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Don Garrett

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A Symposium on David Owen, *Hume's Reason*

Owen on Humean Reason

DON GARRETT

David Owen begins his marvelous and extremely valuable new book, *Hume's Reason*, by describing the task he has set himself: "to explore Hume's account of reason and its associated modes of reasoning: demonstrative and probable."¹ This is an especially important task because, as Owen remarks,

many of the most famous problems that Hume discusses and the positions that he advocates are couched in terms of reason: whether probable reasoning or causal inference is founded on reason, scepticism with regard to reason, reason and the passions, whether moral distinctions are based on reason. To understand what Hume has to say about these issues, we must understand what his account of reason and reasoning is. (HR 1)

It is one of Owen's guiding themes that we can only understand Hume's account of reason and reasoning, in turn, if we see it in the context of the non-formal conceptions of reasoning that Descartes and Locke developed in reaction to the formalism of syllogistic logic. To summarize briefly, both Descartes and Locke rejected syllogistic logic as an artificial contrivance, a contrivance that captures no deep feature of actual human reasoning and is accordingly of little use for its improvement. Their own theories of reasoning emphasize the perception of relations among ideas linked in a chain or series. Thus, Descartes begins with the notion of an *intuition*, defined as "the indubitable conception

of a clear and attentive mind which proceeds solely from the light of reason" (*Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, rule 3).² Single intuitions are not themselves pieces of reasoning, for Descartes, but they are the elements from which reasonings are composed: the reasonings that he calls "deductions" (i.e., demonstrative reasonings) occur when the mind moves through a chain of connected intuitions. Locke famously defines knowledge (strictly so-called) as the "Perception of the Agreement or Disagreement of two Ideas."³ He conceives of intuition as the immediate perception of such agreement or disagreement; and he conceives of demonstrative reasoning as the mediated perception of such agreement or disagreement through the use of a chain of intermediate ideas (called "proofs"), ideas whose agreements or disagreements with their neighbors in the chain can be perceived by intuition. As Owen emphasizes, Locke also conceives of probable reasoning (which results in "assent" or "opinion" rather than knowledge) as a process of using intermediate ideas; but in the case of probable reasoning, the mind is said to perceive only the *probable agreement or disagreement* between two ideas (or, alternatively, the *probability of agreement or disagreement* between them) by the intervention of proofs, in accordance with what Locke calls the two *grounds of probability*—namely, *testimony* and *conformity to past experience*. As Owen explains, both Descartes's and Locke's conceptions of reasoning are non-formal because they treat the logical force of a piece of reasoning not as a result of the abstract form of the propositions that it contains but rather as a result of the specific content of the ideas that it relates and connects.

An understanding of the prevalence of anti-formalism in early modern philosophy is, as Owen says, crucial to understanding Hume's treatment of reason—and, I would add, of many other aspects of early modern philosophy as well. For example, it helps to explain why the explicitly labeled "demonstrations" in Spinoza's *Ethics* are so rarely formally valid—a fact that has frustrated careful readers as far back as Leibniz. Leibniz, of course, had confidence in and eagerly promoted his own formal conception of logic and reasoning. But for Spinoza, formal validity was simply not a goal: he believed that his demonstrations succeeded not in virtue of the forms of their component propositions but rather in virtue of the sheer intellectual power of the ideas that they expressed.

After an introductory chapter describing his project, Owen devotes one chapter to Descartes's theory of reasoning, one chapter to Locke's theory of reasoning, and one chapter to Hume's general methodology and theory of ideas. The five remaining chapters of the book take up, respectively, Hume's theory of demonstrative reasoning, Hume's negative argument concerning the role of "reason" in probable reasoning, Hume's positive theory of probable reasoning and belief, Hume's argument concerning the self-undermining character of reason in the section of the *Treatise* entitled "Of scepticism with regard to reason,"⁴ and Hume's view of the limits and warrant of reason. Focusing pri-

marily on the *Treatise* until the final chapter, Owen sets out all of these matters with remarkable care and clarity. In the course of doing so, Owen states and defends a number of important interpretive theses about Hume. These include the following (all of them quoted from the book, with my own additions in brackets):

