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A Symposium on Louis E. Loeb,  
*Stability and Justification in Hume's Treatise*

# The Unity of Hume's Philosophical Project

MICHAEL WILLIAMS

## 1. Introduction

In both his *Treatise of Human Nature* and *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Hume presents a protean figure.<sup>1</sup> By turns, he appears as a naturalistic theorist of the mind, a proto-Positivist critic of speculative metaphysics, and an utter skeptic. Can these various characters be seen to work together? On the whole, Hume's interpreters seem to think not. The typical approach is to pick a dominant personality, leaving Hume's other philosophical *personae* to be squeezed in as an afterthought, deprecated, or simply ignored.

Louis Loeb is a shining exception.<sup>2</sup> His new book, subtle and densely argued, offers an account of Hume's epistemology that makes a sustained effort to come to terms with its multi-faceted character. However, while Loeb's interpretation marks a real advance in our understanding of Hume, it is not one that I find ultimately persuasive. As I shall try to show, for all his insights, Loeb too fails to provide a satisfyingly unified account of Hume's philosophical project. In the course of explaining why I think this, I shall indicate how I think a better account ought to go.

## 2. Varieties of Skepticism

The key to understanding Hume is to come to terms with the ways in which Hume is and is not a skeptic. So before going farther it will be useful to distinguish the

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various forms that skepticism takes, or might be thought to take, in Hume's epistemological writings. The distinctions I shall introduce will also make it easier to characterize different ways of reading Hume, Loeb's included.

First, we must distinguish between *epistemological skepticism*, which has to do with knowledge and belief, and *conceptual skepticism* which has to do with meaning. So for example, where an epistemological skeptic may wonder whether beliefs of a certain broad kind can be justified, a conceptual skeptic will wonder whether the words we use to express such purported beliefs are so much as meaningful. It seems clear that both kinds of skepticism figure in Hume's theory of the understanding. However, commentators differ sharply over their relative importance.

Second, we must distinguish two forms of epistemological skepticism: *theoretical* (or Academic) skepticism and *suspensive* skepticism (or Pyrrhonism). As its name suggests, theoretical skepticism is a *thesis* (or family of theses) about the epistemic status of human beliefs: for example, the thesis that such and such beliefs do not amount to knowledge or are not justifiable. It is important to note that one can entertain such a thesis in a purely speculative or theoretical way, without becoming inclined to relinquish any fundamental beliefs. By contrast, Pyrrhonism involves an actual breakdown in belief. Again, though we seem to be able to find both Academic and Pyrrhonian elements in Hume's epistemological outlook, commentators are seriously at odds over how to put them together.

Third, both theoretical and suspensive skepticism can be either *qualified* (Hume says "mitigated") or *unqualified* (we can say "radical"). The most important form of qualified theoretical skepticism is *anti-Rationalism*. Anti-Rationalism embraces such theses as that our beliefs never amount to knowledge, or are not supportable by (what we can show to be) truth-conducive reasons. By contrast, theoretical skepticism in its most radical form is the claim that no beliefs are *in any sense* more reasonable than others: i.e., that normative-epistemological distinctions between beliefs are completely indefensible. We can make an analogous distinction with respect to suspensive skepticism. A qualifiedly skeptical outlook might take the form of anti-Dogmatism: we hold beliefs, but in an open-minded, fallibilist spirit, taking nothing to be altogether certain, suspending final judgment. Alternatively, we might suffer a complete breakdown of belief. Once more, we find serious differences of opinion among commentators. In what way is Hume's skepticism mitigated, or qualified, if indeed it is qualified at all?

Fourth, both theoretical and suspensive skepticism can be *wide* or *narrow*. Wide forms of skepticism apply to all our beliefs, or to all our beliefs in certain *very* broad categories (e.g., beliefs about the external world). Narrow forms of skepticism are more focused. Hume seems to entertain both wide and narrow forms of skepticism. He appears to be some kind of skeptic with respect to beliefs about the external world. But he is also critical of superstition and "abstruse" metaphysics. Not surprisingly, commentators differ over how to make sense of this.

With these distinctions in hand, we can turn to the problems we encounter in trying to make sense of Hume.

### 3. Three Ways to Read Hume

Hume is some kind of an empiricist. But what kind? Looking back, we can see three main ways of answering this question. And since Hume's skepticism is linked to his empiricism, all three have implications for the question "What kind of skeptic is Hume?"

The first answer to the question "What kind of empiricist is Hume?" is that Hume is primarily a *skeptical* empiricist: in fact, a skeptic in virtue of being an empiricist. For philosophers who take this view, Hume's skepticism is extreme in its scope, depth and force.

With respect to scope, it is highly general, applying to the most fundamental commitments of common sense, such as belief in an external world, and to the most basic and indispensable forms of inference, such as simple inductive reasoning. In the terms introduced in the previous section, Hume's skepticism is wide rather than narrow.

With respect to depth, Hume's skepticism is unqualified or radical. At the theoretical level, Hume is not just arguing that human "knowledge" fails to live up to the highest standards of Cartesian certainty, but that our beliefs have no rational basis whatsoever. But even this understates the depth of Hume's skepticism. For it seems that Hume is more than an anti-Rationalist: his relentless skeptical assault eventually results in an inability to see any beliefs as being in any way reasonable. This has consequences for the force of Hume's skepticism, which he seems unable to confine to the theoretical level. Thus Book 1 of the *Treatise* seems to culminate in a total breakdown of belief: a state of Pyrrhonian suspense. This was how contemporaries, such as Beattie and Reid, saw Hume: as a true Pyrrhonist.<sup>3</sup>

The appeal of this approach to Hume is obvious enough. Skeptical arguments recur in his work; and the Conclusion to Book 1 of the *Treatise* is one of the most dramatic expositions of skeptical doubt ever set down. But while a reading of Hume that downplays his skeptical tendencies cannot be satisfying, it is hard to see how Hume-as-mere-skeptic could be the whole story. The Introduction to the *Treatise* announces a grand philosophical project, with both critical and constructive aspects. Critically, Hume aims at a reform of the sciences, which he sees as mired in fruitless disputation, with eloquence rather than logic carrying the day. Constructively, Hume aims at laying out the elements of a science of Man, that will allow us (in the manner of Locke) to discern the scope and limits of human understanding. In introducing this project, he does not so much as hint that it is destined to end in ruin.

Skeptical readers must hold either that Hume was *driven* to skepticism, by his willingness to follow an argument wherever it led, or (less flatteringly) that a perverse love of paradox seduced him into skepticism's embrace. Either way, we are

invited to see Hume as deriving from empiricist principles skeptical consequences that his predecessors, Locke and Berkeley, either failed to see or balked at drawing, even at the cost of his own philosophical ambitions. But this is implausible. Even in the depths of skeptical despair, Hume states explicitly that there is no need for him to abandon his inquiries into human nature. More than this, not only does Hume appear not to think that his skepticism eclipses his original project, he seems to see his skepticism as an integral component of it. How can this be? Lacking an answer to this question, the skeptical reading is seriously incomplete.

The second answer to the question “What kind of empiricist is Hume?” introduced by Kemp Smith and currently in the ascendant, is that Hume is primarily a *naturalistic* empiricist.<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, philosophers have linked human knowledge to our having a faculty of Reason, which enables us to grasp necessary truths and logical connections. Among earthly creatures, only humans possess such a faculty: reason is the divine element that connects us with God and sets us apart from other animals. By contrast, from Hume’s standpoint, human cognitive powers, while possibly more extensive than those of other animals, are not essentially different from them and are to be studied and explained in the same empirical and decidedly secular spirit. So while Hume is a constructive philosopher, philosophy is no longer an *a priori* discipline, dealing with matters that lie beyond the purview of scientific inquiry. The naturalistic reading thus invites us to take seriously and literally Hume’s attempts to reveal the psychological mechanisms underlying human beliefs. These attempts are especially elaborate in the *Treatise*, where they constitute the bulk of the text of Book 1, but survive in the first Enquiry, albeit in a simplified form suitable to a popular exposition. On this reading, Hume is a pioneer of something like cognitive science; though, as a philosopher, he is attuned to the larger intellectual significance of his naturalistic turn.

Like the skeptical approach, the naturalistic reading has its obvious attractions. It accords with Hume’s declared intention of presenting a “science of man” founded on “experience and observation” (T Intro. 7; SBN xvi), while recognizing a significant role for the skeptical moment in Hume’s thought. The function of skeptical arguments is to reveal that our most basic beliefs and inferential procedures are not and could not be based on “Reason.” Our adherence to them is therefore best explained naturalistically, i.e., in causal-psychological terms.

A reading of Hume that ignores his naturalistic turn cannot be correct. Even so, as usually developed the naturalistic approach has its limitations. According to the naturalistic reading, the function of skepticism is primarily methodological: by undermining the claims of Reason, skeptical argumentation clears the way for explaining our basic commitments and faculties in naturalistic terms. In the terms I have suggested, to take this line is to assimilate Hume’s skepticism to anti-Rationalism: qualified theoretical skepticism. But while correct as far as it goes, this account makes Hume’s skepticism *too* purely theoretical. As a result, it fails to do justice to Book 1’s skeptical conclusion, where Hume’s skepticism is

neither merely theoretical nor a prelude to further quasi-psychological theorizing. On the contrary, it seems to bring everything into question, Hume's own science of man not excepted. Kemp Smith notes the difficulty of incorporating Hume's final skepticism in a straightforward naturalistic reading, when he remarks that Hume ends up with "a more skeptical conclusion than is strictly demanded by [his] philosophy."<sup>5</sup> Is this so? Or does Hume only end up with a more skeptical conclusion than is easily squared with a straightforward naturalist reading?

