of successive intuitions of the same sort. So it should be intuitively certain if all its elements are. But the objector has already admitted that we are likely to make mistakes in long calculations. Now he has no reason for granting that point, if calculations turn out just to be very long strings of infallible intuitions. His objection either forces him to deny something he has already admitted, and to which any reasonable person would agree, or else he has to admit that long calculations are fallible without being able to explain why.

If we have knowledge at the level of intuition, there is no room for probability, since the two notions are exclusive. Or if the strings of intuitions which make up a demonstration are fallible, and their elements are simply intuited, then we should, contrary to the objector's claim, also regard these intuitions as fallible.

This may seem implausible. Yet when I balance my checkbook, the figures involved are almost always simple sums in chains. Even where they are slightly more complex, they are analyzable in this way. Yet I'm notoriously fallible about the results of these operations. My errors, however, are reducible to simple mistakes involving simple numbers and simple

operations. I blame my errors on distraction, lack of interest, competing interests, and my inability to hold long chains in memory for a sufficient amount of time. These sources of error are familiar. They nonetheless provide a serious challenge to any position which claims infallibility for our 'simple additions'. If 'simple additions' are intuitions, then they are simply fallible. Even if there are some isolated circumstances in which I can be sure that I infallibly intuit a 'simple addition', this won't help me in explaining my confidence in the results of 'the demonstrative sciences'. I can't generalize from those special circumstances to all the mathematical and scientific demonstrations I now accept. Isolated intuitions will not provide an interesting or important category of things I know.

In addition, I may be wrong in my assessment of background features, or of my degree of concentration at the time. I may claim certainty not only because of my calculation but also because of my evaluation of the circumstances involved and my attitude in those circumstances. But all that involves an assessment on my part about many matters of fact. So my evaluation can at best attain a high degree of probability, not knowledge. If I factor that element into the account --as surely I should, if I'm a rationally reflective epistemic agent -- then I ought to reassess my claim to certainty.

Finally, it is my state we are assessing, not the abstract calculation. Everything depends in the end upon a particular set of matters of fact about me. This demands that we end up in the realm of probability, no matter how confident we are in our assess-

ments. While we may well have what Hume calls a 'proof', we can't have knowledge.

This probability can't become knowledge because it is about matters of fact -- not about the relations between ideas. Even if the original subject matter --the abstract calculation -- was about relations between ideas, what is relevant for the question whether we have knowledge is, for Hume, a question of fact.

The arithmetical examples used in this argument were paradigms of the knowledge 'demonstrative reasoning' is supposed to yield. These cases should work, if any do. They don't. So Hume holds that we can apply these results quite generally. When we do, he argues that we will see that "all knowledge reduces itself into probability, and becomes at last of the same nature with that evidence, which we employ in common life" (T 181).

If this is correct, then reason's role in 'demonstrative reasoning' is no different from reasoning as it figures in the acquisition of ordinary empirical belief. So "we must now examine this latter species of reasoning, and see on what foundation it stands" (T 181).

2. From Probability to Nothing

As we should expect, both from the earlier results of Book I and the previous argument, when Hume turns to "this latter species of reasoning" he observes that:

> [i]n every judgment, which we can form concerning probability, as well as concerning knowledge, we ought always to correct the first judgment, deriv'd from the nature of the object, by another judgment, deriv'd from the

> nature of the understanding. (T 181-182)

This summarizes Hume's argument in the last section. The wise person should correct his judgments about "the nature of the object" -- the mathematical proposition under consideration, for instance -- with another which reflects his assessment of himself as a fallible intellect. The result, according to Hume, is a probability assessment about a matter of fact.

