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Ira M. Schnall

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Hume on “Popular” and “Philosophical” Skeptical Arguments

IRA M. SCHNALL

Abstract: In section 12 of the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Hume presents several skeptical arguments, including “popular” and “philosophical” objections to inductive reasoning. I point out a puzzling aspect of Hume’s treatment of these two kinds of objection, and I suggest a way to deal with the puzzle. I then examine the roles of both kinds of objection in leading to “mitigated” skepticism. In particular, Hume claims that the philosophical objection can lead to limiting investigation to matters of common life; but several philosophers have noted that this objection, far from leading to this result, seems to be inconsistent with it. I examine attempts to establish consistency, and I suggest a way to understand how the philosophical objection, along with the popular objections, can indeed provide reasons for mitigated skepticism.

In parts 1 and 2 of section 12 of the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Hume discusses a number of skeptical arguments. These arguments would seem to lead to what he calls “excessive” skepticism; but, he claims, human beings are incapable of adopting such excessive skepticism. In part 3, he says that these arguments can, however, lead to the adoption of a “salutary” form of “mitigated” skepticism. In his discussion of skeptical arguments, Hume distinguishes between “popular” and “philosophical” objections to our reasoning about matters of fact. (Actually, there is a family of distinct popular objections. There seems to be just one philosophical objection, though Hume refers to it in the plural, perhaps because it consists of

several parts.) The aim of this paper is to clarify the differences between these two and to examine their respective roles in leading to mitigated skepticism.

In the passages in which Hume deals with the popular and the philosophical skeptical arguments there is a difficulty that seems not to have been discussed explicitly in the secondary literature: Hume clearly implies that the philosophical objection is more powerful and more successful than the popular objections; yet, he seems to attribute exactly the same strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, to both. In the first section of this paper, I will present this textual difficulty in greater detail, and in the second section, I will suggest a way to deal with it.

My suggestion for dealing with the difficulty involves a view of the popular objections that makes them much more directly relevant than the philosophical objection to engendering mitigated skepticism. But Hume quite clearly implies that the philosophical objection plays at least some role in leading to the adoption of mitigated skepticism. However, several philosophers have asked how the philosophical objection can provide a reason for, or even be consistent with, mitigated skepticism, given that its conclusion entails a much more thoroughgoing skepticism. In the third section of this paper I present this question, or problem, and solutions that have been offered; and in the fourth section I propose an additional possible solution. In the fifth section, I examine a key passage in Hume's discussion, and suggest an interpretation according to which Hume combined the philosophical and the popular skeptical arguments in providing a reason for at least one aspect of mitigated skepticism.

I

Hume presents two types of skeptical objections to reasoning concerning matters of fact, or to inductive inference. He calls one type "popular" and the other "philosophical." Here is what he says about the former:

The popular objections are derived from the natural weakness of human understanding; the contradictory opinions which have been entertained in different ages and nations; the variations of our judgement in sickness and health, youth and old age, prosperity and adversity; the perpetual contradiction of each particular man's opinions and sentiments; with many other topics of that kind. (EHU 12.21; SBN 158)¹

It is clear that these objections are based largely on the variability of beliefs arrived at through inductive inference, plus the fact that this variability depends on factors that generally have nothing to do with the truth of those beliefs—factors such as the nationality of the person making the inference, the era in which she lives, whether she is young or old, healthy or ill, prosperous or poor. A further

objection is that through inductive inferences, one often comes to hold opinions that contradict each other, so they cannot all be true. What is not so clear is what Hume means by "the natural weakness of human understanding." Is this phrase merely a general introduction to the subsequent points about variability and contradiction, or is it a separate objection? If it is the latter, then what exactly is the objection? Perhaps it is simply that we often make mistakes in our inferences, or that we are often unsure what conclusion to infer from the evidence; perhaps it is that our limited experience renders us incapable of answering some of our most important questions about the world and our place in it. Whether or not Hume intended to refer, by the phrase in question, to these further weaknesses of our inductive reasoning capacities, we can tentatively add them to his list of popular objections, at least under the heading of "other topics of that kind."

In any event, Hume calls the popular objections "weak." By this he seems to mean not that they are fallacious, or intrinsically poor arguments, but merely that they do not have the power to stop us from having confidence in our inductive inferences:

The great subverter of PYRRHONISM or the excessive principles of scepticism, is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life. These principles may flourish and triumph in the schools; where it is, indeed, difficult, if not impossible, to refute them. But as soon as they leave the shade, and by the presence of the real objects, which actuate our passions and sentiments, are put in opposition to the more powerful principles of our nature, they vanish like smoke, and leave the most determined sceptic in the same condition as other mortals. (EHU 12.21; SBN 159)

Hume recommends to skeptics that they appeal to other objections, which he calls "philosophical," in order to make their case:

The sceptic, therefore, had better keep within his proper sphere, and display those *philosophical* objections, which arise from more profound researches. Here he seems to have ample matter of triumph; while he justly insists that all our evidence for any matter of fact, which lies beyond the testimony of sense or memory, is derived entirely from the relation of cause and effect; that we have no other idea of this relation than that of two objects, which have been frequently *conjoined* together; that we have no argument to convince us, that objects, which have, in our experience, been frequently conjoined, will likewise, in other instances, be conjoined in the same manner; and that nothing leads us to this inference but custom or a certain instinct of our nature; which it is indeed difficult to

resist, but which, like other instincts, may be fallacious and deceitful. While the sceptic insists upon these topics, he shows his force, or rather, indeed, his own and our weakness; and seems, for the time, at least, to destroy all assurance and conviction. (EHU 12.22; SBN 159)

The philosophical objections are thus none other than Hume's own arguments to the effect that we have no rational justification for our inductive inferences, or what has come to be known as "the problem of induction"; and the profound researches on which they are based are Hume's investigation of the nature of inductive, or causal, reasoning.² Whereas we naturally assume that our inductive arguments tend to lead to true beliefs, the philosophical objection tells us that there is no rational basis for this assumption. In section 4 of the *Enquiry* ("Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding") Hume argues that in drawing inductive inferences we, in effect, presuppose that the unobserved resembles the observed; he also shows that there is no way to justify that presupposition. Then in section 5 ("Sceptical Solution of these Doubts") Hume argues that it is only an instinct, or non-rational process of the imagination, that leads us to make inductive inferences as if we accepted the presupposition. This two-part argument leads to the skeptical view that our inductive reasoning merely leads us to *feel* a certain way about some propositions (i.e., the conclusions of our inductive arguments), but that there is no reason to believe that propositions about which we feel this way are true.

Hume clearly implies that the philosophical objection is stronger than the popular objections. First of all, immediately after pointing out that the popular objections have no impact on our practice, he recommends, as we have seen, that "the sceptic, therefore, had better . . . display those *philosophical* objections"—implying that this latter approach is more promising. He then adds that "here"—presumably as opposed to in the case of the skeptic's popular objections, whose shortcomings he has just described—"he has ample matter of triumph." (Though he has admitted that the popular objections too "may flourish and triumph in the schools," he implies that the philosophical objection provides more "ample matter of triumph.")

