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Inductive Scepticism and Experimental Reasoning in Moral Subjects in Hume's Philosophy

Anne Jaap Jacobson

According to its title page, Hume's *Treatise Concerning Human Nature* is *An ATTEMPT to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning INTO MORAL SUBJECTS*.¹ And from the first section onwards, Hume makes statements about the human mind which are given an unqualified generality; *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* is marked by a similar assurance that much about human understanding can be known. Because of this, exegesis which attributes to Hume an unrestrained scepticism about the experimental method appears to attribute to him inconsistency on such a scale as to render the interpretation itself questionable. Nonetheless, there is, at least on the face of it, considerable justification for ascribing to Hume just such a scepticism.

In this paper I explore sceptical features, some of them important but little noticed, in Hume's treatment of causality and our beliefs about the unobserved. Though I end by suggesting how to avoid viewing Hume in this area as simply lamentably inconsistent, Hume's use of the experimental method does remain problematic, as, I suggest, Hume himself thought.

The first three of the following sections in this paper treat connected themes in Hume's philosophy which, when taken together, present us with a very sceptical view of experimental reasoning.

I. Necessity as projected impression²

Hume holds that our beliefs about causality in the objects are in large part the result of a projection of an internal impression of (some kind of) necessity. The thesis of projection is not entirely straightforward; to see this, let us ask the question, is the impression which is projected semantically simple or complex? There are excellent reasons for regarding the impression as simple as Hume conceives of "simple" in this context. Hume himself appears to say it is simple (E 64, n. 1). And much of Hume's discussion of necessity is driven by the principle that there can be no idea without a preceding impression, and this principle applies only to simple ideas. But the consequent reading is far from satisfactory. To see the problem, let us look at what seems to be the

most entrenched understanding of Hume, one perhaps a mark of Kemp Smith's influence.³ This is the view that Hume is saying that the impression source of our idea of necessity is a feeling of anticipation. The problem is this: if a feeling of anticipation is a simple impression, it is not at all clear that the impression can do the job Hume has for it. Remember that if the impression is in content itself relational, then it is not a simple impression on Hume's own account, since ideas of relations are for him complex (T 13). Hence, we might take the impression to be of the sort described by Stroud,⁴ according to whom the impression yielding our idea of necessity is semantically unrelated to the elements of the relation. But such a reading robs Hume of the explanatory position he so clearly thinks he has. If we have a semantically simple impression it becomes a mystery why the spreading has the effects that it does:

when we transfer the determination of the thought to external objects, and suppose any real intelligible connexion betwixt them. (T 168, my emphasis)

Why does spreading some simple, indefinable feeling result in our supposing there is a real intelligible connection between the objects on which the mind has spread?⁵ To get this result it looks as though the mind will have to make two mistakes: the first mistake is the spreading, and the second mistake consists in the mind's inferring from the experience of the impression as spread that somehow the causal inference itself is also out there in nature as an intelligible connection. But, while Hume does sometimes seem to suggest we make this sort of two-step error (T 223, for example), such a picture makes it seem that the impression spread is not really the semantic source of (that is, wholly determinate of the content of) our idea of necessity. Rather, on the two-step error model, our belief that there are connections enters as a result of an inference following upon the spreading; however, for Hume, an inference is not the way an impression of X gives rise to an idea of X when the impression is the semantic source for that idea. And, as a consequence, the two-step error model gives us a philosophical position which is really foreign to Hume's repeated claims that the feeling is the source of our idea of necessity where he is clearly claiming it is the semantic source for the idea (for example, T 156, lines 5-6; and T 167, lines 15-23; see also E 78).

Once we focus on what we are told about the effects of our projection of necessity, a different interpretation of what Hume is saying appears to be needed. From this vantage point, Hume can be seen to characterize our impression and idea of necessity in terms of what

might be called semantical relations. This account is perhaps most clearly present in Section 7 of the first *Enquiry*:

When we say, therefore, that one object is connected with another, we mean only that they have acquired a connexion in our thought, and give rise to this inference, by which they become proofs of each other's existence. (E 76)

And,

this regular conjunction [of objects] produces that inference of the understanding, which is the only connexion, that we can have any comprehension of. (E 96)

That is, the connection is to be understood in terms of inferences and proofs. But once we become aware of such an interpretation, the same reading of the treatment of necessity in the *Treatise* can also be given strong support. After all, in the *Treatise* Hume begins with *Perhaps 'twill appear in the end, that the necessary connexion depends on the inference, instead of the inference's depending on the necessary connexion (T 88)*. And his comparison of the necessity of causes with arithmetical and geometrical necessity (T 166) strongly suggests a semantical connection interpretation. In addition, parallel to E 96 above, we have,

