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# The Ways of the Wise: Hume's Rules of Causal Reasoning

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*Abstract:* In their responses to Hume's account of causal reasoning, Hume's own contemporaries and many subsequent readers have tended to focus on the skeptical implications of that account. More recent scholarship has emphasized that Hume's account of causal inference is not purely skeptical, for Hume often suggests that forming a belief through causal inference based on repeated experience is the right way to form beliefs. One less-noticed feature of Hume's account of causal inference, however, is that Hume links good causal inference with virtue; thinkers who adopt certain methods of causal reasoning and eschew other methods possess the epistemic virtue that he characterizes as "wisdom" or "good sense." This paper argues that Hume's account of causal reasoning and his normative claims about belief can fruitfully be interpreted by focusing on what Hume says about such doxastic wisdom: why he thinks it is better to be wise than unwise; what he means when he characterizes certain methods of belief-formation as wise; how the cognitive habits employed by the wise differ from those of the unwise; and how he thinks someone can who lacks the epistemic virtue of wisdom can come to acquire it. Since much of the secondary literature on Humean virtue has focused on the "moral" rather than "intellectual" virtues (EPM App 4.2; SBN 313), attention to Humean doxastic wisdom also helps to provide a more complete picture of his account of virtue.

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## Introduction

In Hume's own day, and for nearly two hundred years after that, readers interested in his account of causal reasoning tended to focus on the skeptical implications of that account. For example, in his 1757 *View of the Principal Deistical Writers of the Last and Present Century*, John Leland characterized Hume as "endeavouring to destroy all reasoning, from causes to effects, or from effects to causes."[1] According to this sort of reading, as Louis Loeb describes it, "there is equal justification for every belief about the unobserved—none whatsoever."[2] However, a consensus has now emerged in the secondary literature that while Hume is clearly skeptical about whether beliefs formed through causal inference are rationally justified, he also makes normative claims about causal inference. For example, he observes that "One who concludes somebody to be near him, when he hears an articulate voice in the dark, reasons justly and naturally, tho' that conclusion be deriv'd from nothing but custom" (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225).[3] And throughout the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*,[4] Philo's responses to Cleanthes presuppose that it is reasonable to make inferences on the basis of experience; the objections Philo raises are to Cleanthes's weak analogies rather than to causal inference per se. As Loeb and others have pointed out, if Hume thinks that forming a belief through causal inference based on repeated experience is the *right* way to form beliefs, then he does in fact consider causal inferences on the basis of experience to be justified in some sense.[5] Hume's account of causal inference is not purely skeptical.

One less-noticed feature of Hume's account of causal inference, however, is that Hume links good causal inference with *virtue*. That is, Hume does not *merely* make the normative claim that some methods of causal inference are better than others; rather, he suggests that those thinkers who adopt certain methods of causal reasoning and eschew other methods possess the epistemic virtue that he characterizes as "wisdom" or "good sense." Focusing on the ways in which Hume conceives of good causal reasoning as an epistemic virtue (and poor causal reasoning as an epistemic vice) will provide a richer picture of the constructive and normative elements in Hume's account of causal inference.

This approach will also provide a richer picture of Hume's account of virtues more generally, for while a great deal has been written about Hume's views on justice, benevolence, and even chastity, Hume's views about the epistemic virtue of wisdom have been largely neglected in the secondary literature.[6] This paucity of literature may be because Hume's writings do not contain a sustained discussion of wisdom; indeed, in the *Treatise* Hume uses the term "wisdom" only three times.[7] The *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* mentions wisdom and the wise more frequently, and includes Hume's well-known remark that "a wise man . . . proportions his belief to the evidence" (EHU 10.4; SBN 110),[8] but even in that text the references are scattered. Nonetheless, as I shall show, the passages in which

Hume does refer to wisdom show its connections with what he calls "good sense" and with good causal reasoning, and he has a great deal to say about good and bad causal reasoning. Thus, from Hume's few and relatively scattered remarks, it is possible to construct a unified account of what he takes doxastic wisdom to be. The focus of this paper will be Hume's account of wisdom understood specifically as an epistemic or doxastic virtue—that is, as it pertains to belief-formation. It seems likely that for Hume, the doxastically wise person would also tend to be practically wise, and that someone who has good methods of belief-formation would also be likely to make good decisions and act in ways that are morally praiseworthy. Nonetheless, there is no necessary connection for Hume between doxastic wisdom and practical wisdom; it is conceivable that a person might be virtuous in her methods of belief-formation but not in her actions or intentions.