[Hume refuses] to treat an appeal to a faculty as explanatory of the characteristic activity of that faculty. (HR 9)

Hume's distinction between demonstrative and probable inference is quite unlike our distinction between deductive and inductive inference (HR 5) [Thus] no account of Hume on demonstrative reasoning that characterizes it in terms of deductive validity, where "deductive" is characterized in formal terms, can be correct. (HR 91)

Hume's assertion, that when we make probable inferences we are not determined by reason, is not to be understood primarily as a claim about the reasonableness or unreasonableness of such inferences, or about the justification of the beliefs thus produced. Rather, Hume is arguing that [invoking] reason cannot explain how we come to have beliefs in the unobserved on the basis of past experience. (HR 5–6)

[Hume's argument in T I iv 1, "Of scepticism with regard to reason," that "all knowledge degenerates into probability" (T 180) is not intended to] cast doubt on the existence of demonstration. (HR 179)

When Hume claims that reason or the understanding, when it acts alone, "entirely subverts itself," he is not claiming that reason undermines its own warrant or that the beliefs based on reason are shown to be unreasonable. Rather, Hume is arguing that [invoking] reason by itself cannot explain how we manage to retain beliefs in the face of sceptical arguments.⁵ (HR 6)

Hume's argument about reason in [T I iv 1, "Of scepticism with regard to reason"] is intended to apply to his own account of reason, as well as to the more traditional "rationalist" conception. (HR 204)

[Hume] steers a course between a false reason, and no reason at all [by accepting the "Title Principle": "Where reason is lively and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us" (T 270).⁶ Hume's course between the horns of the dilemma thus requires that] reason

[be] embedded in a sensitive nature with properties that allow it to function in the correct way. (HR 217)

The moral approval we feel towards the wise and reasonable person, on the grounds that characteristics of that sort are pleasing or useful to their possessors or others, is the ultimate ground for Hume's preference for reason. (HR 220)

I agree with every one of these important interpretive conclusions. Indeed, I agree with so much of Owen's book that it would be all too easy for me to turn my portion of what the hardworking conference organizers dubbed "A Feast of Reason" into "A Love-Feast on *Hume's Reason*." Pleasant and richly deserved as that would surely be, however, it would also give Owen little material for a reply (or, at least, for one in keeping with what Hume calls that "appearance of modesty [and] humility, which good-breeding and decency require of us" [T 598]). It is perhaps fortunate for our purposes, then, that I do have *some* reservations about a *few* of the claims that Owen makes. I will turn now to those claims and reservations. They concern, in order, a point of Hume's methodology, an aspect of Hume's conception of demonstrative reasoning, the meaning of Hume's negative conclusion about probable reasoning, and Hume's treatment of the warrant of reason.

My first reservation concerns Owen's interpretive claim that

if experience is constituted by impressions, the cause[s] of impressions cannot themselves be a subject for enquiry. So, for instance, we cannot sensibly ask whether our impression of a tree is caused by and represents a tree. Indeed, it is not even clear such a question makes sense, given Hume's methodology. (HR 72)

Owen cites Hume's remark early in the *Treatise* that impressions of sensation arise "in the soul originally, from unknown causes" (T 7) and his later remark that

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. (T 84)

Owen's radical interpretation of these passages, however—at least when taken at face value—seems to me to be incompatible with much of the rest of the text. Almost immediately after the first passage, Hume himself goes on to say that "the examination of our sensations belongs more to anatomists and nat-