I define necessity two ways, conformable to the two definitions of cause, of which it makes an essential part. I place it either in the constant union and conjunction of like objects, or in the inference of the mind from the one to the other. (T 409)

Further, and most importantly, we have Hume's characterization of our failure to perceive necessity in terms of our inability to draw a conclusion (T 161-2). Finally, the semantical connection interpretation offers a clear interpretation of Hume's important claim that the application of our idea of necessity to objects causally related is strictly **unintelligible**. Thus, necessity as we understand it is *incompatible with those objects, to which we apply it and the real intelligible connexion [we supposed to be] betwixt [cause and effect]... can only belong to the mind that considers them (T 168, my emphasis; see also T 267)*. The results of our projection of necessity onto the objects is unintelligibility, the sort of radical mistake that we would make were we to treat causally related objects as themselves premise and conclusion in a proof.

We have, then, two different interpretations of Hume's account of the impression source, and so the content, of our idea of necessity. It would be a mistake to assume that only one is faithful to the texts. Rather, Hume holds three theses all of which he cannot consistently hold. The three theses are these: (1) our impression source for our idea of necessity is a simple impression; (2) this impression is the semantic source of our relational idea of necessary connection; and (3) ideas of relations are not simple (T 13). The projection of a simple impression interpretation is responsive to (1), while the semantical relations account is responsive to (2).⁶

II. Necessity and the Inferences to the Unobserved

If our understanding of Hume's treatment of our impression and idea of necessity is responsive to the use Hume makes of them, we can see him to be explaining our experience of necessity in nature in terms of the product of a projection of a kind of mental or semantical connection onto nature. But this sort of connection is only intelligibly ascribed to connections in thought. At the same time, and most importantly, the connection is also, according to Hume, a needed foundation for our inferences. Hume clearly thinks that an inference to the unobserved **ought** to be grounded in an objective necessity. As he says in the *Enquiry*:

All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect. By means of that relation alone we can go beyond the evidence of our memory and senses ... And here it is constantly supposed that there is a connexion between the present fact and that which is inferred from it. Were there nothing to bind them together, the inference would be entirely precarious. (E 26-7)

And in Section 4 of the *Enquiry* the negative argument against our inferences to unobserved facts being rationally acceptable consists largely in noting and arguing that we have no knowledge of connections in nature; that is, that the condition on non-precariousness is not met, as far as we know. This is a point I have argued at length elsewhere;⁷ we can see here one strong indication that this is indeed Hume's argument by looking at the summary of the argument of Section 4 which is given in Section 5 (E 42). In this summary the first step in the argument concerns what a single observation can produce. A single observation of a scene reveals conjunctions, but it gives one no knowledge of connections or powers in that scene since (a) particular powers are not sensory qualities; and (b) the inference from one conjunction to the operation of a power is not reasonable. Hume's con-

clusion is that even if someone *brought on a sudden into this world has the strongest faculties of reason and reflection* he or she, without more experience,

could never employ his conjecture or reasoning concerning any matter of fact, or be assured of anything beyond what was immediately present to his memory and senses. (E 42)

Traditional exegesis of Section 4 of the *Enquiry* would have us believe that the next main move is the argument that there can be no good, non-circular argument for "The future resembles the past."⁸ However, look at what in Section 5 follows upon the last sentence quoted:

Suppose, again, that he has acquired more experience, and has lived so long in the world as to have observed similar objects or events to be constantly conjoined together; what is the consequence of this experience? He immediately infers the existence of one object from the appearance of the other. Yet he has not, by all his experience, acquired any idea or knowledge of the secret power by which the one object produces the other. (E 42)

Following on this passage there is a fifteen word clause which contains an oblique reference to the point traditional exegesis gives us as the sole sceptical move in Hume's thought. Contrary to the claims of that exegesis, Hume is much more concerned with our ignorance of powers and connections than he is with the circularity problem. And his treatment of this ignorance gives us a sceptical picture which the circularity concern rounds off, as it were, by showing us that reason alone cannot rescue us from a situation where, as far as we can tell by observation, there are no objective constraints on what the unobserved is like. But the major sceptical move is made by the prior claim characterizing our situation as one in which, as far as we can tell, there are no objective constraints on what the unobserved is like.