With probability assessments themselves the situation is precisely parallel. Our fallibility about judgments of probability is the source of "a new uncertainty, deriv'd from the weakness of that faculty, which judges" (T 182). Reflection on these facts gives rise to

> a new species of probability to correct and regulate the first, and fix its just standard and proportion. As demonstration is liable to the controul of probability, so is probability liable to a new correction by a reflex act of the mind, wherein the nature of our understanding, and our reasoning from the first probability become our objects. (T 182)

But this isn't all. If we add our general uncertainty in matters of probability to the specific uncertainty of an assessment of probability we have just made, then as rationally reflective epistemic agents,

> we are oblig'd by our reason to add a new doubt deriv'd from the possibility of error in the estimation we make of the truth and fidelity of our faculties. This is a doubt, which immediately occurs to us, and of which, if we would closely pursue our reason, we cannot avoid giving a decision. (T 182)

We can't avoid assessing the assessments of a fallible faculty, when we think we should critically assess the

quality of our judgments of probability. Hume clearly thinks that, as rationally reflective epistemic agents, we are obliged to do the latter. But if this is correct, why should reflective evaluation of our abilities stop there? Isn't it merely arbitrary to claim that we should assess our judgments of probability, and to say that it is unnecessary to assess our ability to make assessments of this kind? Surely if the latter is fallible, the former is as well, if not more so. To stop at the first stage of assessment is sheer dogmatism, an unwarranted departure from the spirit of rationally reflective epistemic agency, unless some argument can be given to show that assessments at that stage are somehow infallible. Any such argument would overlook the fact that assessment at the second stage is also about a matter of fact, and so is about a probability. Since we have no right to claim infallibility there, no such argument could possibly succeed. So we have every reason, and as rational reflective epistemic agents, the obligation, to continue to the second stage of assessment.

Things go rapidly downhill from here. If we apply these considerations to the judgment we make at the second stage of assessment, we should also assess that judgment as an assessment of probability. This sets up a vicious infinite regress of assessments of assessments. We have no justification for stopping the procedure at any particular stage. Yet if we continue it, we continue

> till at last there remain nothing of the original probability, however great we may suppose it to have been, and however small the diminution by every new uncertainty. No finite object can subsist under a decrease repeated in infinitum; and even the vastest quantity, which can enter into

> human imagination, must in this manner be reduc'd to nothing. Let our first belief be never so strong, it must infallibly perish by passing thro' so many new examinations, of which each diminishes somewhat of its force and vigour. (T 182-183)

If we are reasonable, then, we are committed to assessing every assessment of probability we make in the light of our realization that we are highly fallible assessors. Each stage of this iterated process, Hume maintains, cannot but lessen our confidence in the original belief:

> When I reflect on the natural fallibility of my judgment, I have less confidence in my opinions, than when I only consider the objects concerning which I reason; and when I proceed still farther, to turn the scrutiny against every successive estimation I make of my faculties, all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence. (T 183)

This is a remarkable, if not outrageous, conclusion. Fogelin describes it as a "morass". He argues that the case for it is, at best, incomplete: "If we provisionally grant the general form of the argument, we can still notice that an important step is missing ... it must be shown that those diminutions [in confidence about my probabilistic opinions] do not approach zero as a limit" (Fogelin 1985, p. 17).

Fogelin's point seems to be that Hume has not proved that all opinion will be reduced to 'nothing' unless he can rule out this possibility. While this is true, Fogelin gives us no reason whatsoever to think that our confidence level would not in fact gradually diminish to total extinction. Instead, he continues:

> Hume does not anticipate this objection ... but ... he need only argue that there is some degree of probability below which the chance of error never falls. ... we will be in a perilous state if our only reply depends upon rejecting any such minimal degree of possible error. (Fogelin 1985, p. 17)

Fogelin is correct to say that Hume could block this objection by holding that there is some degree of probability below which the chance of error never falls. He is also correct to say that rejecting any such claim would smack of arbitrariness. So it doesn't provide a satisfactory reply to the original objection. The question is whether Hume <u>needs</u> any such reply. <u>Is</u> there the serious gap Fogelin claims to find in Hume's argument?

I think not. As I work through the iterated assessments of my probability claim, and recognize that with each step the probability that I've correctly assessed the original proposition diminishes, so should my confidence, or the strength with which I hold the belief, diminish. As it does, I begin to think that the likelihood that the opposing belief -- the negation of that belief -- is true <u>increases</u>.[12] But I can -- and <u>should</u>, as a rationally reflective epistemic agent -- apply the same arguments I applied to my original assessments to <u>that</u> assessment. Eventually, confusion reigns. I have no substantial reason for believing that <u>either</u> is correct. If I am reasonable, I will suspend judgment. But that is just what it is to reduce a belief to 'nothing'.