ural philosophers than to moral" (T 8); he pointedly does not say that such an examination is senseless or cannot be made. Furthermore, Hume often refers to impressions as being caused by—and also as representing—particular bodies, such as books and pineapples.⁷ Indeed, if Hume recognizes the existence of beliefs about trees (as Owen allows that he does), then it follows for Hume that trees can be represented in thought; and hence the question of whether trees cause impressions (which may, of course, also be represented in thought) cannot literally be nonsensical on Hume's account; for "to consider the matter a priori, any thing may produce any thing, and . . . we shall never discover a reason why any object may or may not be the cause of any other" (T 247). Hume confirms this interpretation explicitly when he writes that "it is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them."⁸ Of course, Hume emphasizes that the general supposition that bodies cause our impressions cannot be produced or defended by reason, and he also makes the related point that alternatives to that supposition cannot be refuted with certainty. There is, therefore, a good Humean sense in which the causes of our impressions of sensation cannot be strictly or certainly "known"; and one could add that, in light of this impossibility of success, it would not be "sensible" even to try to support that general supposition or to refute its alternatives. But none of this entails that the question of the causes of our impressions *makes no sense*. Nor does it entail that Hume—or we—should not accept the inevitable supposition that there are bodies and then inquire into the as-yet-undiscovered (and hence in a broader sense "unknown") physiological mechanisms of sense perception that we must suppose to operate, even if the ultimate causes of these mechanisms (like all ultimate causes) cannot themselves be explained.

My second reservation concerns Owen's claim that "following Descartes and Locke, the emphasis [in Hume's conception of demonstration] is on certainty, not necessity or validity" (HR 9), and this in such a way that

a demonstration preserves certainty [by transferring] the certainty of the premises to the conclusion . . . [while] a probable argument has premises with a lower degree of certainty or evidence, and that lesser degree is transferred to the conclusion. (HR 5)

Admittedly, Hume does refer in the *Treatise* to the four philosophical relations that ground intuition and demonstration as "the only objects of knowledge and certainty" (T 70). Furthermore, in distinguishing *knowledge* (which arises only from intuition and demonstration) from *proof* and *probability* (both of which arise from "probable reasoning" in Hume's sense), he seems to characterize all three as "degrees of evidence" (T 124). Yet he then immediately goes on to characterize proof (i.e., probable reasoning from full and uniform expe-

rience) as “entirely free from doubt and uncertainty”; and in *A Letter from a Gentleman*, he states explicitly:

It is common for Philosophers to distinguish the Kinds of Evidence into intuitive, demonstrative, sensible, and moral [i.e., that resulting from probable reasoning]; by which they intend only to mark a Difference betwixt them, not to denote a Superiority of one above another. Moral Certainty may reach as high a Degree of Assurance as Mathematical [i.e., demonstrative].⁹

It thus seems to me that Hume’s emphasis is not on the notion that demonstration involves a greater amount of certainty or evidence but rather on the claim that it involves a different kind of certainty or evidence from that involved in probable reasoning;¹⁰ and although Owen is absolutely right that this demonstrative kind of certainty is not based on any conception of formal propositional validity, it is, contrary to Owen’s suggestion, intimately related for Hume to a kind of “metaphysical” necessity and impossibility—namely, the kind that Hume takes to be revealed by those facts about conception and inconceivability that are based in relations of ideas. (At T 172, for example, in discussing the principle that every beginning of existence has a cause, Hume argues that we can come to accept the non-demonstrability of this principle by recognizing that it lacks “metaphysical necessity.”) Thus, Hume’s account of demonstration—much more than Locke’s—*does* in a way “emphasize” a kind of “necessity.”

These reservations are relatively minor. Indeed, it may be that I have simply misunderstood Owen or read him too literally. My more central reservations concern Owen’s provocative interpretation of the conclusion of Hume’s famous negative argument concerning probable (or, as we now say, “inductive”) inferences—namely, Hume’s conclusion that these inferences are “not determin’d by reason.” The meaning of this conclusion has been a subject of considerable controversy in recent years. A few of Owen’s formulations suggest that he interprets Hume’s conclusion as a rejection of the claim that reasoning really involves a “faculty of reason” at all (e.g., HR 125n26, 126n27, 130, 135).¹¹ Such a radically anti-faculty interpretation of Hume’s conclusion hardly accords with the actual content and structure of Hume’s argument, however, and Owen’s other formulations make it quite clear that he interprets the famous conclusion only as denying a particular *theory of how* the faculty of reason operates. Here is one of Owen’s many similar statements of the meaning of Hume’s conclusion:

[When he says that inferences from experience are not “determin’d by reason,”] Hume is ... denying that such inferences can be explained as an activity of the faculty of reason conceived as functioning by the

discovery of intermediate ideas which serve to link the impression from which we start the inference with the idea of the unobserved. (HR 132)

This constitutes, of course, a rejection of Locke's conception of probable reasoning, a conception according to which reason *is* a faculty that always involves the use of intermediate ideas.