The main shortcoming (and the only one Hume mentions) of this skepticism based on the philosophical problem of induction is "that no durable good can ever result from it" (EHU 12.22; SBN 159). The proponent of this sort of skepticism

cannot expect, that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind: or if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. . . . It is true, so fatal an event is very little to be dreaded. Nature

is always too strong for principle. And though a Pyrrhonian may throw himself or others into a momentary amazement and confusion by his profound reasonings; the very first and most trivial event in life will put to flight all his doubts and scruples. (EHU 12.23; SBN 160)

Thus, were we to accept the skeptic's arguments, we would not have any confidence in our inductive inferences. We would therefore cease to act, since we would not adopt any beliefs as to what any act's results would be; and our inaction would soon lead to our perishing. However, we cannot long accept the skeptic's arguments; the moment any practical question arises, we will naturally make inductive inferences, and act accordingly, ignoring the skeptical arguments that may have seemed compelling for a short time.

I will not discuss here the question of how Hume, if he admits that there is no justification of inductive inferences, can be so sure (presumably on the basis of inductive inferences) of such things as that our falling under the spell of the skeptical arguments, if it were possible, would result in our perishing, or that the prospect of any mundane activity would break the spell. It is well known that Hume, throughout the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries*, continues to assume the reliability of commonsense and common philosophical beliefs and forms of reasoning, even after he has, it seems, effectively undermined them. Commentators have tried valiantly to explain this pervasive feature of Hume's philosophy. In this particular case, the use of inductive inferences to criticize the admittedly irrefutable undermining of such inferences seems especially question-begging. However, I want to deal here with another difficulty.

My difficulty is this: On the one hand, Hume contrasts the "popular" skeptical objections with the "philosophical" objection, calling the former "weak," and saying that by stressing the latter, the skeptic "shows his force." He clearly implies, as we have seen, that the philosophical objection is superior to the popular objections. On the other hand, Hume seems to say that the weakness of the popular objections consists simply in their not having the power to stop us from making inductive inferences when the occasion arises, despite our awareness of the uncertainty and variability of such inferences. But he goes on to attribute precisely the same weakness to the philosophical objection: as soon as an occasion arises for making inductive inferences, we will make them, despite having appreciated the force of this objection. So how is the philosophical skeptical argument any better than the popular ones? The popular arguments, as well as the philosophical one, "may flourish and triumph in the schools, where it is . . . impossible to refute them"; and the philosophical argument, as well as the popular ones, is disregarded as soon as an occasion for activity presents itself.

It seems that David Fate Norton was aware of this difficulty in the text, and tried to dissolve, or avoid it, for he says:

Hume next turns to skepticism regarding matters of fact, and immediately distinguishes between *popular* and *philosophical* versions thereof. His comments about the latter, sandwiched between two slightly longer comments about the former, are brief.³

Norton seems to interpret Hume's discussion of the philosophical objection as limited to paragraph 22 of section 12 of the *Enquiry* (i.e., the paragraph in the middle of SBN 159), "sandwiched between" discussions of the popular objections in paragraphs 21 (the paragraph spanning SBN 158–9) and 23 (spanning SBN 159–60). He thus avoids my difficulty; for it is in paragraphs 21 and 23 that Hume makes the point that the exigencies of ordinary life will dispel any reluctance on our part to engage in inductive reasoning, and on this interpretation, both of these paragraphs are about the popular objections. Thus it is only with respect to the popular objections that Hume makes this point (twice), whereas Hume does not criticize the philosophical objection at all in this section; so the philosophical objection comes out looking stronger than the popular objections, as Hume says it is.

However, I cannot accept this interpretation. The flow of Hume's discussion from paragraph 22 into paragraph 23 is such that it seems clear that he is dealing with the philosophical objection in both paragraphs, and has not reverted to dealing with the popular objections. At most, I would grant (reluctantly) that in paragraph 23 Hume is dealing with both the philosophical and the popular objections. But it seems clear that in paragraph 23, Hume is talking (at least *inter alia*) about the philosophical objection when he says that being convinced of the cogency of the objection would result in inaction and death, but that such results are not to be expected. For one thing, in paragraph 23, Hume refers to the skeptical arguments that are overcome by our natural tendency to draw inductive inferences as "profound reasonings," and says of their attack on our inductive practice that it concerns "the foundations of these operations"; both of these expressions seem to apply to the philosophical objection, rather than the popular objections. Furthermore, the interpretation I have attributed to Norton would have Hume making the same point about the popular objections twice, with a presentation of the philosophical objection in between, which seems implausible.

Besides, even on Norton's interpretation, there is still a problem; for even if Hume does not explicitly say, in section 12, that the philosophical objection is overridden by the natural human tendency to make inductive inferences, nevertheless he has explicitly said this in section 5 (EHU 5.2; SBN 41–2). Furthermore, were it the case that Hume nowhere stated that the philosophical objection is overridden by natural instinct (and given that he states that the philosophical objection is irrefutable on rational grounds), his recommending mitigated skepticism (in part 3 of section 12), rather than simply accepting the full-blown skepticism implied by the philosophical objection, would seem unmotivated.

One might suggest that there really is no problem here: Hume is merely using irony to deflate the pretensions of philosophers, showing that their "profound researches" really fare no better than the more usual skeptical worries of ordinary people. My main reason for rejecting this interpretation is that the only possible butt of his irony would be himself. For, as we said above, the philosophical objection is his own original argument, elaborated in sections 4 and 5 of the *Enquiry*. And though some self-deprecating irony would not be out of character for Hume, it is unlikely that he would make light of such a central tenet of his philosophy.

II

I think we can shed some light on our problem by examining a passage in part 1 of section 12 of the *Enquiry* that bears a striking analogy to the passage we are discussing. In dealing with skepticism about perception and the external world, Hume distinguishes between "trite" and "more profound" skeptical arguments (EHU 12.6; SBN 151). The trite arguments include

those which are derived from the imperfection and fallaciousness of our organs, on numberless occasions; the crooked appearance of an oar in water; the various aspects of objects, according to their different distances; the double images which arise from the pressing one eye; with many other appearances of a like nature. (EHU 12.6; SBN 151)

The point of these arguments—which are often called collectively "the argument from illusion"—is that our perceptual experiences are often misleading. Hume says of these arguments that they do not really entail a thoroughgoing skepticism with regard to the evidence of the senses. They show only, with regard to our sense experiences,

that we must correct their evidence by reason and by considerations, derived from the nature of the medium, the distance of the object, and the disposition of the organ, in order to render them, within their sphere, the proper *criteria* of truth and falsehood. (EHU 12.6; SBN 151)

Thus, as long as we are careful to take distorting factors into account, we can trust sense perception to inform us about the external world. The more profound arguments "admit not of so easy a solution." Hume presents two such arguments, one proving that we are unjustified in believing that there is an external world of material objects, the other proving that we have no clear idea of such an external world. Only the former is relevant to our discussion of the popular and

philosophical objections to inductive inference. It is complex, but I will try to paraphrase it relatively briefly.

We instinctively believe in an external world of objects that are independent of us and of our perception of them. We also believe instinctively that when we perceive one of these objects, it is that very object itself that is before the mind. For example, when I see a tree twenty meters away, I instinctively think of the tree that is directly before my mind as the very tree that is twenty meters away. But “the slightest philosophy” convinces us that what is before the mind is not the external object itself, but only an image of it. For example, as we move away from the object, what is before the mind becomes progressively smaller, whereas we believe that the size of the external object remains unchanged. But once we distinguish what is before the mind from the external object, we require some argument to prove that there is, indeed, an external object present when we have a perceptual image in the mind. The only way we could prove such a matter of fact is through causal reasoning. But in order to causally infer the existence of an external object from the presence of an image in the mind, we must have experienced a constant conjunction of external objects with images in the mind. The problem is that we never experience any such conjunctions; all we ever experience, in the relevant sense, are the mental images. So we can never be justified in believing that any external object exists (EHU 12.7–14; SBN 151–4).