A second limitation of the naturalistic reading concerns Hume's motives for developing his science of man, for it is not immediately obvious how the naturalist reading can accommodate Hume's critical interests. The source of the difficulty is that Hume seems to hold that human beliefs are to be explained in causal *rather than* justificative terms. Accordingly, when he turns to denouncing religious superstition and abstruse metaphysics, it is not clear what entitles him to do so. To retain the right to make invidious distinctions, Hume needs to qualify not just his Pyrrhonism but his theoretical skepticism too. The question is "How?" According to Hume's science of Man, all beliefs—reasonable or not—are to be traced to the "imagination." But if so, why aren't the superstitious or metaphysically inclined just psychologically different, rather than epistemically deficient? How do psychological differences in belief-formation underwrite normative distinctions? Hume seems to be arguing that, while all beliefs are groundless, some are more groundless than others. Of course, this could be a problem for Hume, rather than for the naturalistic reading. But we should not leap to this conclusion. So far, all we need conclude is that the naturalistic reading is incomplete unless it explains how Hume's psychology of belief acquires a normative edge. Unfortunately, rather than meet this challenge, naturalistic readers of Hume have tended to play down the critical moment in his philosophy, as they have the skeptical moment.

This brings us to the third answer to the question, "What kind of empiricist is Hume?" which is that he is primarily a *critical* empiricist. This answer was popular in the middle years of the last century when logical empiricism, itself a form of critical philosophy, was in the ascendant. Thus for philosophers like A. J. Ayer, Hume was a distinguished predecessor, a kind of Positivist *avant la lettre*.<sup>6</sup>

On this reading, too, there is a skeptical element in Hume's outlook, but one that is even more limited than advocates of the naturalistic reading of Hume want to claim. For critical readers, the targets of Hume's skepticism are not commonsense beliefs but certain characteristically *philosophical* claims. These claims, involving such terms as "substance" and "necessary connection," turn out to have no intelligible relation to experience and should therefore be abjured.

The skepticism stressed by the critical reading of Hume is not only limited in scope, it is different in character from any form of skepticism addressed so far. Whereas advocates of the skeptical and naturalistic readings of Hume focus primarily on Hume's epistemological skepticism, those who see Hume as a proto-Positivist take the essential form of skepticism to be conceptual. Hume is primarily a skeptic

about the meaningfulness of certain words, typically those belonging to the professional jargon of speculative philosophers. The problem with much philosophical talk is that its key terms, because they cannot be linked with impressions, fail to be backed by ideas, and are therefore meaningless.

Although currently out of favor, this approach to Hume cannot be dismissed out of hand. First of all, it takes very seriously Hume's own conception of his philosophical project, which is the reform of the sciences. From the opening lines of the *Treatise* to the famous peroration to the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*,<sup>7</sup> Hume never seems to have lost sight of this critical goal. Not only that, Hume himself seems to place a lot of stress on the role played by conceptual skepticism in its pursuit of this goal. As he says in the Abstract, when the author of the *Treatise*

suspects that any philosophical term has no idea annexed to it (as is too common), he always asks from what impression is that idea derived? And if no impression can be produced, he concludes that the term is altogether insignificant.<sup>8</sup>

This emphasis on conceptual skepticism makes sense of the prominence Hume accords to his account of how "ideas" are derived from "impressions." Whatever importance we attach to Hume's epistemological skepticism, we should not forget that the theory of the derivation of ideas from impressions, with which both the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry* begin, expounds a version of concept-empiricism, not justification-empiricism. It has to do with (what Hume claims to be) the sensory basis of concepts, not with the observational basis of judgments. This shift of focus allows the critical reading to sidestep one of the naturalistic reading's main difficulties. If Hume's preferred instrument of intellectual reform is conceptual rather than epistemological skepticism, there is no need to see him as taking some beliefs to be more groundless than others. Talk that lacks content expresses no beliefs, and questions of justification do not arise.

Given these advantages, it may seem surprising that the critical reading of Hume should be *so* out of fashion. No doubt part of the explanation is that, with naturalism in the ascendant, to treat Hume as a proto-Positivist is no longer to pay him much of a compliment. But fashion is not the only factor. The fact is, each approach to reading Hume has difficulty accommodating the strengths of its competitors. If the skeptical reading makes us wonder what becomes of Hume's critical and constructive ambitions, and the naturalistic approach plays down Hume's skeptical tendencies and critical intentions, the critical reading has difficulty doing justice to the naturalistic and skeptical aspects of Hume's thought.

Readers who stress the critical intent of Hume's philosophy find it hard to see how so thoroughly normative an undertaking can be based on a naturalistic "science of man." As a result, they tend to deplore Hume's "psychologism." The burden of the charge of psychologism is that Hume failed to appreciate that his

project, in both its critical and constructive aspects, is more properly an exercise in conceptual analysis rather than in psychological explanation. So, for example, according to Jonathan Bennett, although Hume presents his discussion of the "constancy and coherence" of experience as an account of "what causes induce us to believe in the existence of body" (T 1.4.2.1; SBN 187), the question Hume is really trying to answer is, "What facts about experience enable us to apply objectivity-concepts?" which is not a psychological question at all.

This difficulty may not be insuperable. Why shouldn't Hume's limited conceptual skepticism be backed by (what he takes to be) a well-founded empirical theory of concept-formation? However, "naturalizing" Hume's theory of conception would not reconcile the naturalistic and critical readings. This is because, from the standpoint of the critical reading, the naturalistic reading concedes too much to Hume's *epistemological* skepticism. If Hume's aim is to draw a sharp normative distinction between common sense beliefs and philosophical fantasies, it seems too weak for him to say that the former, while utterly groundless, are at least contentful. A defect does not fail to be a defect simply in virtue of being epistemological rather than conceptual. What we seem to be left with are ways of talking that are *both* defective, albeit for different reasons. That is why, in Bennett's recasting of Hume's question, there is an implied rejection not only of Hume's psychologism but of the epistemological skepticism that motivates it. Bennett's talk of the experiential facts that "enable" us to apply "objectivity concepts" is normatively loaded. It implies that a proper analysis of such concepts will reveal the experiential facts in virtue of which we are *justified* in talking about external objects. Contrast this with the naturalist reading of Hume, according to which a key element in Hume's case for investigating the *causes* of our belief in such objects is the deployment of skeptical arguments to show that such a belief *cannot* be justified. It seems clear that Hume does argue this way, and the naturalistic reading explains why; but on the critical reading, this whole way of arguing is ill-advised. And needless to say, if the critical reading cannot even smoothly accommodate Hume's anti-Rationalism, it has even greater difficulty making room for his Pyrrhonian tendencies.

To sum up, all three approaches to Hume have their strengths and weaknesses. The skeptical reading seems to be true to where Hume ends up, at least in Book 1 of the *Treatise*, but fails to account for Hume's apparently undaunted commitment to the critical and constructive aspects of his philosophical project. The naturalist reading accords well with Hume's constructive theorizing but has little to say about his critical ambitions and is embarrassed by his final collapse into skepticism. The critical reading answers to Hume's sense of the point of his project, but is under pressure to hold that Hume seriously misunderstood the character of his philosophical task. This reading, too, fails to smoothly accommodate what seems to be the *seriously* skeptical element in Hume's thought. A satisfactory account of Hume, if there is one, would do justice to the skeptical, naturalistic and critical aspects of Hume's philosophy.

#### 4. Stability and Justification

I now turn to Loeb's reading of Hume. I shall state it in my own way, perhaps not always putting the emphasis where Loeb would put it. But I want both to bring out what I think is so valuable in Loeb's approach and to set the stage for explaining what I take to be its deficiencies.

Loeb's interpretation of Hume takes seriously both Hume's interest in normative epistemological distinctions and the deep skepticism with which *Treatise* Book 1 concludes. Loeb accommodates these not-obviously-reconcilable aspects of Hume's outlook by arguing that Hume's argument in Book 1 of the *Treatise* goes through two stages. In the constructive stage, which we find principally in part 3, Hume reconstructs his pre-theoretical intuitions about justified and unjustified beliefs in terms of a distinction between beliefs that arise from mechanisms that tend to promote long-term stability in our beliefs, and beliefs that arise from mechanisms that do not promote such stability. But in the destructive stage, to which part 4 is largely given over, Hume argues that, at least for the reflective person, conflicts within and between our fundamental belief-forming propensities work to destabilize even our commonsense beliefs. It turns out that, for the reflective person, the distinction between justified and unjustified belief cannot be sustained. In Loeb's own words:

Hume attempts to systematize and explain his pretheoretical epistemic commitments and sees himself as locating a theory of justification that meets with considerable success. . . . [H]owever, . . . Hume comes to conclude that the normative distinctions to which he is pretheoretically disposed ultimately cannot be sustained with reference to his favored theory of justification. (SJ 14–15)

For his own part, Loeb does not welcome this skeptical outcome, and he argues that Hume has the resources to avoid it.

With respect to Hume's constructive project, Loeb's fundamental claim is that Hume assigns a normative significance to *stability* in our beliefs, hence to mechanisms that promote such stability. This is a very good idea. Loeb is absolutely right to insist on Hume's interest in normative-epistemological distinctions, and on the crucial role played by doxastic stability in the way that he makes them.