Our ignorance of powers and connections is due to the fact that, despite what we are inclined to believe, powers and connections are not among what can be literally observed. Hence, when in Section 4 Hume summarizes his argument, 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 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? (E 38, my emphasis)

Of course, Hume presents a sceptical solution to this sceptical problem and what is particularly interesting to note is that powers and connections **reappear** in that solution:

so has [Nature] implanted in us an instinct, which carries forward the thought in a correspondent course to that which she has established among external objects; though we are ignorant of those powers and forces, on which this regular course and succession of objects totally depends. (E 55, my emphasis)

The reappearance of powers and forces here is very important; the fact that they have a role to play even if they are secret and unobserved tells us that the sceptical attack has an ontological foundation. It is not simply an attack on a particular view of good arguing, nor is it merely an attempt to display the limits of reason.⁹

It will be worth our while to reflect a bit on the kind of scepticism Hume's argument gives us. There are, **very** roughly speaking, two kinds of constraints one might want our knowledge to conform to; namely, internal constraints, and external constraints.¹⁰ Internal constraints are concerned with factors internal to a knower's corpus of beliefs; someone who holds that all justified beliefs must cohere with other beliefs which are members of a coherent system of beliefs is proposing an internal condition on epistemic justification. External constraints are concerned with the largely non-introspectable features of human psychology, with the causal relations the believer has to his or her world, and with the extra-believer features of that world. Externally oriented accounts tend to claim that our inferences to the unobserved have to be more than successful in order to give us knowledge of the unobserved. One condition such a claim suggests is the following: when one infers that C (a conclusion about the unobserved) from P (a premise about the observed), C is a piece of knowledge only if not every alternative to C's obtaining which is consistent with P's obtaining is as objectively likely as C's obtaining. And Hume's requirement of a connection is an example of just such a constraint. Without connections, our inferences to the unobserved are entirely precarious and cannot yield knowledge.¹¹

We have been looking at two related areas of Hume's philosophy. What we have seen is that Hume thinks there is an important task for objective necessity: it binds together the items in our inferences and

without it the inferences are entirely precarious. But at the same time our understanding of "objective connection" is the result of an illicit projection, one which renders such a phrase really meaningless. And Hume's treatment of our idea of necessity has a very important consequence: while the articulation of Hume's sceptical argument in Section 4 of the first *Enquiry* really claims only that **as far as we know** there are no connections, this claim is placed within a philosophy which says that the idea that there are objective connections really does not withstand scrutiny. And it follows easily that our successful inferences to the unobserved are really just instances of luck. What we will next look at is a largely unnoticed, but very important, further indication of the strength and pervasiveness of a sceptical strain in Hume's thought.

III. The Restricted First Definition

In Section 7 (ii) of the *Enquiry* Hume gives us two definitions of causality. The first one, embedded in some of its surrounding context, is given thus:

Similar objects are always conjoined with similar. Of this we have experience. Suitably to this experience, therefore, we may define a cause to be an object, followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second. Or in other words where, if the first object had not been, the second never had existed. (E 76)

There are two problems we might see in this passage. First of all, the first definition appears in a context in which Hume is reiterating the point of the importance of causation in all our knowledge of the unobserved. Thus, just before this passage he has said:

For surely, if there be any relation among objects which it imports to us to know perfectly, it is that of cause and effect. On this are founded all our reasonings concerning matter of fact or existence. By means of it alone we attain any assurance concerning objects which are removed from the present testimony of our memory and senses. (E 76)

And yet, we are given as a first definition what is **often interpreted** as a statement unavailable to any sceptic, despite the sceptical argument of Section 4. That is, the first definition is often interpreted as a statement of a universal juxtaposition which is understood as obtaining among all observed items as well.¹² But since Hume has told us that powers are necessary for grounding inferences (Section 4) and that we

have at best a radically problematic idea of connections (Section 7), we might expect a statement of universal juxtaposition to be seen by him as beyond what we are entitled to put forth. And yet, it appears to be being put forth.