This argument is perfectly general. If I assess my probabilistic judgments as a reflective and reasonable agent, I'll eventually have no real confi-

dence in any of them. As a rationally reflective epistemic agent, I should have no beliefs at all.

There is another consideration which, together with the previous point, draws the teeth of Fogelin's complaint. Suppose the scenario I described in the last paragraph doesn't happen. With each assessmental iteration my estimation of the probability, and my confidence level, go down. But they don't go all the way to zero; they approach zero asymptotically, as a limit. Fine. Given the way Hume presents his argument, there is no non-arbitrary end to the stages of iterated assessment I'm obliged as a rationally reflective epistemic agent to go through. My assessment should never conclude. I must always keep reassessing, and presumably should withhold judgment until the testing procedure ends. But here it never does. I'm never warranted in believing, so I never believe. Meanwhile, my confidence level decreases with each further assessment.

Fogelin, however, doesn't linger over this argument. He moves on to maintain that "we can get a better grasp of Hume's argument -- and thus see what is wrong with it-- by asking the following question: exactly how does the diminution in probability take place?" (1985, p. 17) He summarizes what he thinks is Hume's argument this way:

> We make an assessment of the probability of our being correct in (say) an addition. This claim is itself a probabilistic judgment; we need to assign a probability to it as well. We might maintain that the probability is extraordinarily high, but this concedes Hume's point. However high it is, it does not amount to certainty. Hume's next point is that these considerations must lead us to lower the probability assignment given to the original proposition. This,

> however, is simply wrong. However uncertain we are about our ability to calculate probabilities, if a proposition has a certain probability, that (tautologically) is the probability it has. (Fogelin 1985, p. 18)

If Hume <u>were</u> claiming what Fogelin has him saying here -- that reflecting on our ability to assess probabilities changes the objective probability a proposition has -- he would indeed be wrong. But he is <u>not</u> claiming this. It is <u>my confidence</u> in having correctly assessed the probability that Hume claims should change. His regress is designed to further erode my confidence as the assessments iterate.

Suppose I'm confident that John will come to our Friday seminar. He usually attends, informs someone beforehand when he can't attend, has said that he plans to come, and so on. I believe he will come. This judgment is for Hume a judgment of probability -- for it is a question about a particular matter of fact -- so it is not a question of whether I <u>know</u> that he will come.

In a reflective mood, I look at the grounds for my confidence that he will attend. I recall that I've made assessments of this kind in the past, and neglected, through carelessness, inattention, or ignorance, to include factors relevant to accurately assessing the probability. I then become less confident that I've assessed the probability correctly. Then I reflect on <u>this</u> judgment. It is a probability assessment as well. Even if I'm confident that I'm reasoning correctly in making <u>this</u> assessment, I am aware of my fallibility about judgments of this kind. Perhaps I'm neurotically including factors that are irrelevant for the sake of completeness, and skewing my judgment of the likelihood that my assessment is

correct. And so on. Eventually I don't know what to think. I've moved, just as Hume outlines, from the confident belief that John will attend the seminar to no belief at all.

None of this reflection, however, challenges -- nor intends to challenge -- Fogelin's point that there is, objectively, some probability that the proposition that John will attend the seminar has. The 'diminution' Hume points to is the lowering of my confidence that I have assessed the probability of the proposition correctly, with the subsequent 'diminution' in my total probability assessment at the current level of iteration. And although he does not deploy the point in this section, it follows from Hume's general position that we can never know the objective likelihood of propositions such as the one in question. We can at best have nothing more than assessments, based on our observations and experience, of both the probability of such propositions and of the probability that we have assessed the probability correctly. But this only augments the force of the regress Hume is exploiting in this section, if we add that we are rationally reflective epistemic agents.

This argument, despite its outrageous conclusion, has proven far more substantial and coherent than Hume's critics seem to think. It is a formidable sceptical argument.[13] The next question to ask is, "Is it Hume's?"

3. Is This Hume's Scepticism?

My question may sound paradoxical, if not absurd. How can I be asking whether this argument is Hume's after discussing it for several pages as Hume's argument? What I am asking, however, is an absolutely

central question about the nature and purpose of "Hume's scepticism." I think it is one which has been neglected in Hume studies, by those in the naturalist and sceptical camps alike.