Now I want to draw an analogy between the trite and the profound arguments for skepticism about perception and the external world on the one hand, and the popular and the philosophical skeptical objections to inductive reasoning on the other hand. I think that the difference Hume describes between what the trite arguments show about perception and what the profound argument shows about it is analogous to the difference between what the popular objections show about induction and what the philosophical objection shows about it. Hume tells us that the trite arguments about perception show only that we must be careful and tentative in making perceptual judgments, taking into account all the various circumstances that could make the image in our minds mislead us about the nature of external objects. The more profound argument proves a much more skeptical conclusion: that we are never justified in believing that any external object exists. Similarly, I think that the popular objections to induction show only that we must be careful and tentative in making inductive inferences, taking into account all the various circumstances—for instance, inattention, prejudice, social pressure, mood, age—that could lead us to draw the wrong conclusion from the evidence. The philosophical objection proves the much more skeptical conclusion that we are never justified in inductively drawing any conclusion from any evidence.

I would like to think that Hume intended the reader to understand the popular objections and the philosophical objection to inductive reasoning in the way I have described. However, as we have seen, Hume writes as if even the popular

objections to inductive reasoning are intended to make us stop using such reasoning altogether, and not merely to encourage us to be more circumspect in using it; for he describes the rejection of the popular objections as consisting in simply continuing to make inductive inferences (EHU 12.21; SBN 158–9). It might be suggested that what he means is that we, in effect, reject the popular objections by continuing to make *precipitous* inductive inferences, ignoring the need for circumspection indicated by those objections. But Hume does not say that. Was he simply writing carelessly? That is unlikely, given the importance he attributed to the "manner" in which he was presenting his ideas in this work, and given that he revised the *Enquiry* many times.⁴

Perhaps Hume was assuming a tacit premise, in the popular arguments, to the effect that it is so difficult to avoid being influenced in our reasoning by prejudice and predispositions, and perhaps by countless other sources of error, that, no matter how careful we are, we can have absolutely no confidence in our inductive conclusions. Or perhaps he had in mind an argument from the variability of inductive conclusions to a form of relativism, according to which no inductive conclusion is absolutely correct, or objectively justified (e.g., are we to prefer the conclusions that we draw in youth or those we draw in old age?). But the fact remains that, given Hume's presentation of the popular objections, they show only that we should be tentative and careful in our reasoning, not that our reasoning must be totally worthless or unjustified. The latter seems to follow only from the philosophical objection.

Perhaps we should interpret Hume's discussion of the popular objections as primarily historical.⁵ We can understand the overall discussion of inductive skepticism as follows: First Hume describes how Pyrrhonians and other skeptics have tried to induce, by means of the popular objections, a total suspension of judgment with respect to the conclusions of inductive inferences. He goes on to say that the popular objections failed to have the intended effect on people's lives; for it is human nature to make inductive inferences, despite knowing (by means of induction) how dependent on irrelevant circumstances, and therefore how prone to error, such inferences are. Though he does not say so explicitly, Hume was aware that the popular objections do not really show that induction is irredeemably worthless; he knew that despite the problems pointed out in these objections, if we are sufficiently patient, careful, and systematic, our inductions can be self-correcting, and so may lead to true beliefs. That is why he says that skeptics would have a better chance of success in disabusing people of their habit of engaging in inductive reasoning if they would use his own philosophical objection to induction; for (he apparently believes) this objection really does show that we have no reason to place any faith in induction. Yet he acknowledges that even this objection cannot overcome the natural human tendency to make inductive inferences.

If this is indeed the correct interpretation, one can only wish that Hume had indicated his meaning more clearly. In any event, on this interpretation, Hume assesses the popular objections and the philosophical objection, respectively, as I suggested above; the appearance of a different assessment is due only to his initially adopting the perspective of the Pyrrhonians themselves, who attributed more force to the popular objections than they really have.

All this still leaves us without a definite, full interpretation of the passages dealing with the popular and philosophical objections. But I hope that some new light has been shed on these passages and on the skeptical arguments themselves. Perhaps more light can be shed by moving forward to examine the roles of these arguments in Hume's discussion of mitigated skepticism.

III

In part 3 of section 12 of the *Enquiry*, Hume introduces and praises what he calls “mitigated scepticism or *academical* philosophy,” which he opposes to the “*excessive*,” or “Pyrrhonian,” skepticism which he discussed in parts 1 and 2. As he argued in those earlier parts, Pyrrhonian skepticism cannot long be accepted by anyone, for human nature is such that we cannot help believing in an external world and reasoning inductively (as well as deductively). However, he claims that once one appreciates the force of the Pyrrhonian arguments, one may come to adopt—and actually live by—a “salutary” form of mitigated skepticism.

The nature of mitigated skepticism can be indicated as follows. Most people go through life uninfluenced by any form of skepticism. They tend to be dogmatic in their opinions, and intolerant of contrary opinions held by others. But once they have felt the force of Pyrrhonian arguments, they may be influenced by them—not, of course, to the extent that they will never again hold any opinion about any matter of fact beyond their immediate experience, but only to the extent that they will be more modest (as opposed to dogmatic) about their conclusions, and more tolerant of others' views. Another way in which many people exhibit their indifference to skeptical considerations is that they tend to be overly ambitious, investigating matters beyond their experience, matters about which they cannot really know anything; and they sometimes have strongly-held opinions on such matters. But once they have appreciated the Pyrrhonian arguments, they may tend to limit their investigations to matters similar to those of which they have had experience. This modesty and tolerance, together with the limiting of inquiries to matters of “common life,” constitute the mitigated skepticism that Hume recommends (EHU 12.24–5; SBN 161–2).

In light of our discussion of the trite and profound skeptical arguments and of the popular and philosophical objections, it seems that it is specifically the trite arguments and the popular objections that would tend to lead logically to

mitigated skepticism. For these considerations imply that we should be wary of perceptual judgements made in unusual circumstances and of inductive inferences concerning matters beyond ordinary experience. The awareness, engendered by the trite arguments and the popular objections, of the many and ubiquitous possible sources of error could very well lead us to be less dogmatic about the beliefs we acquire through perception or inductive reasoning, and therefore to be more open and tolerant toward others who have beliefs inconsistent with ours.⁶ The profound arguments and the philosophical objection, on the other hand, entail extreme forms of skepticism that seem to leave no room for mitigation; either one accepts them, and so believes nothing beyond what is directly present to the mind, or one rejects or ignores them, and so cannot look to them for providing any reason for the kinds of modesty and tolerance, and the kinds of limits on inquiry, that constitute mitigated skepticism.

However, it is clear that Hume believes that the philosophical objection plays a role in leading to mitigated skepticism; for in discussing how appreciating the force of skeptical arguments can lead us to limit our inquiries to matters of common life, he writes:

While we cannot give a satisfactory reason, why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall, or fire burn; can we ever satisfy ourselves concerning any determination, which we may form, with regard to the origin of worlds, and the situation of nature, from, and to, eternity? (EHU 12.25; SBN 162)

It is specifically the philosophical objection to induction that entails that no amount of past experience can justify our beliefs about stones' falling and fires' burning in the future, and that we "cannot give a satisfactory reason" for accepting such commonsense beliefs. But it is difficult to see how the philosophical objection, which seems to enjoin total inductive skepticism, can constitute, or provide, a reason for adopting mitigated skepticism, and specifically for limiting our investigations to matters of common life.