We have already seen that Hume's philosophical project is announced as one with the critical intent of purging and reforming the sciences. It is thus no surprise to find that Hume is notably scathing about certain philosophical opinions, notably the talk of "substances" and "occult qualities," characteristic of "the Antient Philosophy" (T 1.4.3). Such opinions are exemplary of the ideas that generate interminable clashes of opinion: hence no firm and settled conviction. But in fact, Hume's interest in making normative-epistemological distinctions is pervasive.

In particular, it is evident in his long and complex discussion of inductive inference, during the course of which Hume repeatedly draws invidious distinctions between good causal reasoning (forms of inference “received by philosophy”) and other (equally natural) ways of forming beliefs. Of particular importance are the somewhat neglected chapters “Of the effects of other relations and other habits” (T 1.3.9) and “Of unphilosophical probability” (T 1.1.13). In the former, Hume is at pains to contrast the benign (stability-promoting) tendencies of causal inference (“custom”) with the unfortunate influence of the other natural relations (resemblance and contiguity), and also with the effects of “education” (the production of beliefs by verbal indoctrination). In the latter chapter, Hume explains how “general rules” (custom-based meta-inductive principles) can regulate the effects of prejudice and enable us to distinguish “accidental circumstances” (i.e., coincidental regularities) from “efficacious causes,” again leading us to endow our system of beliefs with greater stability. Loeb’s reading restores these discussions to the prominent place that they merit.

To appreciate the originality of Loeb’s reading of Hume, it is crucial to see that Loeb is *not* making the familiar naturalist point that, for Hume, belief is generally involuntary. Stability in our beliefs must be distinguished from irresistibility (at least if we take irresistibility to be mere involuntariness). To be sure, Hume does insist on the involuntariness of belief, and this insistence plays an essential role in his response to Pyrrhonism. However, if we allow our understanding of Hume’s approach to belief to be guided too exclusively by Hume’s general way of responding to the Pyrrhonian skeptic, we will find it hard to do justice to his interest in normative-epistemological distinctions (a common weakness in naturalist readings, as we have noted).

Once more, the distinctions we have drawn between different kinds of skepticism come in handy. We need to distinguish not only between theoretical skepticism and Pyrrhonism but also between two forms of theoretical skepticism, qualified and unqualified. All naturalist readers draw the first distinction, in some terms or other. However, the second is by no means universally observed. For example, according to Robert Fogelin, Hume is an “unmitigated theoretical skeptic.”<sup>9</sup> If we understand Hume’s theoretical skepticism as a thesis about the limits of Reason, and take the “unmitigated” character of this skepticism to indicate Hume’s unqualified endorsement of it, this claim is true. But if we understand Hume’s theoretical skepticism to be “unmitigated” in the sense of truly radical—that is, to entail that there is *no* defensible distinction between justified and unjustified belief—then Fogelin’s claim is false, for it would imply that Hume has no interest in or way of making normative-epistemological distinctions. Fogelin’s view is the natural outcome of too exclusive a focus on the involuntariness of belief.

All Naturalist readers take Hume to endorse at least a qualified theoretical skepticism, to the effect that our most fundamental beliefs, or belief-forming propensities, cannot be defended by “reason.” I have called this form of skepticism

“anti-Rationalism.” Its upshot is that our beliefs, since they cannot be the products of Reason, must be explained in terms of the (causal-psychological) workings of the “imagination.” As Hume says, his aim in displaying skeptical arguments is not to turn anyone into a (Pyrrhonian) skeptic but rather

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 1.4.1.8; SBN 183, emphasis in original)

But while Hume relies on theoretical skepticism to clear the way for naturalism, his naturalistic theory of belief enables him to repudiate Pyrrhonism, at least at this stage of his argument. To link theoretical skepticism with Pyrrhonism, we must presuppose *Prescriptive Rationalism*: the principle that we ought only to hold beliefs that are certifiable by Reason. If no beliefs are so certifiable, we should practice universal suspension of belief. But according to Hume, “Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity, has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel” (T 1.4.1.7; SBN 183). This means that any such prescriptive principle must be idle. The Rationalist prescription assumes that it is up to us what, if anything, to believe, and this is simply not so.

In the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Hume makes the same point by presenting “skeptical” doubts that are met with a “skeptical” solution. The skeptical doubts are, of course, his theoretically skeptical arguments to the effect that causal reasoning cannot be defended by Reason. Such reasoning depends essentially on the presupposition that “Nature operates uniformly,” which cannot be argued for in a non-circular way. The solution to these doubts, which traces causal reasoning to “custom” (the propensity of the mind to form associative links between ideas reliably conjoined in experience), is “skeptical” in that it does not challenge the skeptic’s theoretical conclusions. But it is a solution because it denies that such conclusion either can or should lead to serious doubts: i.e., to Pyrrhonism.

Now, I do not think that Hume takes us to have *no* control over what we believe, for he seems to think that we are, in some way, able to exert some influence over which belief-forming propensities we generally rely on. Nevertheless, all such propensities, once activated, operate involuntarily. The mechanisms of the imagination are at work whether we are engaged in serious causal reasoning or under the spell of superficial similarities. Accordingly, belief can be involuntary (to whatever extent it is involuntary) and still be superstitious, credulous, or otherwise unjustified. Hume’s reconstruction of the distinction between justified and unjustified belief needs to drawn *within* the imagination. The inevitability of believing may ground a generalized anti-Pyrrhonism, but it will not ground the distinction between justified and unjustified belief. If Hume has nothing to

ground this distinction, he will be more than an anti-Rationalist: he will be the unqualified theoretical skeptic that Fogelin takes him to be. We have yet to see how he avoids skepticism of this kind.

If Hume's anti-skepticism depends only on an appeal to the involuntariness of belief, I do not think that he can avoid it. The appeal to involuntariness may defeat Pyrrhonism, but that is not the same as salvaging the distinction between justified and unjustified belief. The problem for Hume is that his critical and constructive interests demand a *contrastive* notion of justification; and the claim that Nature has "determined" us to believe gives us no clue as to why some beliefs should enjoy a higher epistemic standing than others. If all believing is involuntary, all beliefs are justified, which is as good as to say that none are. However, if we follow Loeb and distinguish between irresistibility and stability, we have an opening for drawing the invidious distinctions we need.

Hume himself is well aware that his use of theoretical skepticism to motivate his program of explaining belief in causal-psychological terms threatens to wipe out normative-epistemological distinctions. It may be objected, he writes,

that the imagination, according to my own confession, being the ultimate judge of all systems of philosophy, I am unjust in blaming the antient philosophers for making use of that faculty, and allowing themselves to be entirely guided by it in their reasonings.

Furthermore—and this might be thought to be a problem for Loeb—Hume's response to this objection involves talk of irresistibility. According to Hume, he must

distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and effects to causes: and the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular. . . . The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life. . . . and being opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition. (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225)

However, there is no problem for Loeb here. In this important passage, Hume refers not to irresistible beliefs but to irresistible *principles*. This makes all the difference.

As I have already noted, Hume does seem to think that while, once activated, all belief-forming propensities function automatically, we have some power to favor the use of some propensities over the use of others. Although relations of resemblance and contiguity can influence our opinions,

[t]here is no manner of necessity for the mind to feign any resembling and contiguous objects; and if it feigns such, there is as little necessity for it always to confine itself to the same, without any difference or variation. (T 1.3.9.6; SBN 109)

To let one's beliefs be formed on the basis of inferences guided by only resemblance or contiguity is to indulge in "caprice" (ibid.). But the important thing to note is that what makes principles other than causal reasoning resistible is precisely their tolerance for "difference and variation"; i.e., inability to stabilize belief.

It is true that, in making this argument, Hume often seems to be writing in a purely descriptive vein, reporting that the flightier principles of the imagination simply do not have the enduring influence on our convictions that causal reasoning inevitably has. It is also true that these discussions take place in the context of theoretical skepticism. Since Reason aims at truth (which Hume may not always clearly distinguish from demonstrative certainty), epistemic procedures can be seen to be guided by Reason to the extent that they can be seen to be truth-conducive. Hume seems clearly to think that, if subjected to a searching skeptical examination, no epistemic procedures can be seen this way, including those he commends. But this does not mean that Hume is doing mere psychology. What enables him to reconstruct the distinction between justified and unjustified belief is that he puts forward doxastic stability as an *alternative epistemic goal* to truth.

That this is Hume's intent is evident in his discussion of the special role played by causal inference in our doxastic economy. Certain principles of belief-formation stabilize our beliefs because they tend to produce beliefs that constitute a coherent system. From the ideas and impressions of memory, "we form a kind of system," every member of which, when joined to some present impression, "we are pleas'd to call a reality" (T 1.3.9.3; SBN 108). The skeptical note struck by the phrase "pleas'd to call" echoes a point already made: that with respect to our sense-impressions, "twill always be impossible to decide with certainty, whether they arise immediately from the object . . . or are deriv'd from the author of our being" (T 1.3.5.2; SBN 84). However, Hume argues that this concession to skepticism does not affect his inquiry into the natural history of our beliefs, since we may "draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they be true or false; whether they represent nature justly, or be mere illusions of the senses" (ibid.). The means of extending our belief system is, of course, causal inference. By causal inference we construct the system of belief that we ascribe to "the judgment." Thus it is causal inference that

peoples the world, and brings us acquainted with such existences, as by their removal in time and place, lie beyond the reach of the sense and memory. (T 1.3.9.4; SBN 108)

Only principles rooted in custom—causal inference—produce a system of beliefs that exceeds the bounds of the senses and memory but which, over time, proves coherent, self-reinforcing, and thus stable. Following flightier principles of the imagination produces only opinions that are readily subverted. At the same time, the things with which judgment “acquaints” us are simply those things that the mind “*dignifies with the title of realities*” (T 1.3.9.3; SBN 108, my emphasis). Whether, from the standpoint of Reason, they fully deserve this title is another question. While reconstructing the distinction between justified and unjustified belief, Hume maintains a certain skeptical distance. His substituting stability for truth as the goal of inquiry explains all this.