The second puzzle concerns Hume's other words. Many have seen the other words as containing a counterfactual conditional while at the same time causation according to the first definition has been seen as incapable of supporting such conditionals.¹³

The appearance of these two problems is really only, I maintain, in the eyes of interpreters, not in the texts. The central misunderstanding is about the context of the first definition and, more generally, about Hume's use of *constant conjunction* or *always conjoined*. *Constant conjunction*, from the first moment of its introduction in Hume's discussion of natural necessity, has been a restricted constant conjunction.¹⁴

tho' to tell the truth, this new-discover'd relation of a constant conjunction seems to advance us but very little in our way. For it implies no more than this, that like objects have always been plac'd in like relations of contiguity and succession. (T 88, my emphasis)

And *constant conjunction* retains this restriction throughout the discussion of natural necessity in the *Treatise*. For example, Hume tells us,

but even after experience has inform'd us of their constant conjunction, 'tis impossible for us to satisfy ourselves by our reason, why we shou'd extend that experience beyond those particular instances, which have fallen under our observation. (T 91)

It is then particularly important that Hume says,

Thus tho' causation be a philosophical relation, as implying contiguity, succession, and constant conjunction, yet 'tis only so far as it is a natural relation, and produces an union among our ideas, that we are able to reason upon it, or draw any inference from it; (T 94)

for it is clear that the first definition gives us a philosophical relation; as a consequence, it is also clear from T 94 that a causal statement interpreted according to the first definition does not support inferences to the unobserved.

If this restriction is also present in the *Enquiry*, then the first definition is available to one with sceptical worries, for it would mean only *an object, followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are* [so far] *followed by objects similar to the second* (E 76). And the one application of the first definition Hume gives us contains just such a restriction: *We ... mean that this vibration is followed by this sound, and that all similar vibrations HAVE BEEN followed by similar sounds* (E 77, my capitals).

In order to see Hume as consistent we might want to see the first definition as restricted in temporal scope and **we have Hume's own word** that such a restriction gives a correct reading. Once we see that the first definition is restricted in temporal scope, we can find an easy and attractive reading for Hume's other words. The *had not been* may be read as merely a use of the pluperfect, signifying completion in the past. For example, suppose I know that two deceased friends, Molly and Morice, always in fact travelled together, though their doing so was sometimes accidental. I might then say, "Had Morice ever been to Peru? I do not know if he had, but I do know that if Molly had not, then neither had Morice." There is no counterfactual suggestion here of what would have happened had Molly not gone when she in fact did. Reading Hume's "other words" similarly allows us to see them as adding to the first definition merely the fact that a component of the causal relation is symmetrical.

In this section we have seen that reading Hume's first definition as restricted in temporal scope solves a consistency problem **and** provides an attractive interpretation of a puzzling remark of his. What we will next look at is the consistency problem **raised** in part by this reading. In what follows, I address the issue of whether a genuinely sceptical reading of Hume's arguments regarding causation and induction results in our having to attribute to Hume a blatant, unintelligent inconsistency. In deciding the issue in the negative, I will not say that Hume's endorsement of the experimental method is unproblematic. And one may think that one can recover a charge of inconsistency from my descriptions of the problem in Hume's work. I do not think that is so; that is, I do not think that my exegesis does entail that Hume is inconsistent, and though I can envisage some arguments for saying that there is such an entailment, I disagree with at least one premise in each of the arguments. But, in any case, that's not the issue. The issue is whether Hume has perhaps unwittingly made some serious mistakes resulting in inconsistency or whether, rather, his philosophy has created an interesting philosophical problem of which he was well aware. And, of course, I endorse the second alternative.

IV. Conclusion¹⁵

Why there at least appears to be a consistency problem, given the interpretation above, is very clear. For it is inconsistent to hold the sceptical position that no one does or can know anything about the unobserved while also holding that one does have such knowledge. And yet, on the interpretation I have just argued for, Hume may well seem to hold just such a sceptical view of the very method he sees himself as using.

In order to get an accurate understanding of Hume's relation to inductive scepticism, we must, first of all, be clear that Hume does not pretend to answer the sceptic's claims in a very important way. Hume recognizes very clearly what it is to argue against the truth or likelihood of some proposition (see, for example, T 180-7). And in general he does not claim to have that sort of argument against the sceptic.¹⁶ Rather, notoriously, Hume's 'argument' against the (excessive) sceptic regarding our knowledge of the unobserved is that *no durable good can ever result from* such a scepticism (E 159), and he does not give us an argument for thinking the more useful beliefs are more likely to be true. Secondly, it is important that at the same time, Hume appears to think that the fact that no durable good can result from excessive scepticism confers positive epistemic merit on disregarding the sceptic's claims; similarly, he thinks unsceptical beliefs built in accordance with the *permanent, irresistible, and universal* principles of the imagination have or can have positive epistemic merit (T 225). Once we see these two factors, it starts to look not difficult to find a way to see Hume as consistent.