Terence Penelhum has argued that far from leading to this aspect of mitigated skepticism, the philosophical objection is inconsistent with it:

The most obvious criticism of what Hume says concerns the consistency of mitigated Skepticism. How can he recommend that we confine ourselves to the reflections of common life, when their presuppositions are as incapable of rational justification as the pretensions of metaphysics? Surely Hume should either indulge both or reject both? How can Skepticism consistently *be* mitigated?⁷

In other words, the philosophical objection condemns *all* inductive reasoning—whether about the falling of stones or about the origin of worlds—as equally unjustified; so how can Hume recommend a mitigated skepticism, according to which we investigate some phenomena but not others? As Penelhum says elsewhere, given the scope of the problem of induction, Hume’s “recommendation to confine our attention to science and common life” is “arbitrary.”⁸ So to the extent that we approve of some inductive investigations, we should approve of all such investigations.⁹

We can extend Penelhum’s objection to apply to other aspects of mitigated skepticism as well. The philosophical objection implies that we should not place any faith in the conclusions of our own inductive inferences, and it may therefore curb dogmatism; but, as Hume points out, the lack of belief entailed by the philosophical objection would be so extreme as to be pathological, rather than constitute the salutary modesty that presumably characterizes the mitigated skeptic. Furthermore, the philosophical objection also implies that we should have no faith in others’ inductive inferences, any more than in our own, and would therefore engender *intolerance* of others’ opinions. Alternatively, if we do seek enlightenment from others’ opinions, then as far as the philosophical objection is concerned, we should be equally open to all opinions (as long as they are deductively consistent), even if they are based on gross violations of the accepted canons of induction. How can we non-arbitrarily set any limits to openness to alternative opinions?

Thus, we have two problems concerning the relation of the philosophical objection and mitigated skepticism. One is *the inconsistency problem*—to explain how mitigated skepticism, or anything short of total inductive skepticism, is consistent with the philosophical objection. The other is *the reason problem*—to explain how the philosophical objection provides a reason to adopt any aspect of mitigated skepticism. Let us first examine the inconsistency problem. How, or on what reasonable basis, can Hume consistently recommend some types of reasoning about matters of fact over others, given that he has undermined all reasoning about matters of fact equally? This is a problem not only with respect to mitigated skepticism, but also with respect to Hume’s arguments that we should accept the evidence against, over the evidence in favor of, miracles (EHU 10; SBN 109–31), his setting limits to acceptable inductive inferences about God and the world He created (EHU 11; SBN 132–48), his presumably normative “rules by which to judge of causes and effects” (T 1.3.15; SBN 173–6),¹⁰ and in general his use of inductive reasoning throughout his works.

Peter Millican, who argues that part of Hume’s program was to propound a theory of proper induction, suggests a solution to this problem, by appealing to James Noxon’s idea of “methodological consistency.”¹¹ Simply put, the idea seems to be that since we are perforce going to use induction, we should use it consistently;

and the types of inferences which Hume endorses together form a consistent system, whereas using other types of inference involves inconsistency.

But I would argue that if there is no reason to think that induction is likely to lead to truth, as Hume apparently has shown, then why should anyone care whether induction is used consistently? Millican thinks that my rhetorical question misses the point. We have an implicit faith in induction, or in the principle that the unobserved resembles the observed. The philosophical objection, even if sound, proves only that our faith in this principle is *unjustified*; it does *not* show that the principle is not *true*. Furthermore, consistency is an intellectual virtue, so we should practice it with respect to our inductive inferences, even if our making inductive inferences in the first place is just a universal human habit, without rational justification.¹² However, the philosophical objection implies that for any given event, the *inductive* conclusion as to what will follow, or what else is the case, is only one of an indefinite number of equally improbable, mutually exclusive possibilities. So there is no reason to think that consistent use of induction in the future will track truth better than inconsistent use of it, or even better than an unsystematic series of random imaginative proposals.

Of course, as Hume says, no human being can accept the implications of the philosophical objection fully enough to be totally indifferent as to the use of induction; we all believe, in effect, that induction *does* lead to truth, and that it will do so more effectively if we use it in a consistent, systematic manner. But that does not alter the fact that accepting the practical implications of the philosophical objection is inconsistent with being concerned that people use certain forms of induction and not others, or that they use it in certain cases and not in others, if that concern is motivated by a desire that we acquire true beliefs. The only possible concern that seems relevant is concern for consistency itself, for its own sake, as an intellectual virtue that does not lose its standing as a virtue even in the context of an unjustified practice.

One might develop Millican's approach in a somewhat different way by appeal to what may be termed Hume's "higher-order skepticism"—a view neatly encapsulated by Hume as follows: "A true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well of his philosophical conviction; and will never refuse any innocent satisfaction, which offers itself, on account of either of them" (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 273).¹³ The application to our current issue would be as follows: we should be skeptical even of our skeptical arguments, and even if we cannot find a flaw in them, we should seriously entertain the possibility that there is a fatal flaw. So for all we really know, the philosophical objection may be mistaken, and induction may be justified after all. Therefore, if we use induction consistently, we *might* be doing the right thing (epistemologically); whereas if we use it inconsistently, then we are almost certainly doing something wrong. So since we are perforce going to use induction, we may as well use it consistently and stand a better chance of being right.¹⁴

Though this approach is insightful, both as an interpretation of Hume and as an approach in epistemology, nevertheless it does not yield a very robust endorsement of proper (i.e., consistent) inductive practice. This hypothetical, hedging-of-bets approach seems too bland to explain Hume's apparently wholehearted adoption and endorsement of certain forms of inference about matters of fact. We might explain Hume's enthusiasm for methodological consistency in inductive practice by appealing to the fact that he, just as everyone else, has a very strong instinctive faith in induction as a reliable method of acquiring true beliefs. But this is a naturalistic explanation, not a justification; for Hume is not entitled to have such strong faith in induction, given his logical assessment of the philosophical objection.

Kenneth Winkler has developed an interesting approach that I think is best viewed as an alternative naturalistic explanation of Hume's wholehearted approval of certain kinds of induction and disapproval of others.¹⁵ According to Winkler, Hume employs two different sets of standards, or norms, of reasonableness—a set of strict, philosophical standards and a set of commonsense standards. Thus Hume argues, in section 4 of the *Enquiry*, that since inductive beliefs are based on the unsupported assumption that the unobserved resembles the observed, they are all unreasonable, according to the strict, philosophical standards; and he argues, in section 10, that belief in miracles is less reasonable than other inductive beliefs, according to the commonsense standards. The commonsense standards are derived from reflection on our past inductions, which leads us to infer what Hume would call “general rules” about our inductive practice. (See T 1.3.15 and T 1.3.13.11-12; SBN 173-6 and 149-50.) We notice that certain types of inductive inferences have worked better than others—that is, certain types of inductive inferences have yielded expectations that were generally fulfilled, whereas others have yielded expectations that were generally unfulfilled. The former have thus been a source of satisfaction, whereas the latter have been a source of frustration. Now, according to Hume, a mental trait that generally leads to satisfaction (one's own or others') tends to be approved as a virtue, whereas one that generally leads to frustration tends to be disapproved as a vice.¹⁶ Therefore, we (and Hume) come to consider the tendency to use only the satisfying types of inductive inferences as a virtue (a kind of wisdom) which we can recommend, and the tendency to use the frustrating ones as a vice (a kind of folly).