In reconstructing the justified/unjustified distinction in these terms, Hume is investing stability in our beliefs with normative significance. He is able to do so because he thinks that stability is intrinsically desirable. Putting things the other way around, instability—the presence of conflict and contradiction—produces uneasiness in the mind, and is therefore something that we have a natural interest in avoiding or alleviating.

As Loeb points out, this attitude towards stability connects Hume's views with a central theme in classical Pyrrhonian skepticism.<sup>10</sup> The Pyrrhonian skeptic, as described by Sextus Empiricus, is disturbed by the contradictory views he finds all around him, as Hume is disturbed by the clamorous state of the republic of letters. To be beset by contradictions is to be in an uncomfortable state of mind, and the skeptic-to-be's first impulse is to relieve the tension by finding out the truth. What he finds, however, is that any claim can be balanced by a claim of roughly equal plausibility. Extensive inquiry thus leads to suspension of judgment and an unreflective, commonsensical approach to life. Unexpectedly, this leads to the peace of mind the skeptic first sought through theoretical inquiry. Hume has a somewhat similar view. He too sees the human mind as made uneasy by contradictions and motivated to escape from them. Doxastic stability has a normative significance because it is natural to want to relieve the uneasiness induced by a tendency to hold contradictory views. But whereas Sextus thinks that peace of mind is achieved by suspending judgment, Hume thinks that judgment, properly understood and suitably disciplined, can be seen to lead to stability in our beliefs. Hume finds the idea of universal suspension of judgment ludicrous (though to be fair, what Sextus thinks of as skeptical assent—his alternative to “judgment”—bears more than a passing resemblance to judgment as Hume understands it). For Hume, what is commonly called “the judgment” consists in those principles of the imagination that lead to beliefs that (*pace* Sextus) will not easily be subverted by “a due contrast and opposition.”

## 5. The Skeptical Turn

To this point, Loeb has offered us a sophisticated version of the naturalistic reading: sophisticated because he takes seriously Hume's interest in normative-

epistemological distinctions. However, without further development, this reading fails to do justice to the increasingly skeptical character assumed by Hume's philosophy in part 4 of *Treatise* Book 1. To accommodate what he takes to be Hume's ultimate skepticism, Loeb invites us to see a second (destructive) stage in the development of Hume's philosophical project. The stages are not independent. Rather, the second stage grows out of the first. As Loeb puts it, Hume's pursuit of his constructive project "gives rise to a destructive result, a negative assessment of the prospects for stability in belief, hence for justified belief, at least for the reflective person" (SJ 12).

According to Loeb, the driving force behind Hume's skeptical turn is the deep conflict that Hume claims to discover between causal reasoning and our disposition to believe in the existence of "bodies": objects that exist independently of our awareness of them. In uncovering the "manifest contradiction" (T 1.4.7.4; SBN 266) between the two fundamental principles of natural belief, Hume undercuts the positive epistemic status that his stability-based account of justification initially accords to certain commonsense beliefs and inferential procedures, thereby producing Book 1's dramatically skeptical conclusion.

Bodies are understood to be capable of "continued" existence. That is to say, they continue to exist even when not perceived. This implies that their existence is "independent": they do not depend for their existence on anyone's being aware of them. But why do we believe in the existence of body? This belief is not produced the senses: we can't perceive things existing unperceived. Nor can it be the result of straightforward causal reasoning. On Hume's account, causal inference depends on experience of conjunctions, and we don't have experiences of bodies in the perceived and unperceived phases of their existence. The belief in bodies is a problem for Hume.

Notoriously, Hume offers *two* suggestions. His first attempt to explain our belief in bodies invokes the "coherence" of experience: the supposed fact that our experiences succeed one another in patterned-governed ways. More precisely, it invokes coherence characteristic of those perceptions that we take to be bodies (i.e., to which we attribute continued and distinct existence). According to Hume, this attribution takes place because the coherence of experience gives rise to "a kind of reasoning from causation" (T 1.4.2.19; SBN 195). Roughly, we have to postulate the continued existence of external objects to maintain our beliefs concerning "the regularity of their operation." I hear the door creak and shortly thereafter the porter appears. I do not think that he appeared by magic: I take him to have come through the door, even though I did not see him do so. This leads me to reflect that he came up the stairs, though I did not see this either. To maintain the causal structure of the world, I need to accept endlessly many events that I did not perceive, and this implies the continued and distinct existence of bodies.

Hume is uneasy with this argument. As he says, although it may at first sound like a kind of custom-based causal inference, it is at bottom very different. And the problem is clear enough: the imaginative supplementation that Hume envisages

involves postulating a far greater degree of regularity (in the world) than is directly experienced: our experience of the world is spotty and episodic. Why then do we take the world to be so regular?

Hume toys with an appeal to a principle introduced to explain idealization in mathematics. We experience better and better approximations that can lead us to form an idea of something we probably never experience: perfect equality. This happens because

the imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse. (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198)

Similarly, custom (causal reasoning) may lead us to expect a certain degree of regularity in experience, and the “inertia principle” leads us expect even more. We are thus led to fill in the gaps in our experience with unperceived events, hence bodies.

Hume finds this mechanism, which Loeb calls “custom-and-galley” (SJ 186), “too weak to support alone so vast an edifice, as is that of the continu'd existence of all external bodies” (T 1.4.2.23; SBN 198). But what he then offers as a supplement is really a wholly new account of the belief in body. This account appeals to “constancy”: the recurrence of qualitatively identical perceptions. Roughly, Hume argues that we are inclined both to judge such perceptions to be numerically identical (on account of their exact resemblance) and to judge them to be distinct (on account of the interruption in their appearance). To resolve such contradictions, we distinguish between appearance and existence, attributing identity to the object itself and the interruption to its presence to the mind.

As Loeb is at pains to point out, this account of the origin of our belief in the existence of bodies involves attributing to the human mind susceptibility to all kinds of confusions. Unlike causal reasoning, it doesn't even *look* like the kind of inference that (prior to exposure to skeptical arguments) we would intuitively take to be justifying. In this, it is very different from causal inference. Loeb sees Hume as accepting this feature of the argument: the belief in body really isn't justified in *any* sense. But worse is to come. The initial form taken by our belief in body is naive realism. As naive realists, we attribute continued and distinct existence to the immediate objects of awareness: i.e., to our impressions.

According to Hume, naive realism is not inconsistent. Invoking his conception of the mind as a bundle of perceptions, Hume argues that there is no contradiction in supposing that perceptions exist unbundled. But naive realism is, however, false and can be shown to be false by “the slightest philosophy” (EHU 12.9; SBN 152). Pressing an eyeball makes us see double; but no one supposes that doubling our perceptions doubles the objects. We are thus led to distinguish between perceptions and objects. Initially, we take perceptions and their objects to be exactly

resembling. But further reflections on the observer's dependence on sensible qualities destabilizes this view, leading us to embrace "the modern philosophy," which distinguishes between primary and secondary qualities. But this version of belief in body is not stable either since Hume thinks (following Berkeley), that we cannot really conceive the primary qualities in abstraction from the secondary. Material existence thus shrinks to "a certain unknown, inexplicable something, as the cause of our perceptions; a notion so imperfect that no skeptic will think it worth while to contend against it" (EHU 12.16; SBN 155).

Whatever we think of this argument, its important feature, from Hume's standpoint, is that it involves causal reasoning essentially. As the independence of bodies followed from their capacity for continued existence, so continuity falls to the evident mind-dependence of the immediate objects of awareness. Similarly, the naive form of representative realism falls to the observer-dependence of the secondary qualities. In both cases, causal reasoning is what destabilizes our belief in body and pushes us further along the road to skepticism and the "manifest contradiction." For Loeb, this is a disaster. Hume's justification of causal inference turns on his offering stable and consensual belief as an alternative epistemic goal to truth. As we saw, he thinks that he can do this because he holds that we can draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, without worrying about the skeptical problem of the external world. But now it turns out that the two great principles of natural belief—causal inference, which "peoples the world," and the mechanism that leads us to belief in an external world, "the universal and primary opinion of all men" (EHU 12.9; SBN 152)—are in deep and irresolvable conflict. For reflective people, it turns out, belief cannot be stabilized. Thus, Hume ends up an unqualified or radical skeptic. This is because skepticism triumphs even when the justified/unjustified distinction is reconstructed in Hume's own terms.

As noted, Loeb finds Hume's destructive turn unnecessary as well as unwelcome. In particular, Hume should never have made "constancy" the basis for a wholly new (and patently non-justifying) account of the origins of our belief in body. Following Price and Bennett,<sup>11</sup> Loeb argues that Hume should have subsumed constancy under coherence; for had he done so, and had he had made more use of custom-and-galley, he could have given a more plausible account of the origins of our belief in bodies. Further, Loeb argues that Hume's conception of the mind as a bundle of perceptions could and should have led him to take a much more critical attitude towards the causal arguments against naive realism. Putting these two points together: Hume could have traced our belief in external bodies to (an extended form of) custom-based reasoning; and he could have avoided the view that elementary causal reasoning destabilizes that belief. In this way, he could have avoided the "manifest contradiction" and the ultimate collapses of his philosophical project into unmitigated skepticism.