Naturalists, we saw, typically ignore the argument of I.IV.I, because it seems not to fit their conception of Hume's programme. And Fogelin, the most recent and vocal champion of the sceptical tendencies in Hume, takes it as obvious that Hume is a sceptic when he sets out this argument. For Fogelin, Hume's position -- "the unmitigated epistemological scepticism he accepts" (1985, p. 20)[14] -- is the sceptical position about reason expressed in this argument. We need now to ask whether this is really the case.

Hume, interestingly, anticipates just these questions. Do I, he asks, "hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in <u>any</u> thing possest of <u>any</u> measures of truth and falshood" (T 183). From what we have seen, it certainly <u>sounds</u> as if he holds just that.

This impression is hardly dispelled by his own summary of what he has accomplished thus far in Section I:

> I have here prov'd, that the very same principles, which make us form a decision upon any subject, and correct that decision by the consideration of our genius and capacity, and of the situation of our mind, when we examin'd that subject; I say, I have prov'd, that these same principles, when carry'd farther, and apply'd to every new reflex judgment, must, by continually diminishing the original evidence, at last reduce it to nothing, and utterly subvert all belief and opinion. (T 183-184)

This seems to be just the sceptical position Fogelin attributes to Hume. How then can Hume, in the same

breath, reject the question "whether I really be one of those sceptics" as "entirely superfluous"? Hume even goes on to claim that not only does he not hold the sceptical position, no one ever really (i.e. "sincerely and constantly") held it -- or could, because

> Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable 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. (T 183)

What is going on here? Hume seems to have lurched from his repeated boast that he has 'proved' the sceptical conclusion, to the very different claim that no one could adopt the position he has proved. He adds to the mounting confusion with these puzzling remarks:

> 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. (T 183)

It is time to call a halt. This makes little sense indeed unless we recall some of Hume's general strategy in Book I of the Treatise. In the famous argument of Part III about causal inference, Hume's object is to demolish the view that our causal expectations are in any way based on reasoning. The "sceptical doubts about the operations of the understanding" that he raises in those familiar passages are concerned not to establish scepticism per se, but to

destroy a prevalent rationalist or intellectualist model of the way the mind works.[15] Hume believes that the model is incoherent, and that his sceptical arguments show this. If that model were the only possible account of the operations of the mind, then scepticism would be true. But there is another alternative: the description of the actual operations of the mind Hume outlines in his positive account of how our causal expectations operate -- his 'sceptical solution' to the sceptical doubts he raised about the understanding.

Hume's aims in I.IV.I are precisely parallel. Here he is attacking the same intellectualist model of the rationally reflective epistemic agent in what should be its heartland -- the realm of relations of ideas and demonstrative argument. Section I is an extended reductio of this model of the mind in the area where it should be strongest. Hume is saying that if this model were correct, if we were reflective rational epistemic agents, then not only would we know nothing, we would be unable to form any beliefs at all! If the intellectualist model and scepticism were genuinely exclusive alternatives, then scepticism would win the day. The model cannot withstand the sceptical arguments it invites.

Fortunately, there is another possibility. The intellectualist and the sceptic share the model, but differ about what it can deliver epistemically. As Hume puts it, "the sceptical and dogmatical reasons are of the same kind, tho' contrary in their operation and tendency" (T 187). But Hume's 'sceptical solution' to these worries about belief-formation rejects the model as incoherent, though not for the sceptic's reasons. He is both clear and explicit about this:

> If belief, therefore, were a simple act of the thought, without any peculiar manner of conception, or the addition of a force and vivacity, it must infallibly destroy itself, and in every case terminate in a total suspense of judgment. But as experience will sufficiently convince any one, who thinks it worth while to try, that tho' he can find no error in the foregoing arguments, yet he still continues to believe, and think, and reason as usual, he may safely conclude, that his reasoning and belief is some sensation or peculiar manner of conception, which 'tis impossible for mere ideas and reflections to destroy. (T 184; my emphasis)