Owen and I agree—against most other interpreters—that Hume's famous conclusion is a conclusion in cognitive psychology rather than normative epistemology, although of course it later proves to have a very significant bearing on normative epistemology. As Owen rightly emphasizes, only such an interpretation makes Hume's negative answer (namely, "not reason") and his positive answer (namely, "custom or habit") answers to *the same question*. We also agree that Hume correctly believes himself to be rejecting a Lockean theory of probable reasoning. I nevertheless have two reservations about Owen's particular formulation of Hume's famous conclusion. The first concerns whether it can account for Hume's treatment, within his famous argument, of what Owen calls the "Uniformity Principle"—that is, the principle "*that instances, of which we have had no experience, must resemble those, of which we have had experience, and that the course of nature continues always uniformly the same*" (T 89). As Owen notes, Hume's arguments show that we *could not come to know or to believe* (HR 129, 141) the Uniformity Principle by reasoning without already employing probable inference; and Owen often alludes to this fact by saying that Hume has shown the Uniformity Principle to be "unavailable" for use as an intermediate idea prior to probable reasoning. But the term "unavailable" is ambiguous here. Owen takes Hume's conclusion to be that our most basic probable reasoning does not involve intermediate ideas *at all*; and the fact that we could not *believe or know* the Uniformity Principle prior to probable reasoning does not show that the *very idea or conception* of it is unavailable. An account of reasoning as involving the use of intermediate ideas need not be limited to ideas that are *known or believed*; and indeed, Locke's own account of demonstrative reasoning via intermediate ideas involves no such restriction. If Owen's interpretation is right, then, it seems that Hume should have offered a *further* argument to show that reason could not produce probable conclusions by using an *idea* of the Uniformity Principle that was merely present or entertained.

My other reservation concerning Owen's interpretation of Hume's famous conclusion involves a serious disadvantage that Owen himself acknowledges—namely, that it requires Hume to equivocate on his use of the term "reason." The *Treatise*, the *Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature* (T 641–62), and *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* all contain versions of Hume's famous negative argument concerning probable reasoning. In each work, Hume consistently uses the term "reason" both before and after the famous argument to mean "the inferential faculty."¹² Yet according to Owen, the famous argument

about induction must use the term "reason" much more restrictedly, to mean "an inferential faculty employing intermediate ideas." This is because he regards "not determin'd by reason" as equivalent to "is not an instance of the faculty of reason," so that if "reason" meant simply "the inferential faculty" in the famous conclusion, it would be a conclusion that Hume himself could not accept. Thus, if Owen's interpretation is correct, it seems we must conclude that Hume, in an argument that he regarded as crucial to the understanding of the nature of reason, chose to use the term "reason" not in his own sense but rather in a restricted sense in which he never used it before and never used it again.

Surely it would be simpler and more charitable to interpret Hume, as I have done previously,¹³ as using the term "reason" univocally throughout his writings to mean *simply* "the inferential faculty." In denying that probable inferences are "determin'd by reason," I claim, Hume is denying that they are *caused* ("determin'd") by any operation of the inferential faculty—that, is by any other inference. Since no inference can cause itself, the trivial observation that an inference is an *instance* of reasoning by no means settles the more substantive question of whether that inference is *caused* by an instance of reasoning. In order to understand Hume's claim that probable *reasonings* are not *determined by reason*, we must distinguish between (i) the claim that each probable inference is an instance of reasoning, and (hence) an exercise of reason; and (ii) the claim that each probable inference is an instance of reasoning that is itself *caused* by some *other* inference or act of reasoning—for example, by a mediating act of reasoning about the relation of observed to unobserved cases. The first of these two claims Hume consistently accepts; the second he consistently denies and argues vigorously against. Not only does this interpretation of Hume's famous conclusion allow us to understand him as using the term "reason" univocally throughout his writings, it can also incorporate Owen's important insight that Locke is among the chief objects of Hume's attack. For as I have also argued,¹⁴ Locke's account of reasoning is precisely one according to which most inferences *are* caused or determined by intermediate inferences—as, for example, when a demonstration of the relation of A to D begins with an intuition of the relation of A to B and is then mediated by a subsidiary inference or piece of reasoning concerning the relation of B to D, an inference that itself involves intuiting the relation of B to C and the relation of C to D.