I find it significant that Loeb is moved to correct Hume on this fundamental point. But while Loeb finds the outcome of Hume's project unsatisfactory, Hume

himself seems not to, and we need to know why. Unfortunately, given Loeb's reading, it is not easy to imagine an explanation. For according to Loeb, Hume offers an elaborate naturalistic epistemology with real normative bite, only to take it all away. Why would anyone do such a thing? Traditionally, there have been two suggestions. The more flattering attributes to Hume a kind of steely integrity, or what the French call *jusqu'aboutisme*. The idea is that Hume is driven to skepticism by his willingness to follow an argument wherever it leads. The less flattering casts aspersions on his seriousness: he loves to shock and so welcomes paradox. Neither suggestion gives Hume much credit for common sense.

Loeb presents Hume as having quite different attitudes towards inductive inference and belief in the external world. In both cases, Hume denies that our beliefs or inferential procedures can be given a grounding in Reason. However, in the case of belief in the existence of body, he is willing, even eager, to trace a route skepticism from within his own naturalistic theory of (justified) belief. That is to say, in the one case but not in the other, he allows the principles of natural belief to generate instability. So for Loeb, the problem is to explain why Hume is so much more receptive to external world skepticism than he is to inductive skepticism. Loeb's explanation is that Hume is himself "convinced that the vulgar belief [in the existence of body] is patently false and [in] light of this conviction seeks . . . an explanation of the belief that will have the consequence that it is unjustified" (SJ 195). This is Loeb's version of the integrity suggestion.

I am not convinced. Loeb is right that Hume thinks that the vulgar form of belief in body is patently false. But why would this lead Hume to argue that it is unjustified, in the sense of unstable? Does Hume even *think* that it is unjustified, in this sense? Surely not. Not only is the vulgar belief "the universal and primary opinion of all men," it is what we all recur to once our skeptical delirium recedes. Belief in body may be subject to occasional destabilization, but it does not fail the stability test in the way that, say, superstitious beliefs—which can be permanently undermined—assuredly do. Indeed, according to Hume, even when temporarily undermined by skeptical reflections, the vulgar belief in body is not altogether eliminated. Rather, it continues to exert an important subterranean influence, functioning as the source of whatever appeal is possessed by its philosophical successor—representative realism—which has "no primary recommendation either to reason or the imagination" (T 1.4.2.47; SBN 212). Arguably, the vulgar belief is never *completely* destabilized.

I think that Loeb over-simplifies Hume's skepticism with respect to the senses. He fails to note that Hume's attitude towards the vulgar belief is quite different from his attitude towards the philosophical theories that grow out of reflection on it. The vulgar belief in body, which involves attributing continued and distinct existence to the immediate objects of awareness (i.e., our impressions), is refuted by arguments that show those objects to be observer-dependent. But Hume is at pains to argue that the vulgar belief, while false, is *not* incoherent. By contrast, reflection on philosophical replacements for the vulgar belief leads ultimately to *conceptual*

skepticism. Thus conceptual collapse is the fate of “the modern philosophy,” the sophisticated version of representative realism that incorporates the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Following Berkeley, Hume thinks that the primary qualities cannot be conceived in total abstraction from the secondary. Accordingly, when we preclude continued and distinct existence for the secondary qualities, “there remains nothing in the universe, which has such an existence” (T 1.4.4.15; SBN 231). Or as he puts it in the first *Enquiry*:

Bereave matter of all its intelligible qualities, both primary and secondary, and you in a manner annihilate it, and leave only a certain unknown and inexplicable something, as the cause of our perceptions, a notion so imperfect, that no skeptic will think it worthwhile to contend against it. (EHU 12.16; SBN 155)

Nothing could save us from this conceptual collapse except the doctrine of abstract ideas. But again following Berkeley, Hume repudiates that doctrine (EHU 12.16; SBN 203; T 1.1.7).

The coherence of the vulgar belief is important: how could a belief exert such influence if it were incoherent or, worse still, lacked content altogether? But the need to keep the vulgar belief conceptually respectable poses a serious problem for Hume. Hume treats “ideas” indifferently as concepts or judgments. Indeed, he voices explicit doubts as to whether conception and judgment can be distinguished.<sup>12</sup> (This is why he discusses “impressions” twice: once in connection with the sensory basis of concepts, and again in connection with the perceptual basis of judgments.) But this creates all kinds of trouble. In particular, when Hume argues that there is no perceptual basis for *believing* that objects exist unperceived—the very idea of such a basis is a contradiction—he is in danger of establishing at the same time that there is no basis in impressions for the *concept* of unperceived existence. Given Hume’s version of the theory of ideas, both points are naturally put in terms of there being no impression of continued existence. So Hume faces the danger of finding the vulgar belief to be not just false but contentless, a danger compounded by his tendency to think that there is in any case no idea of existence, perceived or otherwise (T 1.2.6).

In the *Treatise*, when discussing the vulgar belief in body, the most difficult problem Hume deals with is to explain the content of that belief. The heart of the problem is to explain how the mind ever comes to distinguish between existing and being perceived. Though Hume is not as forthcoming as we might wish, I think that a close examination of the text shows that this problem is the key to Hume’s dissatisfaction with the coherence mechanism. At best, this mechanism explains our *belief* in body, taking the *concept* of body for granted. By contrast, the constancy mechanism involves conceptual innovation: to resolve the contradictory identity-judgments prompted by recurrent, exactly resembling impressions, the mind

distinguishes for the first time perception and existence, attributing interruption to the first and continuity to the second. In taking this line, Hume is forced into a dramatic departure from the naive "copy" theory of ideas with which the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* both begin; and his uneasiness about this is shown by his tendency to speak of the "notion" of body, rather than the idea.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, this way of salvaging the coherence of the vulgar conception of body still leaves him with a basis for arguing that attempts to philosophize about bodies leads to conceptual collapse. For as we have seen, all that could save the most sophisticated philosophical notion of body from such a fate is the (exploded) doctrine of abstract ideas.

Whatever we think of this aspect of Hume's treatment of the belief in body, we can be sure that he would not have welcomed Loeb's suggestion that he make more use of "custom-plus-galley." The coherence mechanism, however supplemented, does not address what is for Hume the most intractable problem: how we come by the concept of body in the first place. However, the essential point for our present purposes is that Hume's argument is both more and less destructive than Loeb suggests. While more destructive with respect to philosophical theories of matter, it is notably accommodating to the vulgar belief: so accommodating that Hume is willing, albeit reluctantly, to make a radical departure from his original simple theory of conception.<sup>14</sup>

Returning to Loeb's idea of constructive and destructive stages, corresponding roughly to the treatment of causal inference and the treatment of belief in body, we should note, too, that Hume thinks that the ordinary conception of causation—which is implicated in our ordinary understanding of the reliability of inductive inference—involves the idea of necessary connection. But the vulgar belief in objective necessary connection is false, or perhaps confused, and fairly readily shown to be so. This does not make the cases of induction and naive realism completely parallel: for one thing, the element of conceptual skepticism is significantly different. But Hume tries to make the cases appear as close as he can, a point I shall return to. For now, let me just say that Loeb's two-stage model does not correspond to Hume's intentions at any point.

Loeb's explanation for Hume's tolerance for external world skepticism is in any case incomplete. For even if Hume is especially open to external world skepticism, why does he ride it so hard? Why does he push it to the point at which, if Loeb is to be believed, it undercuts the naturalistic reconstruction of justification? To answer this question, Loeb switches from the integrity to the perversity explanation. According to Loeb, Hume "relishes paradox": a love of paradox is "part of Hume's intellectual personality" (SJ 215). In other words, there is no philosophical explanation: Hume is just frivolous. Loeb joins the long line of Hume's detractors.

Now I do not deny that Hume has a certain love of "paradox." Particularly in the *Treatise*, there is an element of *epater le bourgeois*: that is, Hume delights in presenting views that are surprising and (to his contemporaries) even shocking. But what Loeb wants us to suppose is that Hume's relish for paradox extends to

cutting the ground from under his own positive epistemological program. I find this very implausible. To take just one problem, why does Hume feel entitled to proceed with his science of man, if its fundamental division has suffered internal collapse? Is it that a philosopher can do anything, if he loves paradox enough?

Can we do better than this? I think we can.

## 6. The Uses of Pyrrhonism

In my overview of approaches to Hume, I argued that commentators have not found it easy come up with a truly unified account of Hume's intentions. Indeed, for the most part they have not tried, preferring to play up some particular aspect of Hume's project: naturalistic, critical or skeptical. Now while, greatly to his credit, Loeb acknowledges the skeptical element in Hume's outlook, he fails to reconcile it with the constructive naturalism. In essence, his strategy is to *conjoin* a naturalist and a skeptical reading, and then to trace Hume's tolerance for this unsatisfactory outcome to a defect in his character. By itself, this appeal to personality is a sign that things have gone awry.