This account explains why Hume wholeheartedly recommends certain forms of inductive reasoning over others. I suggest that it could also explain Hume's recommending that we limit our inquiries to common life; for in our experience, reasoning about some matters of common life (e.g., about whether eating bread will nourish us) has generally led to satisfaction, whereas reasoning about matters beyond common life (e.g., about disembodied spirits) has led only to frustration, at least in the sense of failing to achieve wide and long-lasting agreement.

As far as I am aware, Hume does not explicitly state anything like Winkler's account. However, I think that what Hume says about value judgements of mental

traits entails Winkler's account; that is, it entails that, once we pay attention to our inductive practice and make the relevant distinctions, we would approve and recommend the tendency to make the kinds of inductive inferences that generally have led to satisfaction, and disapprove of the tendency to make kinds of inductive inferences that generally have led to frustration, including philosophers' and theologians' notoriously inconclusive inferences in metaphysics. Thus Winkler's account is more than a mere possible explanation that Hume could have given; rather it is something that Hume is committed to accepting.

However, according to Winkler, Hume's and our selective endorsement of inductive inferences is itself based on induction. For we not only approve of people's use of certain forms of inductive reasoning in the past as having led to satisfaction; we also recommend using specifically these forms of reasoning in the future, because we inductively infer that they will continue to lead to satisfaction. We can reasonably make this recommendation only if, contrary to the implications of the philosophical objection, we have reason to believe that the future will resemble the past. Thus, Winkler's approach does not solve the inconsistency problem, though it does provide a naturalistic explanation of Hume's recommendations and practice with respect to induction.

Perhaps we can combine Winkler's and Millican's approaches. For presumably the kinds of inductive inferences that we prefer, according to Winkler, because they tend to lead to satisfaction are the very same kinds of inductive inference that are to be preferred based on Millican's considerations of methodological consistency. Millican (as I have developed his view) provides a logical justification, based on higher-order skepticism and considerations of methodological consistency, of Hume's explicitly and implicitly prescribing (tentatively) the use of specific canons of induction, even though he accepts the implications of the philosophical objection which seems to undermine all inductive inferences; and Winkler provides a naturalistic explanation of Hume's wholeheartedly recommending the use of those canons of induction. I suspect that this is as close as we can get to a solution of the inconsistency problem.

However, we still have the reason problem: neither Millican's nor Winkler's account (nor their combination) explains the role of the philosophical objection in supporting Hume's recommendations with regard to mitigated skepticism. Thus Winkler writes,

[B]ut we do not answer the reader who wonders, with Terence Penelhum, why our failure to satisfy the norms at work in section iv gives us a reason—a positive reason—to confine our enquiries to common life. Hume is persuaded that it gives us such a reason . . . , but I have so far been unable to discover what it is, or even what it could be.¹⁷

Winkler refers us to an article by Robert Fogelin, in which Fogelin “neatly sidesteps” Penelhum’s and Winkler’s question. “Fogelin denies that these failures [to justify induction] give us a reason (in any sense) to mitigate our skepticism. Mitigation is simply the causal upshot of recognizing them.”¹⁸ Fogelin himself sums up his position as follows:

[T]here are no arguments that will refute Pyrrhonian skepticism and thus there can be no arguments that will justify a more mitigated skepticism. The mitigated skepticism that Hume recommends is thus the causal consequence of the influence of two factors: Pyrrhonian doubt on one side and natural instinct on the other. We do not argue our way to mitigated skepticism, we find ourselves there.

In sum, Hume’s skepticism and his naturalism meet in a causal theory of skepticism itself.¹⁹

Fogelin here presents a short but powerful argument against the philosophical objection’s providing a logical reason, as opposed to a psychological cause, for adopting mitigated skepticism. The argument (which is similar to Penelhum’s) is that, according to Hume at least, the philosophical objection is irrefutable, that is, on the level of rational argumentation, it proves conclusively that our inductive practice is totally unjustified; therefore, there can be no epistemic reason, or justification, for mitigating our inductive skepticism and retaining some confidence in induction. His final conclusion (different from Penelhum’s) is that Hume holds that appreciation of the philosophical objection, along with our natural tendency to engage in inductive inference, can *cause* people to adopt mitigated skepticism.²⁰

As Hume makes perfectly clear, there is a conflict between our reasoned, skeptical doubts (based on the philosophical objection) and our instinctive, or natural, belief in inductive justification. What is the result of this conflict? It is not simply that we forget entirely the skeptical arguments and follow our natural instincts as if we had never thought of the philosophical objection.²¹ Rather, as David Fate Norton has suggested,²² recalling the philosophical objection when we make inductive inferences has the effect of weakening, or tempering, our belief of the conclusions of those inferences, and thus making us less dogmatic about those conclusions and more tolerant of dissenting opinions. Thus some aspects of mitigated skepticism result from a contest of strength between our reason—in particular, the philosophical objection—and our natural instinct, in which the latter wins, but is somewhat weakened by the contest. All this is on the level of *psychology* rather than philosophy, and so can be seen as a development of Fogelin’s view that the philosophical objection is a (partial) *cause* of, rather than a *reason* for, adopting mitigated skepticism.²³

In the following section of this paper, I will try to show how, even within the picture suggested by Fogelin and Norton of mitigated skepticism's resulting (at least partially) from a contest of strength between skeptical arguments and natural inclination, we can still view the philosophical objection as providing a *reason* for mitigated skepticism.²⁴

IV

In this section, I will be concerned primarily to show how it is *possible*, within a Humean framework, to view the philosophical objection as providing a reason for adopting mitigated skepticism. In the following section, I will deal with the question of whether this view of things is what Hume had in mind, and I will return to consideration of the popular objections.

In order to see how the philosophical objection, in its tug-of-war with our natural inclinations, can provide reasons for adopting the various aspects of mitigated skepticism, consider the following analogy: Suppose a certain person, Jones, is a kleptomaniac; that is, Jones cannot avoid stealing. There is a moral reason for Jones not to steal—that is, stealing is wrong. However, though Jones is aware of this reason and appreciates its force, he is incapable of acting in accordance with it. Jones will steal periodically, no matter how hard he tries not to. Therefore, the same set of moral norms that provides a reason for Jones not to steal becomes modified, in light of Jones's kleptomania, so that it prescribes (i) that whenever Jones *can* control himself and avoid stealing, he should not steal, and (ii) that when he does steal, he should try to minimize the damage, for example, by not becoming excessively attached to the stolen items and by being willing to return them to the rightful owners.

The analogue in our case is that the philosophical objection provides a reason for us not to make any inductive inferences—that is, such inferences are unjustified. But we are *inductomaniacs*; that is, we cannot avoid making inductive inferences. Though we (or at least some of us) are aware of the reason not to make inductive inferences, and we appreciate its force, we are incapable of acting in accordance with it. We will make inductive inferences, no matter how hard we try not to. Therefore, the same philosophical objection that provides a reason for us not to make inductive inferences becomes modified, in light of our inductomania, so that it prescribes (i) that whenever we *can* control ourselves, we should not make inductive inferences, and (ii) that when we do make inductive inferences, we should try to minimize the damage, for example, by not becoming too attached to the conclusions of those inferences and by being willing to retract them in favor of alternative opinions.