What, crucially, we need to note is that there are or may be different standards of epistemic merit and different paradigms of the epistemically meritorious belief. And precisely such a view can be found in Hume's texts. For Hume certainly seems to think that paths of inquiry which are incompatible can lead to conflicting positions which should each be judged as right to hold when it is judged by the standards of epistemic merit most congenial to it. To say this is just really to generalize over, for example, much of Section 12 of the *Enquiry*. Further, Hume does often enough use just the sort of locutions appropriate to someone who is taking a stand somewhat external to each of two positions. For example, as we saw above, there is a summary of Section 4 of the *Enquiry* which appears in Section 5; after the material of Section 7 is on hand, the summary is repeated (in Section 12 [ii]) and is again assessed for its sceptical consequences. But at this point Hume detaches himself from the argument and writes about the sceptic's having *ample matter of triumph*.¹⁷

There is no inconsistency in holding that two inconsistent positions can each seem right when judged by its own standards. Further, what

I interpret as an admission on Hume's part of different standards or paradigms of epistemic merit seems to me to be profoundly right. Much of recent 20th Century epistemology has been a war over conflicting paradigms of epistemic justification; the fact that no one epistemological theory is capable of plausible completion should suggest that a monistic conception of epistemic justification is fundamentally wrong.¹⁸ However, while it is right, I suggest, to recognize different paradigms of an epistemically meritorious belief, there is a very considerable problem when (1) beliefs well justified when judged by one of the different paradigms embody a negative assessment of the procedures the other endorses, while (2) there is no neutral perspective which is rich enough to give us a means of determining which of the conflicting assessments is right. But now we have a problem which, arguably, Hume does think he has. For sceptical arguments, which have premises Hume endorses and which look to be rightly argued, place our use of the experimental method in serious question. As a consequence, even in the *Enquiry* the sceptic is able *for the time at least, to destroy all assurance and conviction* (E 159), though when the sceptic awakes from his dream, he will be the first to join in the laugh against himself (E 160).

It is important to see that Hume does not claim to have a position independent of both the sceptic's claims and the claims of custom and habit which will allow him a final assessment of the truth in each. Nor, arguably, should he. Thus, as I suggested above, Hume does not claim to be able to show that the sceptic's assertions are false. One view prevails, however. The view that prevails is the view of the experimental philosopher who forms beliefs in accordance with the permanent and irresistible principles of the imagination. But it is also the view of a philosopher who is aware of the whimsical condition of mankind (E 160).¹⁹

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1. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1987). Further references ("T") will be given in parentheses within the body of the text. References to the *Enquiry* will be to the following edition: David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1972). Further references to this work ("E") also will be given in parentheses within the body of the text.
2. To some extent this section is a response to comments by David Pears and Gavin Lawrence, who each argued that more defense on

this topic was needed by an earlier work of mine: "Does Hume Hold a Regularity Theory of Causality?" *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1.1 (January 1985): 75-91. Not all of the argument for the interpretation presented in this section which is in the *HPQ* paper is represented in the present paper.

3. Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (New York, 1983), 392.
4. Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London, 1977).
5. The context makes it clear that *real intelligible connexion* does not mean simply "genuine and comprehensible relation"; rather, to put it roughly, such a relation is particularly explanatory.
6. My account of Hume on our idea of necessary connection gives us the conclusion that there are no necessitating connections in nature. This not atypical exegetical position has been challenged recently. For example, John Wright, in *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume* (Minneapolis, 1983), and in "Hume's Academic Scepticism: A Reappraisal of His Philosophy of Human Understanding," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16 (1986): 407-36, has argued for a realist construal of Hume's position on natural necessity. Somewhat similarly, Janet Broughton has argued that for Hume our idea of natural necessity does have genuine application in the natural world; see Janet Broughton, "Hume's Ideas about Necessary Connection," *Hume Studies* 13.2 (November 1987): 217-44. I do not have here the space to consider their challenging arguments, but I note that my position is, I think, more faithful to Hume's discussion of liberty and necessity in the *Treatise* and in the *Enquiry* where he is overtly concerned to articulate a full range of beliefs about natural necessity.
7. Anne Jaap Jacobson, "The Problem of Induction: What is Hume's Argument?" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 68.3, 4 (September, December 1987): 265-84. On my account, the requirement of a connection is an ontological requirement and not directly concerned with what premises one has; see my discussion of E 55, below. William Edward Morris also stresses the reference to connections on E 26-7, though, if I am reading him correctly, the requirement on his reading is principally one about what premises one has. A consequence of this disagreement is that there is a very considerable difference between our accounts of the importance accorded to a Uniformity Principle. See William Edward Morris, "Hume's Refutation of Inductive Probabilism," in *Probability and Causality*, ed. James H. Fetzer (1988), 43-77.
8. The standard exegesis can be found in J. L. Mackie, *The Cement of the Universe* (Oxford, 1974); D. C. Stove, *Probability and Hume's Inductive Scepticism* (Oxford, 1973); and Stroud (above, n. 4).