Loeb's failure to offer an integrated account of Hume's philosophical outlook can be understood in terms of two fundamental and closely inter-connected misreadings. First, Loeb mischaracterizes Hume's intentions in undertaking his inquiries into human understanding and, as a result, is led to adopt an incorrect account of the kind of doxastic stability that Hume offers as the goal of inquiry. Second, Loeb exaggerates the extent to which Hume's conclusion is "skeptical." Together, these misreadings produce Loeb's two stage model of Hume's argument. Aside from them, the model has little to recommend it.

Let us begin with Hume's intentions. According to Loeb, Hume's goal in pursuing his constructive epistemological project is "to sustain his pre-theoretical intuitions about justification with reference to a stability-based theory of justification" (SJ 12). Thus Loeb treats Hume as if he were a certain kind of contemporary analytic epistemologist, looking for a systematic account, and thus a kind of vindication, of his epistemic intuitions. But this is not Hume's goal at all. Hume is engaged in the Baconian project of reforming the sciences, and makes a pointed allusion to Bacon as his intellectual progenitor (T Intro. 7; SBN xvii). No doubt, as methodologist, Hume will make use of pre-theoretical intuitions about good and bad forms of inference, as logicians generally must do. But that does not mean that systematizing intuitions is the point of Hume's investigations.

By itself, this mistake need not be catastrophic. For although vindicating intuitions is not Hume's *goal*, the execution of his *task*—a positive theory of justification grounded in the science of man—will inevitably be guided by them. In Loeb's case, however, the mistake matters. It matters because it leads him to adopt an inadequate—because too undemanding—conception of stability. For Loeb, stability is individualistic: any individual who can stabilize his beliefs, by whatever

means, is capable of justified belief. Such a conception of stability is clearly of no use to Hume. The Republic of Letters is wracked by endless controversy, ruled more by eloquence than by reason: this is the state of affairs that Hume means to remedy. Accordingly, he needs to identify principles of belief-formation that produce *long-term consensus*. To foster long-term doxastic stability within and across individual belief systems, he needs principles that both stabilize the beliefs of individual inquirers and lead inquirers to converge on the same beliefs. Causal inference, under the control of meta-inductive methodological principles ("general rules") is the chief example of such a principle.

Hume's interest in consensus can be spotted throughout the *Treatise*. Indeed, although Loeb represents Hume as trying to systematize his own intuitions, Hume is notable for his avoidance of the first person. He prefers to speak of "we": we the learned, the sort of people who read or write books like the *Treatise*. Even more impersonally, he speaks of principles that are or are not "received by philosophy." But more significantly, he stresses the permanence and universality of stability-promoting propensities, and his interest in consensus explains why. Philosophers who adopt hypotheses that are "specious and agreeable" (to them) are following idiosyncratic inclinations ("caprice"). In consequence, their opinions will not be widely shared, and the Republic of Letters will be a scene of endless dissension. By contrast, if we become cautious and modest reasoners, following the universal principles of the mind and sticking close to experience, we can expect to be led to consensual views. The Republic of Letters will be a calm and reasonable place. Reason (as reconstructed by Hume) will displace eloquence.

The goal of consensus puts severe constraints on the kind of stability, and hence the principles of belief formation, that Hume is looking for. If I am incurious, stupid, dogmatic, or too full of myself to listen to anyone else, I may have stable beliefs. But such routes to personal doxastic stability do not interest the Baconian reformer. On the contrary, the tendency of "the greater part of mankind" to be "affirmative and dogmatical in their opinions" (EHU 12.24; SBN 161) is part of the problem. To repeat, what Hume wants is to stabilize beliefs across the community of inquirers and over the long term. Such stabilization will be possible only if there are ways of forming beliefs that can survive sustained critical scrutiny. Such ways are what Hume claims to have identified. Thus he writes that if we follow sound methods and suppress our tendency to be charmed by specious and agreeable hypotheses:

we might hope to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for that, perhaps, is too much to be hop'd for) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination. (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272)

Note again, as Baconian reformers we want a system that is satisfactory to "the human mind," not particular human minds with their personal prejudices and

caprices. Naturally, such a system must depend on principles that are “permanent and universal.” Beliefs formed on such principles will not be easily subverted by a due contrast and opposition: that is, they will stand the test of the most critical examination.

Loeb’s overly individualistic notion of stability leads him to an interpretation of Hume’s epistemic judgments that strikes me as extremely dubious. As we know, Loeb thinks that Hume’s final position is that no beliefs are stable under sustained reflection. But what about people who are not particularly reflective? Hume has two ways to go. On the “demanding” version of his theory, even the most firmly grounded beliefs of the unreflective are ultimately unjustified because intrinsically *susceptible* to destabilization. On the “less demanding” version, unreflective people have justified beliefs because, while their beliefs are susceptible to instability, they are not *in fact* infected by it. Loeb argues that Hume takes the less demanding option.

A key piece of evidence for Loeb’s view is Hume’s curious discussion of the English country gentlemen who, having no use for philosophy, are safe from skepticism. Hume thinks that “they do well to keep themselves in their present situation,” a remark that Loeb takes to have “an approving ring” (SJ 92). But in the light of Hume’s goal of reforming the Republic of Letters, this reading is truly bizarre. If Loeb is to be believed, Hume takes the most (perhaps the only) successful believers to be the stolid and incurious. The one sure road to justification is stupidity. Love of paradox indeed.

The passage that Loeb alludes to here is an important one. It is worth quoting in full. Hume writes:

there are in England, in particular, many honest gentlemen, who being always employed in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, have carry’d their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are every day exposed to their senses. And indeed, of such as these I pretend not to make philosophers, nor do I expect them either to be associates in these researches or auditors of these discoveries. They do well to keep themselves in their present situation; and instead of refining them into philosophers, I wish we cou’d communicate to our founders of systems, a share of this gross earthy mixture, as an ingredient, which they commonly stand much in need of, and which wou’d serve to temper those fiery particles of which they are composed. (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272)

Patently, Hume is not commending the incurious and unimaginative: they are not his audience. They have nothing to do with his project of stabilizing belief within the community of inquirers, to which they do not belong. Rhetorically, Hume’s “approving” verdict is delivered *de haut en bas*, a proud Scot playfully tweaking the English. But Hume has a serious point to make. He continues:

While a warm imagination is allowed to enter into philosophy, and hypotheses embrac'd merely for being specious and agreeable, we can never have any steady principles, nor any sentiments, that will suit with common practice and experience. (Ibid.)

If we are too commonsensical, we will make no discoveries, for we will not even engage in deeper forms of inquiry. But if we let our speculative imagination run riot, we will end up only with a plethora of “chimerical systems” and will again make no lasting or useful discoveries. So while Hume is not urging country gentlemen to become philosophers, or philosophers to become country gentlemen, he is urging fiery-tempered philosophers to cultivate some of the earthiness—the practical- and empirical-mindedness—of the country gentlemen. In other words, the way forward is to temper speculative imagination with practical good sense and attention to experience, a point already insisted on by Hume's hero, Bacon.<sup>15</sup> Hume nails the point down in a passage we have already encountered:

But were these hypotheses [i.e., those embraced for being specious and agreeable] once remov'd, we might hope to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for that, perhaps, is too much to be hop'd for) might at least be satisfactory to the human kind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination. (Ibid.)

Hume's “commendation” of the blinkered squires is the preamble to his affirmation of hope for a system of opinions that would stand the test of criticism. He surely does not think that such a system is ready to hand in the views of the country gentleman, who almost certainly thinks, perhaps immovably, that the Irish lack wit and the French solidity. Loeb's reading of this passage is wide of the mark.

I think that Loeb's misreading of Hume reflects a certain historical blindspot. While sensitive to the Pyrrhonian influences on Hume's thought, Loeb wholly ignores its strikingly Baconian character. Two of Bacon's central themes, when he expresses his hopes for the future of science, are time and co-operation. These are Hume's themes too. If at present we lack a system of opinions that would withstand the most rigorous criticism, we should not despair:

Two thousand years with such long interruptions, and under such mighty discouragements, are a small space to give any tolerable perfection to the sciences; and perhaps we are still in too early a stage of the world to discover any principles, which will bear the examination of the latest posterity. (Ibid.)

Hume is interested in consensus over the *very* long run: all the way out to the latest posterity. And he does not despair of our achieving it.

This brings me to what I regard as Loeb's second major mis-step: his contention that, in Hume's considered opinion, no beliefs are stable under reflection, which means that no beliefs are justified even by Hume's relaxed standards. Hume holds no such simple view. Rather, his position is that skeptical reflections, while theoretically unassailable, are capable only of producing a *temporary* destabilization of our beliefs. Over time, beliefs properly grounded in the stability-inducing propensities of the imagination, dominate our thinking in all practical and even most theoretical undertakings.

Hume makes his attitude clear from the beginning. To distance himself from Pyrrhonism, he appeals to the inevitability of our having beliefs. But his words repay close attention. Having just gone through an elaborate skeptical argument, Hume realizes that he may be suspected of being a skeptic himself, a charge he repudiates. He writes:

Shou'd it here be ask'd me . . . whether I be really one of those skeptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in *any* thing possest of *any* measures of truth and falsehood; I shou'd reply, that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion. Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity, has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel. (T 1.4.1.7; SBN 183)

The key words are "sincerely and constantly." While no one who claims to be a constant skeptic can be sincere, occasional bouts of skeptical doubt are entirely possible and, for those with a reflective turn of mind, may even be inevitable. But we must not equate susceptibility to skeptical interludes with serious doxastic instability. Here we see that Loeb's two major mistakes are closely connected. His inadequate account of Hume's larger philosophical project leads him to an overly simple notion of doxastic stability, which in turn leads him to an overestimation of the project's skeptical results. Loeb thinks that if an individual's beliefs are de-stabilized (perhaps periodically), they are unstable. But the fact is, stability (as consensus over the long haul) is compatible with *occasional* Pyrrhonian interludes on the part of *individual* inquirers. Accordingly, in his "despairing" conclusion, Hume stresses the temporary character of his *crise Pyrrhonienne*. His doubts are "the sentiments of [his] spleen and indolence" and will be dissipated by the return of "a serious, good-humour'd disposition" (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270). Indeed, by the final paragraphs of the conclusion, they are already starting to evaporate. Having expressed his hopes for solid results, Hume prepares to continue his inquiries.