In applying the above analogy, we should distinguish two levels of mitigated skepticism, which we may call "epistemic" and "practical," respectively. This

distinction cuts across the distinction between the two aspects of mitigated skepticism: (a) being modest and tolerant, and (b) limiting inquiry to matters of common life. Consider, first, (a): on the epistemic level, the mitigated skeptic sincerely believes that his own views may be mistaken, and those of his opponents may be correct; and on the practical level, he avoids forceful presentations of his own views, and listens attentively to others when they propose opposing views. Similarly with respect to (b): on the epistemic level, the mitigated skeptic believes that we cannot achieve knowledge of metaphysical truths, and he does not believe metaphysical views when they are presented to him; and on the practical level, he spends little, if any, time on metaphysical speculation.

Let us now apply our analogy to the mitigated skeptic's practical avoidance of metaphysical speculation. Again, given our inductomania, the philosophical objection, which shows that we have no reason to think that induction ever leads to true beliefs, gives us a reason not to engage in inductive investigations *whenever we can* refrain from engaging in them. I suggest that Hume holds that though we cannot refrain from making inductive inferences about matters of common life (e.g., whether to leave a building by the door or by an upper-story window), nevertheless we *can* refrain from investigating matters beyond common life. That is, our natural inclination to engage in metaphysics is much weaker than our inclination to reason about ordinary affairs. As Hume was well aware, most people have little inclination to engage in metaphysics. (See EHU 1, in which he, in effect, tries to convince his readers to read further, despite the fact that he will be discussing metaphysical topics. See also the opening paragraphs of the "Introduction" to the *Treatise*.) Thus we can argue as follows: the philosophical objection provides a reason to refrain from reasoning about matters of fact to the extent that we can; we can refrain from reasoning about matters beyond common life; therefore, the philosophical objection provides a reason to refrain from reasoning about matters of fact beyond common life. (I suggest that the inductive reasoning beyond common life that Hume would recommend that we avoid is specifically natural theology as based on the argument from design.)

Penelhum anticipated the above approach, but objected that some people, some of the time, cannot help engaging in metaphysical speculation. He asks, rhetorically, why such people, when the speculative mood is upon them, are not just as entitled to their metaphysical speculations as all of us are to our reasoning about ordinary matters of fact.²⁵ But I take issue with this objection, for two reasons. First, I doubt that people ever feel as compelled to engage in metaphysical speculations as we all feel compelled in some situations to reason about ordinary things. For example, when we see all support removed from rocks on a mountainside, we literally cannot refrain from drawing a chain of inductive inferences about the falling of the rocks, the crushing of houses in their path, the death of people in the houses, and so on; and if we are in those houses, or care about those who are,

we will perforce tend to act accordingly. But when we look at the world, though we may feel some curiosity as to how it came to be, and feel some temptation (some of us more than others) to reason about its origin, nevertheless, we feel perfectly capable of refraining from such reasoning.²⁶ So a person who yields to the temptation to engage in metaphysical speculation can be held accountable for behaving unwisely in willfully ignoring the implications of the philosophical objection.

Secondly, just as it is not the case that everyone always acts in accordance with the requirements of morality, so also it is not the case that everyone always acts in accordance with the recommendations of mitigated skepticism. Lapses are to be expected in both areas; and just as the fact that people sometimes knowingly act contrary to the requirements of morality does not invalidate morality, so the fact that people sometimes knowingly act contrary to the recommendations of mitigated skepticism does not invalidate mitigated skepticism.

If there really are people who suffer from full-blown metaphysicomania (as some suffer from kleptomania, and as we all suffer from inductomania), then such people have an excuse for engaging in metaphysics and for believing certain metaphysical theories. For them, the recommendation to avoid reasoning about matters of fact to the extent that they can is not coextensive with the recommendation not to engage in metaphysical speculation. But none of this constitutes a serious problem for Hume's recommending in general that we limit our inquiries to matters of common life, since most of us, most of the time, can do so.

There is reason to think that Hume would say that the philosophical objection can engender not only practical avoidance of metaphysical speculation, but also, on the epistemic level, disbelief, or at least suspension of belief, of proffered metaphysical conclusions, or theories. Consider the following passage from the *Dialogues*:

All sceptics pretend that, if reason be considered in an abstract view, it furnishes invincible arguments against itself, and that we could never retain any conviction or assurance, on any subject, were not the sceptical reasonings so refined and subtile that they are not able to counterpoise the more solid and more natural arguments derived from the senses and experience. But it is evident, whenever our arguments lose this advantage and run wide of common life, that the most refined scepticism comes to be upon the same footing with them, and is able to oppose and counterbalance them.²⁷

Here Hume says—through the mouth of the character Philo, the skeptic—that skeptical arguments that cannot stop us from believing the conclusions of simple commonsense arguments nevertheless can stop us from believing the conclusions of complex metaphysical arguments. When we have straightforward inductive evidence, we feel compelled to accept the relevant conclusions, despite the ever-

present general reason not to accept any inductive conclusion. But the very fact that metaphysics is beyond our experience entails that its arguments are never simple and straightforward; farfetched analogies and long chains of reasoning are required in order to apply our experience to metaphysical topics. Thus metaphysical arguments are at least as complex as the skeptical arguments that undermine them. So our belief of the conclusions of metaphysical arguments is not strong enough to withstand the force of the skeptical arguments. Again applying our kleptomaniac analogy, we may say that the philosophical objection provides a reason to refrain from believing conclusions about matters of fact *whenever we can*; and most people most of the time *can* refrain from believing conclusions about matters of fact that are far beyond common life.²⁸

What of the other aspects of mitigated skepticism—modesty and tolerance, both epistemic and practical? Here we can apply clause (ii) from the paragraph in which we introduced the term “inductomania”—that is, when we do make inductive inferences, we should try to minimize the damage by not becoming too attached to the conclusions of those inferences and by being open to retracting them. In many situations in which we cannot suspend judgement completely, we may still be capable of having a certain degree of doubt or hesitation with respect to our beliefs; and in such situations, the philosophical objection provides a very general reason for having such doubt. In fact, it seems that it is specifically with respect to issues about which there are likely to be conflicting opinions—for example, which of two presidential candidates will best serve the interests of the country—that we are capable of experiencing some hesitation; and it is specifically with respect to such issues, as opposed to such universally agreed-upon issues as whether an unsupported stone will fall, that dogmatism and intolerance are intuitively seen as problematic and therefore unbecoming in a mitigated skeptic. In short, there are cases in which, though we are incapable of suspending belief completely, nevertheless we are capable of limiting the degree or strength of our belief, and so of being modest and tolerant; and the philosophical objection provides a general reason to be modest and tolerant in those situations. Of course, some people are naturally dogmatic and intolerant even on issues about which reasonable people may disagree. But that does not make it inappropriate to recommend that people in general should be modest and tolerant about such issues.