9. Thus, I am in disagreement with, among others, Tom L. Beauchamp and Alexander Rosenber, *Hume and the Problem of Causation* (Oxford, 1981).
10. I introduce this distinction to stress the fact that on my interpretation the requirement of a connection is an ontological requirement, not a requirement that a knower be able to produce some elaborate argument. Indeed, typically externalist requirements may be met even if the knower cannot show they are met and this is true of the connection requirement as I construe it and as Hume explicitly invokes it at the end of Section 5 in the *Enquiry*. I do not want to suggest that the distinction is entirely unproblematic. For a discussion of this distinction see Alvin Goldman, "The Internalist Conception of Justification," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, ed. Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein, vol. 5 (Minneapolis, 1980), 27-52; and Laurence Bonjour, "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, ed. Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein, vol. 5 (Minneapolis, 1980), 53-74.
11. I defend this interpretation further in my "The Problem of Induction: What is Hume's Argument?" (above, n. 7).
12. This interpretation may originate with J. A. Robison, "Hume's Two Definitions of 'Cause'," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1962); reprinted in V. C. Chappell, ed., *Hume* (London, 1966), 129-47.
13. This view is present in Antony Flew's recent *David Hume Philosopher of Moral Science* (Oxford, 1986); and in his earlier *Hume's Philosophy of Belief* (London, 1961). See also David Lewis, "Causation," *Journal of Philosophy*, 70 (1973): 556-67; reprinted in Ernest Sosa, ed., *Causation and Conditionals* (Oxford, 1975); and also reprinted in David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1986), 159-214.
14. See Anne Jaap Jacobson, "Does Hume Hold a Regularity Theory of Causation?" (above, n. 2); and Anne Jaap Jacobson, "Causality and the Supposed Counterfactual Conditional in Hume's *Enquiry*," *Analysis* 46 (1986). Wade Robison has also challenged the idea that for Hume an utterance of "A caused B" commits the speaker to the existence of an unqualified regularity, though Robison's central argument is different from mine. According to Robison, if I understand him correctly, Hume's theory of abstract ideas has the result that the extension of any general term as used at any one time is limited to the items the speaker or thinker can remember and call to mind. In contrast, my account of the restricted content of the first definition is in large part based on a survey of the contexts in which Hume uses the relevant phrases (see here especially my "Does Hume Hold a Regularity Theory of Causality?"). And, unlike

Robison, I would argue for an account of Hume on abstract ideas which stresses the passages in which, for example, he allows they might have an infinite extension (e.g., T 24). The interested reader might note that Robison and I are alone (as far as I know) in developing accounts sensitive to the restrictions on T 88, 89-90, and 93. See here, Wade L. Robison, "One Consequence of Hume's Nominalism," *Hume Studies* 8.2 (November 1982): 102-18; and Wade L. Robison, "Hume's Causal Scepticism," in *David Hume: Bicentenary Papers*, ed. B. P. Novice (Edinburgh, 1977).

15. This section of the paper should be understood more as a recipe for an exegetical position than as one which pretends to be well worked out.
16. There is an exception to this. In the concluding section of the *Treatise* Hume does seem to see scepticism as in various ways self-referential and so casting doubts on itself. I think it could be argued that similarly, but indirectly, in the *Enquiry* the power of scepticism may be seen as casting doubt on itself.
17. Thus, compare the sceptic's **philosophical** objections on E 159 with Hume's own argument on E 42 which is itself a summary of the argument in Section 4.
18. I have argued for this point in unpublished work. Some of the argumentation is sketched out in my review of Alvin Goldman's *Epistemology and Cognition*, forthcoming in *Metaphilosophy*.
19. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Northeast American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies 1987 Conference, the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association 1988 Conference, and the 1988 Conference of the Hume Society; I am indebted to John Wright, Dorothy Coleman, and Corliss Swain for comments on these occasions.