Now there is a passage in which Hume seems to say something stronger. Skepticism, he announces, is

a malady that can never be radically cur'd, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chace it away, and sometimes seem entirely free from it. (T 1.4.2.57; SBN 218)

But this is hyperbole. Hume is not suggesting that there is chronic instability in our everyday beliefs, only that we have a natural *disposition* towards Pyrrhonism that cannot simply be removed. A “radical” cure for skepticism would require that our fundamental commitments be provided with rational foundations. However,

'Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or senses; and we but expose them farther when we attempt to justify them in that manner. As the skeptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always encreases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. (Ibid.)

In other words, there is no satisfying theoretical response to skeptical arguments. But all this means is that doubt is overcome by Nature rather than by reason. Nature cures us of “this philosophical melancholy and delirium” either by “relaxing this bent of mind” or by “some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate these chimeras” (T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269).

We have a natural disposition towards Pyrrhonism because, though we cannot sustain it, we have a natural disposition to profound and intense reflection. Our curiosity knows no natural bounds. So in the case of causal relations, we want to know “the causes of every phaenomenon.” However, we are not “content with knowing the immediate causes, but push on our inquiries, till we arrive at the original and ultimate principle.” When we push on this way, we are disappointed to learn that the energy we sought in the cause “lies merely in ourselves” (T 1.4.7.5; SBN 266), being no more than a projection on to the world of our own inferential dispositions. We court disappointment, and ultimately skepticism, when we leave Baconian science (the quest for knowledge of “immediate causes”) for philosophy (the quest for rational foundations or original principles). So here is another angle on the occasional character of skeptical doubt: it is tied inseparably to a peculiar kind of inquiry. This is why Hume says that causal inference and the principle that leads us to believe in body are “*in some circumstances . . . directly contrary*” (T 1.4.7.4; SBN 266, emphasis mine). The circumstances in question are the context of philosophical reflection. In the course of everyday life, the conflict does not make itself felt. It emerges only when we retreat from involvement with all particular experiences in order to get at ultimate principles, whether of mind or world. This withdrawal from experience and from all practical interests is what makes skeptical doubt both possible and unsustainable.

A lot more could be said about Hume's idea that skepticism is the natural outcome of philosophizing. But we need to move on. For while I have explained how

Hume can *tolerate* a natural disposition towards Pyrrhonism, I have not explained why he seems positively to *welcome* it. However, the explanation is not far to seek. Our disposition towards Pyrrhonism is the corrective for our dispositions towards credulity and dogmatism.

With philosophers, credulity takes the form of attraction to the “specious and agreeable” hypotheses that spring from their over-active imaginations. An experience of the force of profound skeptical reflections is the means by which the “fiery” tempered philosopher can acquire a touch of the country gentleman’s earthiness. Skeptical reflections help us cultivate the balance between stolid practicality and speculative excess that is Hume’s recipe for reforming the sciences.

The tendency towards dogmatism is different, in that it afflicts even the most careful reasoners. Thus Hume has no objection to our yielding to “that propensity, which inclines us to be positive and certain in *particular points*, according to the light, in which we survey them in any *particular instant*” (T 1.4.7.15; SBN 273, emphasis in original). It would be easier to abandon inquiry altogether than to “guard against that assurance, which always arises from an exact and full survey of an object.” A tendency towards dogmatism is thus natural and inclines to “make us of such terms as these, *'tis evident, 'tis certain, 'tis undeniable*; which a due deference to the public ought, perhaps, to prevent” (ibid., emphasis in original). Hume apologizes if he has fallen into this trap, declaring that

such expressions were extorted from me by the present view of the object, and imply no dogmatical spirit, nor conceited idea of my own judgment, which are sentiments that I am sensible can become no body, and a skeptic still less than any other. (Ibid.)

*Treatise* Book 1 ends with this assertion of the opposition between skepticism and dogmatism. But the paragraph is interesting for recapitulating—and connecting with the skeptical spirit—the ideas that we have found to be central to Hume’s conception of justification: consensus in the long run. Individual certainty in “particular instants” is no guarantee of long-term public approval. This elevation of public over private judgment is perhaps the most important single theme in Hume’s constructive epistemology.

Hume makes the same points even more clearly in the first *Enquiry*, without the hyperbole that he came to think disfigured the *Treatise*. As for dogmatism, Hume tells us, “The greater part of mankind are naturally apt to be affirmative and dogmatical in their opinions.” Limited in their views and eager to get on with things, men are uncomfortable with uncertainty; and they think that they can overcome it “by the violence of their affirmations and the obstinacy of their belief.” However, were such dogmatic thinkers made sensible of “the strange infirmities of human understanding, even in its most perfect state,” they might acquire some “modesty and reserve.” The learned in particular could profit from “a small

tincture of Pyrrhonism” to “abate their pride” and inspire them with that “degree of doubt, and caution, and modesty, which in all kinds of scrutiny and decision, ought for ever to accompany a just reasoner.” But exposure to skepticism can also encourage “the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding” (all quotations from EHU 12.24; SBN 161–2). Skeptical reflections are thus the antidote to both dogmatism and unbridled speculation.

The use Hume makes of skeptical reflections shows another line of affiliation with the Pyrrhonian tradition. Pyrrhonian skepticism is principally an attitude (of avoidance of refined theoretical inquiry), sustained by a kind of supreme dialectical skill. Having acquired the ability to argue for and against any thesis, the Pyrrhonian skeptic assents to none. Skeptical suspension of judgment is the outcome of acquiring this ability, not of a taking a decision in light of a theoretical conclusion. The Pyrrhonian argues his way *to* skepticism, though not exactly *for* it.<sup>16</sup> Hume's mitigated skepticism has a similar character. Avoidance of topics remote from experience and practice “may be the natural result of the PYRRHONIAN doubts and scruples” (EHU 12.25; SBN 162, capitalization in original). I take this talk of “natural result” seriously. While we cannot, in the normal course of things, take skeptical problems seriously, exposure to skepticism has a chastening effect. Mitigated skepticism is more an attitude than a policy, an attitude we cultivate by exposing ourselves to extreme skepticism. The balance Hume seeks is something like the vector sum of our dogmatic and skeptical tendencies.

The urge to inquire can take us far from the concerns of common life. Accordingly, this urge, especially when allied with a warm imagination, is apt to lead us into theoretical fairyland. But this same willingness to pursue profound and intense reflections, applied to questions about ultimate principles, leads to skepticism: i.e., to the very thing that chastens the speculative inquirer. Through their very potential for conflict, the principles of natural belief provide the inquiring mind with a kind of self-correcting mechanism.

The theme of self correction through conflict gives us further reason to doubt Loeb's claim that Hume's project goes through two stages, corresponding roughly to parts 3 and 4 of *Treatise* Book 1. While it is true that part 4 presents a lengthy and elaborate account of a skeptical breakdown resulting from a deep conflict between the principles of natural belief, already in part 3 there is a brief—but significant—anticipation of the theme of conflict in the imagination. The crucial passage occurs in Hume's discussion of our capacity for forming “general rules.” According to Hume, under the influence of general rules, we are able to resist the force of experience, dismissing repeatedly observed conjunctions as merely accidental. This capacity is the source of prejudice. We may be so convinced of the general rule that “An Irishman cannot have wit, and a Frenchman cannot have solidity,” that even when we meet a witty Irishman or solid Frenchman, we refuse to acknowledge their qualities (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 146). All appearances

notwithstanding, Sean must be dull and Pierre must be flaky. But a capacity to override experience is also essentially implicated in our ability to distinguish between real causes and accidental correlations. For when we know how things work generally, we can conclude that some observed conjunctions must be misleading. Or, in some circumstances, we may conduct an investigation knowing that some things just couldn't be the cause of others, not wasting our time proving that they are not.<sup>17</sup> But the experience of separating genuine causes from accidental circumstances leads us to form "general rules" of a special kind: methodological principles to guide inquiry. These general rules enable us to correct for our prejudices. They do so because, as Hume says, "our general rules are in a manner set in opposition to each other" (T 1.3.13.12; SBN 149). Granted, Hume is stretching here. But for present purposes, I am less interested in the quality of Hume's argument than in the peculiar spin he puts on it. With respect to the conflict between the two uses of general rules,

the skeptics may here have the pleasure of seeing a new and signal contradiction in our reason, and of seeing all of philosophy ready to be subverted by a principle of human nature, and again sav'd by a new direction of the very same principle. The following of general rules is a very unphilosophical species of probability; and yet 'tis only by following them that we can correct this, and all other unphilosophical probabilities. (T 1.3.13.12; SBN 150)

In the *Treatise*, this is the very first mention of "skeptics," and it occurs in a passage linking a conflict in the imagination with a capacity for self-correction. I do not think that this conjunction of themes is accidental. Loeb thinks that Hume's constructive treatment of causal inference and the skeptical conclusion that arises from his discussion of our belief in body are sharply and obviously in conflict, and seen by Hume as such. My view is quite different: if anything, Hume tries too hard for theoretical coherence, striving for parallels where they are not easily achieved.<sup>18</sup>

## 7. Skepticism and Philosophy

I want to conclude with some further remarks on the ways in which Hume is and is not a skeptic.