My final reservations concern some of Owen's descriptions of Hume's treatment of the topic of warrant, particularly in the *Treatise*. While I agree with Owen that Hume's arguments in *Treatise* I iii 6 (the negative argument concerning probable reasoning) and I iv 1 ("Of scepticism with regard to reason") are intended to support conclusions in cognitive psychology, I think that Owen perhaps goes a bit too far when he writes that

the wider issue of the need for a defence of our preference for reason did not arise for him until Part 4 [of *Treatise* Book I]. Furthermore, although Hume begins to address and resolve these issues in "Conclusion of this book," he does not really see the issue as central until the first *Enquiry*. (HR 206)

In a similar vein, Owen writes that Hume "was not primarily concerned with issues of warrant and justification"; that "like Locke, Hume seems little interested in the question of warrant" (Owen 64); and that it is only in *Treatise* I iv 2 ("Of scepticism with regard to the senses") that "Hume begins to see the [normative] problem with which he is faced" and "finally realizes" its depth (HR 209).

I don't believe that Hume in the *Treatise* was only "little interested" in the evaluation of reason itself, nor that he came to realize only late in the composition of Book I that his findings in cognitive psychology posed skeptical challenges to the status of reason. Rather, I see Hume even in the *Treatise* as a sophisticated practitioner of the "consequent skepticism" that he so ably describes and employs in section 12 of *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*.¹⁵ As a practitioner of consequent skepticism, Hume conducts an investigation of his own faculties by means of his own faculties, waiting—sensibly enough—to consider the potentially skeptical bearing of his discoveries on the final evaluation of those faculties until all the provisional discoveries can be collected together at once, at the climax of his investigation. But I feel reasonably confident that he both saw and cared about the potentially skeptical implications of his conclusions in *Treatise* I iii 6 and *Treatise* I iv 1 from the moment that those conclusions occurred to him; he simply deferred discussion of them to the appropriate time.

Furthermore, I think it underestimates Hume a bit to say that reason receives only the "beginnings" of an endorsement in the *Treatise*. As I mentioned at the outset, I agree with Owen that Hume regards the "wise" use of a properly chastened and skeptical reason to be a virtue.¹⁶ Furthermore, I agree that wisdom's status as a virtue provides, in a fairly obvious way, a kind of "final" or "ultimate" warrant for reason in his philosophy. But that said, we should not ignore the fact that Hume fully considers and endorses his self-approving Title Principle (T 270, quoted earlier)—a normative principle specifying precisely which results of reason ought and ought not be assented to—at the end of *Treatise* Book I. To do so, he uses both his reason and his passions (specifically, curiosity and ambition)—but he does so without invoking any moral sentiments. Although he does mention that philosophy is preferable to superstition as a guide to matters beyond the "narrow circle of objects . . . of daily action" because it is less *dangerous*, this reflection is offered only as a motive of "weakness" (T 271) to complement the positive passions of curiosity and ambition; it has no obvious moral character.

Indeed, Hume could hardly feel entitled to re-launch, into the investigation of passions and morals in Books II and III, the very cognitive faculties that skeptical considerations had made to appear as a “leaky weather-beaten vessel” (T 263) unless some satisfactory normative stance toward the use of his own reason had already been achieved. Furthermore, to imply that the normative endorsement of reason requires moral sentiments is to court a charge of circularity. This is because all moral sentiments themselves depend on probable reasoning; without probable reasoning concerning the causal consequences of various features of character, no moral sentiments would ever occur. If Hume did not, therefore, have some epistemic approval for probable judgments that was independent of moral sentiment, he would at least have to face the question of why we should nevertheless accept the legitimacy of any of our reason-based moral sentiments—including those that approve of “wise” practitioners of probable inference. Hume announces and endorses his Title Principle in the *Treatise* prior to any process of moral assessment, and he sees no need, even in Book III of the *Treatise*, to return to the Title Principle to subject it or its use to moral assessment. *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* comments at various points on the utility of philosophy in comparison with superstition—as befits a book with the direct and practical aim of combating superstition by means of philosophy—and it clearly defends mitigated skepticism in part by appeal to its social utility. But even the *Enquiry* nowhere specifically mentions moral sentiments or moral approval as being applied to philosophizing or reasoning.¹⁷