But rejecting the model means rejecting both positions. We need neither be sceptics nor dogmatists. We can be what we are -- human. But Hume's argument helps us throw off some illusions about what it is to be human, and adopt a more realistic picture of how we act, decide, and come to believe. Hume's 'sceptical solution' to the worries about how we act, decide, and form beliefs is of a piece with the positive description he gave us in Part III. So it is not surprising that he uses the language of Part III to describe both his solution and his aims in mounting the argument of I.IV.I:

> 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)

There is more to the story, but it must wait for another time. Hume ends Section I with a provocative explanation of how his positive view avoids an appli-

cation of the sceptical regress. This, too, is an important part of his account. My purpose in this essay has been more limited. I wanted to show how Section I not only fits with, but contributes to, Hume's general strategy in the Treatise. If we ever are to understand Hume's view of the role of reason, it stands to reason that we should first figure out how to integrate "Of scepticism with regard to reason" into the picture. Only then will we be ready to move to a consideration of Hume's positive views about reason. These views are the least understood of any of Hume's doctrines. Gaining an adequate understanding of them is both the most pressing and the most difficult problem facing Hume studies today.[16]

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1. Throughout my references to the Treatise ('T') will be to the Second Edition, with text revised and notes by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford University Press, 1978).

2. See, for example, the books by Nicholas Capaldi (Twayne, 1976) and Barry Stroud (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

3. It has been so described by (in order of quotations) John Passmore, Hume's Intentions (Cambridge University Press, 1952), Richard DeWitt ,"Hume's Probability Argument," Hume Studies (1986), and Terence Penelhum, Hume (Methuen, 1978).

4. Robert Fogelin, Hume's Scepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985). Hereafter referred to in the text as (Fogelin 1985) followed by the relevant page numbers.

5. D.C. Stove, Probability and Hume's Inductive Scepticism (Oxford University Press, 1973), page 132. Given Stove's opinion of the quality of Hume's arguments, it is unclear whether Stove takes the "man of genius" imposed upon by this argument to be Hume – or himself!
6. Hume clearly is referring to all of Part IV with this remark.

7. All references to the version of the Abstract published in Nidditch (1978), abbreviated 'A', with page references inserted into the text.

8. I use this awkward and somewhat pretentious phrase, as opposed to alternatives such as 'Cartesian' or 'rationalist', to make the point that Hume's discussion is not only backward-looking, but forward-looking as well.

9. Fogelin misconstrues the intent of this remark, as should be obvious from what follows. He says: "Hume's next move ... may be no more persuasive than the last, but it is revelatory of his fundamental approach to philosophical problems. He immediately offers a causal account of this liability of the human mind to fall into error in its demonstrative reasoning. Here Hume's naturalistic conception of the mind is carried to the seat of reason.... The plain suggestion of this passage is that reasoning [like causal inference] is another natural propensity" (Fogelin 1985, p. 15).

10. Here I am using 'proof' in the ordinary sense of 'mathematical proof', not in Hume's technical use of that term.

11. Hume thinks this is true despite "the artificial structure of the accompts" (T 181).

12. I might instead just suspend judgment. That works fine, too. If I do assess the probability of the opposite belief as increasing, however, this doesn't help for the reasons given in this paragraph.

13. Space does not permit me to give a detailed discussion of the various ways Hume's interpreters and critics have construed this argument. I examine them in detail, however, and relate them to the present interpretation, in my paper, "Hume's Notorious Probability Argument," forthcoming.

14. While Fogelin does see Hume as providing a 'sceptical solution' that is naturalistic, we disagree about what that solution is as well, in addition to our disagreement about the nature and role of Hume's sceptical argument.

15. That is just the model embodied in the picture of the 'rationally reflective epistemic agent' I have regarded Hume as considering throughout my account of Section I. I provide a detailed defense of this reading of Hume's 'sceptical doubts' and 'sceptical solution' in my paper, "Hume's Refutation of Inductive Probabilism" in James H. Fetzer (ed.) Probability and Causality, Essays in Honor of Wesley C. Salmon (Kluwer, 1988), pp. 43-77.

16. My research, and my attendance at the XV International Hume Conference in Marburg, was made possible by grants from the Taft Faculty Committee of the University of Cincinnati, for which I am most grateful. I regret that this paper, in its present form, cannot incorporate the interesting and helpful remarks of my commentator, Mikael Karlsson.

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