Hume sees Pyrrhonism—a skeptical breakdown of belief—as inevitably occasional. But what of his theoretical or Academic skepticism? If I am right, not only is Hume not a Pyrrhonist, he is not an *unqualified* theoretical skeptic either. Given his theory of justification, a system of justified beliefs remains possible, even if with respect to more abstruse matters we are not there yet.

Does this mean that Hume is not a serious skeptic at all? Not necessarily. It is tempting to claim that Hume holds to a qualified theoretical skepticism—anti-Rationalism—that is, within its limits, utterly uncompromising. Consider for example his commendation of consensus in the long run as the goal of science and philosophy. While this cannot help but remind us of Peirce's theory that truth is what will be believed at the end of inquiry, Hume himself shows no inclination to redefine truth in doxastic or epistemic terms. Rather, Hume consistently treats stable consensus as an alternative to truth. The reason for this is clear: by so doing, he sustains his anti-Rationalism. If truth were defined in terms of long-term consensus, stability-conducive principles of belief-formation would turn out to be truth-conducive after all. Hume never shows the slightest inclination to make such a claim.

On the other hand, Hume's attitude towards even this qualified theoretical skepticism is nuanced for, like the ancient Pyrrhonians, he recognizes that it would not become a skeptic to be too dogmatic in his skepticism. Rather, "A true skeptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction" (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 273). True, this sentence is not repeated in the first *Enquiry*; but even there Hume avoids overly dogmatic pronouncements. Sticking to philosophical objections, he tells us, the skeptic "*seems* to have ample matter of triumph" (EHU 12.22; SBN 159, my emphasis). Like his Pyrrhonian forebears, Hume records the appearances while avoiding definitive endorsements. But I do not myself think that these qualifications are very serious. Hume need not think that his theoretical skepticism is demonstrably correct. It is enough for his purposes if there are no decisive arguments against it, which he surely does hold. It may be enough if there are particular situations in which skeptical arguments strike us as utterly compelling, which there certainly are.

It seems clear that Hume's philosophical temperament is profoundly anti-Rationalist. His anti-Rationalism comes out even in his attitude towards his own science of man. As the discussion of general rules shows, there is nothing "intelligible" about the workings of the imagination. The propensity that gets us into trouble also gets us out of it. But there is no reason why it should: it just does. We are saved from Pyrrhonism by a "trivial" property of the imagination: the difficulty we find in entering into remote views. This property is trivial because utterly contingent. Things don't have to be this way, but thankfully they are. This tendency to insist on the ultimate contingency of things—including the workings of our own minds—is the true significance of Hume's apparent love of paradox.

In conclusion, let me note a feature of Hume's "skeptical" conclusion that is too little remarked on: his insistence on the impossibility of guiding our inquiries by rules or maxims. Trivial propensities of the imagination can cause us problems; but we cannot make it a rule to resist all such propensities, since just such a propensity rescues us from Pyrrhonism. Refined and elaborate reasoning can create all kinds of difficulties; but if we make it a rule to eschew all such reasoning, we

“cut off entirely all science and philosophy” (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 268). This is why, as I have argued, Hume’s mitigated skepticism is more an attitude than a doctrine or method.

I began by distinguishing different forms of skepticism. To get at what is behind Hume’s distrust of rules, we need one more distinction: between philosophical skepticism (in all its forms) and skepticism about philosophy, where philosophy is understood as the attempt to base human beliefs and inferential procedures on something firmer and more convincing than themselves. There is no such basis. And yet we should not give up our inquiries. Our situation is that of

a man, who having struck on many shoals, and having narrowly escap’d shipwreck in passing a small frith, has yet the temerity to put out to sea in the same leaky weather-beaten vessel, and even carries his ambition so far as to think of compassing the globe under these disadvantageous circumstances. (T 1.4.7.1; SBN 263)

Dwelling on our disadvantages can make us despondent. But leaky though our vessel may be, it is the only one we’ve got; and if we sail it well, it will deliver us to parts unknown.

Loeb’s insight—that Hume has a constructive epistemological project based on the goal of doxastic stability—is essential to understanding how the various strands in Hume’s thinking fit together. But Hume is not the unqualified skeptic Loeb thinks he is. Hume’s conclusion, so often described as despairing, is an expression of Baconian hope, though not of Cartesian assurance.

## NOTES

1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2000); and David Hume, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Previously, the standard scholarly editions of these works were *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) and *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed., revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). Further references to the *Treatise* and *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, in both the text and the notes, will be given by “T” and “EHU” respectively followed by a page number for Selby-Bigge/Nidditch (SBN). References to the *Treatise* will also be given by numbers for book, part and chapter, which are the same for both editions.

2 Louis Loeb, *Stability and Justification in Hume’s Treatise*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Subsequent references given by “SJ” and page number.

3 James Beattie, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Immutability of Truth*, 4th edition (Edward and Charles Dilly: London, 1773); Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), chap. 14, essay 2. The skeptical reading of Hume was revived (along with Hume's philosophical writings themselves) by T. H. Green in the Introduction to his edition of Hume's works. This Introduction is reprinted as *Thomas Hill Green's Hume and Locke*, ed. Ramon M. Lemos (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1968). But while the skeptical reading of Hume is sometimes thought of as the Beattie-Reid-Green interpretation, it is worth noting that these skeptical readings are by no means the same. Beattie's central claim is that fundamental "principles of truth," such as that the course of Nature is uniform, "must rest upon their own evidence, perceived intuitively by the understanding." If we demand arguments for such fundamental principles, we will be led into skepticism, since any arguments we can think up will be less certain than the principles themselves. (Beattie, 139). Reid stresses the important role, in leading Hume to skepticism, of the theory of ideas, as in a way does Green. However, for Reid, Hume's skepticism is straightforwardly epistemological and results from his taking ideas to be the immediate objects of perception. By contrast, while Green is aware of this skeptical potential in the theory of ideas, he argues (taking his cue from Kant) that the theory generates a much deeper problem: namely, that in its empiricist version it cannot allow for *judgment*, knowledgeable or otherwise. Green writes, perhaps thinking of Beattie and Reid, "The weakness of Hume's opponents . . . has lain primarily in their allowing that his doctrine would account for any significant predication whatever (Green, 185). Green raises a very important and under-discussed issue, though one that I will not be able to go deeply into here.

4 Important versions of the naturalistic reading of Hume include Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, (London: MacMillan, 1941); John Passmore, *Hume's Intentions* (London: Duckworth, 1952); Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge, 1977). and Robert Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 1985). However, as the title of his book suggests, Fogelin puts more stress on the severity of Hume's skepticism than naturalist readers generally do.

5 Norman Kemp Smith, "The Naturalism of David Hume (1)," *Mind* 14 (1905): 149–73. Quotation from 168. Cited by Loeb, SJ 24.

6 See for example, A. J. Ayer, *Hume* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980); Antony Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief* (London: Routledge, 1961); Jonathan Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

7 "If we take into our hand any volume, of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion" (EHU 12.34; SBN 165).

8 David Hume, "An Abstract of a Book Lately Published Entitled A Treatise of Human Nature," in Hume, *Treatise* (Norton and Norton, 404–17). Quotation from 409.

9 *Hume's Skepticism*, 22.

10 SJ 6f.

11 Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, chap. 13; H. H. Price. *Hume's Theory of the External World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948).

12 See T 1.3.7.5n (SBN 96n), where Hume denounces the distinction between conception, judgment and reasoning as “a very remarkable error.”

13 Generally speaking, commentators have never properly appreciated Hume's conceptual difficulties. Again, Loeb is a shining exception: see his discussion of “quasi-contents” (SJ 166f.). But for the reasons given in the text, I do not think that even Loeb takes Hume's struggles with these difficulties seriously enough.

14 For a more detailed treatment of the nature and basis of Hume's conceptual skepticism, see my paper “Hume's Criterion of Significance,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 15 (1985): 273–304.

15 Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 4, ed. J. Spedding, R. Ellis, and D. Heath (London; Longman's, 1875). See for example aphorism 95, where Bacon calls for the uniting of the “experimental” and “rational” faculties. Bacon's ideas concerning the reform of the sciences are far more subtle than Hume's, in my view largely as a result of Bacon's lack of interest in general skepticism.

16 For some thoughts on the Pyrrhonist's use of general skeptical arguments, see my “Scepticism without Theory,” *Review of Metaphysics* 41 (1988): 547–88.

17 See EHU 10.26 (SBN 123f.), where Hume tells the story of the investigation of a miracle by the Cardinal de Retz. According to considerable testimony, a one-legged man had regained his missing limb by having holy oil rubbed on his stumps; but the Cardinal did not think it necessary to “disprove the testimony, and to trace its falsehood through all the circumstances of knavery and credulity which produced it.” This is commendable prejudice. Interestingly, Hume also quotes De Retz in the *Treatise*, in a passage following shortly after the discussion of general rules (T 1.3.13.18; SBN 153).

18 Which is perhaps why, in the *Enquiry*, these discussions are severely truncated or omitted altogether.