Thus, although the wise use of reason is a virtue for Hume, I am not yet convinced that moral sentiments provide the use of reason with its *primary* or *essential* warrant—even if they provide an *ultimate* one. One confirmation of this, I think, is that Hume’s proposal and endorsement of the Title Principle could be followed and assented to by a rational being who lacked moral sentiments altogether. Indeed, one might still approve of reason as *truth-conducive*, and of its results as *true*, even if one came to feel truth-acquisition itself to be a morally vicious disposition. To put the point more generally: reason and the moral sense each provide a source of *commitment*—the former to objects of believing or thinking-true, and the latter to objects of loving and hating or feeling-to-be-virtuous-or-vicious.¹⁸ These are sources of commitment that can not only be made to reflect on themselves but also to reflect on each other—so that inductive reasoning, for example, approves of inductive reasoning, and moral sense approves of having a moral sense—but also to reflect on each other: just as the moral sense can reveal wise reasoning to be a virtue, so wise reasoning can reveal many virtues to be conducive to truth-seeking. But while reason and moral sense may be mutually reinforcing in this way, neither, for Hume, is utterly dependent on the other for its entitlement to *be* a source of commitment.

Having tried my best to provide some targets for Owen's response, let me say again that this is a stimulating, edifying, and simply wonderful book, one that constitutes essential reading for anyone who needs to understand Hume's conception of reason and reasoning. As Owen argues, that includes everyone who needs to understand Hume at all; and, by my lights, the latter category includes, in turn, every philosopher alive. In a memorable turn of phrase in the preamble to the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant wrote: "All metaphysicians are . . . solemnly and legally suspended from their occupations till they shall have satisfactorily answered the question: *How are synthetic cognitions a priori possible?*"¹⁹ I don't know about metaphysicians or synthetic cognitions, but I do know this: All interpreters of Hume should be solemnly and legally suspended from *their* occupations till they shall have satisfactorily answered the question: *Have you carefully studied Hume's Reason?*

NOTES

A version of this paper was presented at a symposium on David Owen's *Hume's Reason* at the 27th Hume Conference, Williamsburg, Virginia, July 2000.

1 David Owen, *Hume's Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1. Hereafter, page references to *Hume's Reason* ("HR") will be provided in the text.

2 *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985-91), 1:14.

3 John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), I iv 2.

4 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), henceforth abbreviated as "T."

5 Similarly, Hume's conclusion that "all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence" is a psychological claim about how reason would operate if unaffected by other forces; it is intended to confirm Hume's theory of belief by showing that only that theory can account for the failure of reason actually to produce the extinction described. Thus, as Owen also argues, "evidence" in this conclusion means *evidentness*, and the "total extinction of belief" in question (described elsewhere in *Treatise* I iv 1 as a reduction of probability to "nothing") is the loss of all positive psychological affirmation, not an assessment of zero probability, as that would be understood in the modern probability calculus.

6 Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), chapter 10, discusses Hume's use of this principle in detail.

7 Passages stating or implying that impressions can represent include T 27-28, 38, 84, 201, and 233. Passages referring to pineapples (via "organs of sensation") and books as producing impressions may be found at T 5 and T 108, respectively.

8 *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (hereafter "EHU") in *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd. ed., revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 153.

9 *A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh: Containing Some Observations on A Specimen of the Principles concerning Religion and Morality, said to be maintain'd in a Book lately publish'd, intituled, A Treatise of Human Nature &c.* (Edinburgh, 1745).