V

Is there any textual evidence that Hume held anything like what I have suggested above, in the preceding section? There is at least one passage in section 12 of the *Enquiry* in which Hume seems to present arguments, based on both the philosophical and the popular objections, for limiting our inquiries to matters of common life. The passage, part of which was quoted earlier, is as follows:

[1] Those who have a propensity to philosophy . . . will never be tempted to go beyond common life, so long as they consider the imperfection of those faculties which they employ, their narrow reach, and their inaccurate operations. [2] While we cannot give a satisfactory reason, why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall, or fire burn; can we ever satisfy ourselves concerning any determination, which we may form, with regard to the origin of worlds, and the situation of nature, from, and to, eternity? (E 12.25; SBN 162; my numbering)

As I argued earlier, the sentence that I have labeled here as [2] seems to express, in its first part, a claim based on the philosophical objection. Now [2] as a whole expresses, in the form of a rhetorical question, an *a fortiori* argument: we cannot fully justify our inductive inferences about the falling of stones, so *a fortiori* (or all the more so) we cannot fully justify inductive inferences in cosmology and eschatology. This argument raises two familiar questions. First, what is the basis of the *a fortiori*? On what basis can Hume say, or imply, that metaphysical beliefs about the origin of worlds are *more* unjustified, or are more likely to be unjustified, than beliefs about the falling of stones? Obviously, Hume is addressing readers who, he assumes, have less faith in metaphysical than in commonsense inferences and beliefs. But this difference in degree of faith cannot be based on the philosophical objection, which undermines all inductive inferences equally. On what, then, is it based? Secondly, even given the *a fortiori*, the practical conclusion that seems to follow from the argument is that we should *not* reason even about stones falling, and certainly not about the origin of worlds. However, the context makes it clear that the conclusion intended by Hume is that we should limit our inquiries to matters of common life; that is, reasoning about stones falling is all right, but reasoning about the origin of worlds is not. How can we understand the argument as leading to this intended conclusion?

One possible way to answer the second question is to interpret the argument as including an implicit premise, or assumption, that goes somewhat beyond the mere difference in degree of faith, noted above. The assumption is that we perform reason about things like falling stones, and cannot help believing the conclusions of straightforward inferences about these things; but we feel no such compulsion to reason about things like the origin of worlds or to accept the conclusions of reasoning about such matters. Therefore the undermining of *all* inductive inferences by the philosophical objection constitutes, *for us*, a reason not to inquire specifically about things like the origin of worlds; for whether we will inquire about stones falling and the like is not open to discussion. On this interpretation, [2] is precisely "the inductomaniac argument" that I presented in the preceding section.

As for our first question, that is, regarding the basis of people's greater faith in inferences about the falling of stones than about the origin of worlds, it might

help to examine [1] in the above quotation. Though [1] flows smoothly into [2], it seems *not* to be based on the philosophical objection; nor does it seem to be based on the profound arguments. Hume's talk in [1] of the "imperfection," the "narrow reach," and the "inaccurate operations" of our faculties would be a tremendous understatement if he were referring to the conclusion of the philosophical objection or of the profound arguments; for according to these, our faculties have *no* reach, and their operations are *totally detached from reality*, not merely imperfect and inaccurate. Therefore it is plausible that in [1], he is appealing to the popular objections and the trite arguments; for those stress the imperfections, inaccuracies, and narrow reach, of our faculties.²⁹

I suggest that we might interpret [1] as providing the basis for the *a fortiori* in [2]. That is, perhaps Hume is *not merely assuming* that his readers do not feel compelled to engage in metaphysical speculation; rather he presents, in [1], reasons for being disinclined to engage in such speculation. In particular, it is because of the "imperfection," "inaccurate operations," and especially the "narrow reach" of our faculties that the chances of success in metaphysics are so much less than in matters of common life. Our intellectual faculties are not up to the task of carrying out or evaluating the subtle and complex reasoning that is necessary in order to construct experiential (i.e., inductive) arguments about matters beyond our experience. This sets the stage for the *a fortiori* argument in [2], and thence to the practical conclusion that we should limit our inquiries to matters of common life.

I certainly would not insist that the above interpretation of [1] and [2] is the only way to understand this passage. But I think that it is a plausible interpretation. I will rest content with having shown, in section IV, above, that it is *possible* to view the philosophical objection as providing a reason for mitigated skepticism, and in the present section, that Hume *might* have had this view, perhaps supplemented by considerations based on the popular objections, in mind.

VI

I have suggested a possible explanation of how some of the skeptical arguments presented by Hume—in particular, the philosophical objection to reasoning concerning matters of fact—provide reasons to adopt various aspects of mitigated skepticism. The relation between the philosophical objection and mitigated skepticism was seen by Terence Penelhum as problematic (the inconsistency problem), and by Kenneth Winkler as a source of puzzlement (the reason problem); and it led Robert Fogelin to cut the Gordian knot by saying that Hume's skeptical arguments are causes of adopting mitigated skepticism, but not reasons for doing so.

I began by noting the different implications of what Hume called, respectively, the "popular" and the "philosophical" objections to inductive reasoning, and comparing this difference to the difference between the implications of the "trite"

and the "profound" skeptical arguments about perception and the external world. This led to the observation that the popular objections seem much more directly relevant than the philosophical objection to engendering mitigated skepticism. I argued, however, that the philosophical objection can be viewed as providing a reason to suspend judgement about matters of fact that we do not directly perceive, to the extent that we can do so; and generally we can do so with respect to matters beyond common life. In the context of this latter argument, the popular objections can be viewed as playing the role of explaining why we *can* suspend judgement on matters beyond common life. That is, they marshal inductive evidence, to which we are susceptible, that our inferences are sometimes variable and undependable; and we find that variability and undependability are especially prevalent with respect to matters beyond common life.

This argument leaves even proper, consistent inductive practice merely the unavoidable folly of "inductomaniacs," and construes mitigated skepticism as mere "damage control." But Hume seems positively to recommend proper induction, not merely tolerate it when it is unavoidable. I think that we can nevertheless view my inductomaniac argument as just one consideration in favor of mitigated skepticism, a consideration based on the assumption that the philosophical objection is as sound and as damaging as it seems. It is to be supplemented by Millican's argument that, since the philosophical objection might not be as damaging as it seems, consistent inductive practice is not mere folly, and by Winkler's naturalistic explanation of Hume's wholehearted approval of such practice.

As for how much of all this Hume had in mind, I do not think that the text can answer this question decisively. However, I hope that my description of the respective logical roles of the different skeptical arguments provides a plausible account of the connections among the various arguments and positions that Hume presents in section 12 of the *Enquiry*.

NOTES

I would like to thank David Widerker for encouraging me to develop the short note that I had written on these topics into a full-fledged article. I would also like to thank a number of anonymous referees, whose comments helped improve the article. I am especially grateful to the two editors of *Hume Studies*, Peter Loftson and Peter Millican, for insightful suggestions and general encouragement. Peter Millican, in particular, provided me with a wealth of detailed comments that helped make this article much better than it otherwise would have been.

1 The reference is to David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* [EHU], ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), section 12, paragraph 21; and to Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles*

of *Morals* [SBN], ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, third edition, revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 158.

2 Doubts have been raised as to whether Hume viewed his arguments about induction, in EHU 4 and 5 (and in Book 1, part 3 of the *Treatise*), as skeptical. But it is difficult to deny that here Hume is summarizing his arguments in EHU 4 and 5, and he says explicitly that those arguments are skeptical. Note also that Hume used the word “sceptical” in his titles for both sections 4 and 5. For one approach to denying that Hume was a skeptic about induction, see Tom Beauchamp and Alexander Rosenberg, *Hume and the Problem of Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); and for another, see Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume’s Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), chap. 4. For responses to both approaches, see Kenneth Winkler, “Hume’s Inductive Skepticism,” in *The Empiricists: Critical Essays on Locke, Berkeley, and Hume*, ed. Margaret Atherton (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 183–212, especially 185–200; and Peter Millican, “Hume’s Sceptical Doubts concerning Induction,” in *Reading Hume on Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 107–73, especially 154–66.