10 We can reconcile Hume's seemingly inconsistent remarks about whether knowledge and "proof" differ in the "degree" of their certainty by distinguishing two aspects of certainty. In the sense of *present confidence and lack of doubt or hesitation*, proof can equal knowledge in certainty; but in the sense of *resistance to possible countervailing psychological forces*, knowledge may still be superior in degree to proof due to the impossibility of conceiving the contrary. In a similar way, all "proofs" (in Hume's sense) are presumably equal to one another in their degree of present confidence; yet Hume asserts in EHU section 10 that some proofs can defeat others in case of unexpected conflict. (See my *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy*, chapter 7, for a discussion of this matter.)

11 Owen provides a generally deflationary reading of Hume on mental faculties that is perhaps related, in spirit and motivation, to his deflationary reading of Hume on bodies (just surveyed). Owen is certainly right to insist that Hume sees no *explanatory* value in the mere postulation of a faculty. He is also right to insist that Hume's own positive account of probable reasoning makes the faculty of reason an aspect or function of the faculty of imagination. But I think Owen goes too far when he writes concerning all mental faculties that "there are only ideas, impressions, and the ways they interact" (HR 76). By definition, *mental occurrences* can only be *occurrences of perceptions* for Hume; but he need not reject the postulation of further causal mechanisms that operate unperceived to produce these perceptions and their patterns. Indeed, given (i) his clear endorsement of universal determinism and (ii) his clear declaration of the radical indeterminism of his psychological laws of association ("a gentle force," T 10), Hume can hardly avoid postulating such mechanisms. This becomes even clearer when we take into account his requirement that causes *immediately* precede their effects, for this entails that past perceptions can only produce present perceptions through some intervening process, except in those cases in which the production is utterly immediate. Such an intervening process will rarely consist entirely in the occurrence of an intervening sequence of further perceptions. For an example of a postulated physiological background process, involving "traces" and "animal spirits," see T 60.

12 In fact, the very section of the first *Enquiry* that contains the famous argument (EHU section 4) begins with several references to *reason* that clearly include both demonstrative and probable reasoning. A footnote (which Owen frequently cites) from the section of the *Treatise* (I iii 7) immediately following Hume's famous argument makes it especially clear that Hume is not using "reason" *after* that argument to mean "a faculty employing intermediate ideas":

we may *exert our reason* without employing more than two ideas, and without having recourse to a third to serve as a medium betwixt them. We infer a cause immediately from its effect; and this inference is not only a true species of reasoning, but the strongest of all others, and more convincing than when we interpose another idea to connect the two extremes. (T 97; italics added for emphasis)

13 I first offered this interpretation in *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy*; improved statements may be found in "Ideas, Reason, and Skepticism: Replies to My Critics," *Hume Studies* 24 (1998): 171–194, and "Replies," in a book symposium on *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62 (2001): 205–15.

14 "Ideas, Reason, and Skepticism: Replies to My Critics," 182–3, and "Replies," 207–9.

15 "There is another species of scepticism, *consequent* to science and enquiry, when men are supposed to have discovered, either the absolute fallaciousness of their mental faculties, or their unfitness to reach any fixed determination in all those curious subjects of speculation, about which they are commonly employed" (EHU 150). Hume endorses a mitigated version of this kind of skepticism, contrasting it with the merely methodological and ungrounded "antecedent" skepticism of Descartes.

16 It should be noted that he explicitly calls wisdom a "virtue" only once (T 611), and he mentions it then only as an example of a quality that is virtuous *because it is useful to its possessor*. However, he also includes it as part of *personal merit* in appendix 4 of *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (in *Enquiries*, ed. Selby-Bigge and Nidditch, 316). In his *Essays*, in contrast, he several times juxtaposes *wisdom* and *virtue* as parallel values, rather than treating wisdom as one virtue among many.

17 The first *Enquiry* does mention moral sentiments in connection with moral responsibility (section 8) and the reason of animals (section 9).

18 When the object is oneself, of course, one feels pride or humility, rather than love or hate, on Hume's view.

19 Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, ed. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 23.