3 David Fate Norton, “Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy,” in Millican, *Reading Hume on Human Understanding*, 371–92, 377.

4 See Hume’s *My Own Life*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 351–6, 352–3. I owe the point about Hume’s many revisions of the *Enquiry* to Peter Millican.

5 This interpretation was suggested to me by Peter Millican.

6 On the other hand, it may be thought that according to Hume, the popular objections play no role in leading to mitigated skepticism; for Hume says that what may lead to mitigated skepticism is “Pyrrhonism, or excessive scepticism” (EHU 12.24; SBN 161), and it might be thought that by “Pyrrhonism” and “excessive scepticism” he means specifically the more extreme skepticism that is based on the profound arguments and the philosophical objection. However, Hume does use these terms in connection with the popular objections as well. Thus, *before* introducing the philosophical objection, he says, in response to the skepticism that is based on the *popular* objections, “The great subverter of *Pyrrhonism* or the excessive principles of skepticism is action” (EHU 12.21; SBN 158–9).

7 Terence Penelhum, *God and Skepticism* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983), 127.

8 Terence Penelhum, “Comments and Responses,” in *Faith, Scepticism and Personal Identity*, ed. J. J. MacIntosh and H. A. Meynell (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1994), 235–90, 269.

9 It is not clear exactly where Hume would set the limit to legitimate or worthwhile inquiry. I will assume that Hume’s mitigated skeptic avoids not only *a priori* metaphysics, but also *a posteriori* natural theology; this is indicated at the end of the above quotation from EHU 12.25, and it accords with EHU 11, especially the final paragraph, and with the position of Philo in the *Dialogues*. Thus the philosophical objection, which undermines induction, is relevant to the aspect of mitigated skepticism that sets limits to our fields of inquiry.

10 The reference is to Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 1, part 3, section 15.

11 Peter Millican, "Hume's Skeptical Doubts concerning Induction," 162–6, (see above, note 2). See James Noxon, *Hume's Philosophical Development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 180–7.

12 See Millican, "Humes Old and New: Four Fashionable Falsehoods and One Unfashionable Truth," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 81 (2007): 163–99, 189.

13 That is, Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Book 1, part 4, section 7, paragraph 14; corresponding to page 273 of the Selby-Bigge edition of the *Treatise*, 2nd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). See also EHU 12.20 (SBN 157–8). The term "higher-order skepticism," and the relevance here of the idea for which it stands, was suggested to me by Peter Loftson in correspondence.

14 Millican himself prefers not to support his position in this way, that is, by casting doubt (or saying that Hume cast doubt) on the cogency of the philosophical objection. He would rather rest his case, as above, on the possibility that despite the cogency of the philosophical objection, the principle that the unobserved resembles the observed might still be true, and on the fact that we all can't help believing that it is true.

15 Winkler, "Hume's Inductive Skepticism," 203–7. (See note 2, above.) Winkler, "Hume's Inductive Skepticism," 211n29, cites Páll Árdal and Annette Baier as having influenced his account.

16 See EPM 9.1 [i.e., Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), section 9, paragraph 1] (SBN 268). See also T 3.3.1.30 (SBN 591).

17 Winkler, "Hume's Inductive Skepticism," 207–8.

18 *Ibid.*, 212 notes 38 and 40.

19 Robert J. Fogelin, "The Tendency of Hume's Skepticism," in his *Philosophical Interpretations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 114–31, 130.

20 Yves Michaud, in "How to Become a Moderate Skeptic: Hume's Way out of Pyrrhonism," *Hume Studies* 11:1 (1985): 33–46; especially 45–6, has suggested an interesting development of Fogelin's approach.

21 See Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Nelson Pike (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), 11; quoted in Fogelin, "The Tendency of Hume's Skepticism," 125: "[I]f a man has accustomed himself to skeptical considerations on the uncertainty and narrow limits of reason, he will not entirely forget them when he turns his reflection on other subjects; but in all his philosophical principles and reasoning, I dare not say, in his common conduct, he will be found different from those who either never formed any opinions in the case or have entertained sentiments more favorable to human reason."

22 David Fate Norton, "How a Sceptic may Live Scepticism," in MacIntosh and Meynell, *Faith, Scepticism and Personal Identity*, 119–39, especially 128–34. (See above, note 8.) See also Norton, "Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy," (above, note 3), 385–6.

23 G. E. Moore viewed something like the above account as being on the level of *philosophy*, not merely of psychology. See G. E. Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Collier, 1966; first published by Macmillan, 1953), 136ff. Peter Lopton has pointed out to me that Thomas Reid anticipated Moore in this. See Reid's *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970) chapter I, section VIII, 19–20.

24 The issue of cause vs. reason is complicated by the fact that according to Hume, at least some reasons *are* causes. However, since not all causes, even of beliefs, are reasons, we may say the following: Penelhum and Winkler believe that Hume held that the philosophical objection can persuade people to adopt some aspects of mitigated skepticism by its figuring in an *argument* that conforms to the canons of deductive or inductive logic or the logic of decision-making, but they cannot see how it can do so; whereas Fogelin says that the philosophical objection gives rise to mitigated skepticism in some other way.

25 Terence Penelhum, "Hume's Skepticism and the *Dialogues*," in *McGill Hume Studies*, ed. David Fate Norton, Nicholas Capaldi, and Wade Robison (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1979), 253–78.

26 Though Hume says, at the end of Book 1 of the *Treatise* (T 1.4.7.12–5; SBN 270–4), that he and others are sometimes led to engage in metaphysics, nevertheless I understand him to mean that he and they are so led not in the instinctive and overpowering way in which we are led to engage in ordinary inductive reasoning. Rather we are led to *want* to speculate, and to speculate *because we want to*; whereas we are compelled to draw at least some inductive inferences about matters of common life whether we want to or not. Thus he says, of the "sentiments" that incline him to engage in metaphysics, "shou'd I endeavour to banish them, . . . I *feel* I shou'd be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy" (T 1.4.7.12; SBN 271). I think that Hume indicates, in this sentence, that whether he engages in "philosophy" is a matter of *decision*. (Of course, all of this is to be understood in light of Hume's determinism, or his acceptance of both liberty and necessity in human thought and action. See EHU 8.)

27 Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, page 13 of the Pike edition; or pages. 135–6 of the Norman Kemp Smith edition of the *Dialogues* (London, 1947). See Richard H. Popkin, "David Hume: His Pyrrhonism and His Critique of Pyrrhonism" in *Hume*, ed. V. C. Chappell (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 53–98, 72.

28 Penelhum's objection and my response, in the preceding paragraphs, apply here, *mutatis mutandis*. Though we literally cannot help believing that a given flame is hot, nevertheless, most people most of the time can sincerely suspend judgement with respect to metaphysical theories; and even if some people sometimes yield to temptation, or fall prey to metaphysicomania, and adopt a metaphysical theory, that does not invalidate Hume's general prescription that we not do so.

29 Thus perhaps Hume held that *all* of the skeptical arguments discussed in the earlier parts of section 12 have parts to play in leading to mitigated skepticism. In fact, it seems that Hume's express case for modesty and tolerance, in EHU 12.24 (SBN 161–2), is based primarily on the problems he had raised for *deductive* reasoning, that is, the "absurdities" of infinite divisibility involved in geometry (see EHU 12.18; SBN 156–7); for Hume appeals to "the strange infirmities of human understanding, even in its most perfect state, and when most accurate and cautious in its determinations," thus using terms that he generally reserves for mathematics.