Section 1 of this paper shows that Hume does in fact characterize wisdom as an epistemic virtue and explains why he thinks it is better to be a wise thinker than an unwise one. Section 2 considers what Humean wisdom is; I argue that it is a character trait of consistently tending to follow rules of good reasoning such as those that Hume outlines in the *Treatise*. This account of epistemic virtue can also shed light on Hume's distinction in the *Treatise* between the "vulgar," the "metaphysicians," and the "true philosophers"; I argue that possession of the epistemic virtues of wisdom and good sense is, for Hume, a necessary (although not sufficient) condition for being what he calls a "true philosopher." Sections 3 and 4 contrast the cognitive habits employed by the wise with those of the unwise, and Section 5 examines how Hume thinks someone who lacks epistemic virtue can acquire it, especially given Hume's claim that belief cannot be willed.

## 1. Humean Wisdom as a Virtue

Hume includes "wisdom and good sense" in his discussion of natural abilities in the *Treatise*, arguing that there is no good reason to exclude such natural abilities from the "catalogue of virtues" (T 3.3.4.8; SBN 611 and T 3.3.4.2; SBN 607). While he only refers explicitly to wisdom once in that section, his references to "good sense and judgment" (T 3.3.4.1; SBN 607) and "good sense and genius" (T 3.3.4.2; SBN 608) evidently refer to the same natural virtue, wisdom. Similarly, in "Of Miracles," Hume describes the physician Jean-Baptiste De Sylva's rejection of a case of purportedly miraculous healing as reasoning "like a man of sense" (EHU 10n25; SBN 107n1). Moreover, it is in "Of Miracles" that Hume presents his well-known principle that "a wise man proportions his belief to the evidence," so that good sense and wisdom are implicitly linked; we may reasonably conclude that these refer to the same virtuous trait.

For Hume, a virtue is any character trait of which we human beings approve for its usefulness or agreeableness to its possessor or others, where that approval

derives from the sympathy we feel with those affected by the trait (T 3.3.3.30; SBN 591 and EPM 9.12; SBN 277).[9] Thus, when a trait has beneficial effects (through being either useful or agreeable) for either the possessor of the trait or those around her, we too appreciate the beneficial effects; our approval in this case stems from sympathy with the feelings of those affected. As Hume puts it in the *Treatise*, "When the natural tendencies of [a man's] passions leads him to be serviceable and useful within his sphere, we approve of his character, and love his person, by a sympathy with the sentiments of those, who have a more particular connexion with him" (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602).

Hume points out that of course there are many things besides character traits that we find useful or agreeable to ourselves or others, and indeed that we approve of such things. For example, a sharp knife is useful, and a beautiful painting is pleasing. But he insists that the sharpness and the beauty in these cases are not virtues; the sentiments excited by the good traits of inanimate objects are simply different from those excited by good character traits (EPMn17; SBN 213n1). For a trait to count as a virtue, the approval we feel for it must derive from our experiencing, through sympathy, a feeling of the latter sort.

Hume clearly holds that wisdom is a virtue (T 3.3.4.8; SBN 611). But what is it about wisdom which makes us approve of it? In his account of why a given quality is deemed a virtue, Hume offers four choices: the quality may be useful to the possessor, useful to others, pleasing to the possessor, or pleasing to others. Scholars have applied these criteria to Humean wisdom in various ways;[10] I shall argue that Hume thinks any of the four criteria can explain why we approve of wisdom. Explaining why we approve of *courage*, Hume says that all four reasons may play a role: "The utility of courage, both to the public and to the person possessed of it, is an obvious foundation of merit: But to any one who duly considers of the matter, it will appear, that this quality has a peculiar luster, which it derives wholly from itself, and from that noble elevation inseparable from it" (EPM 7.11; SBN 254). He makes a similar point about benevolence: we approve of it not only for its "utility, and its tendency to promote the good of mankind" but also because observing benevolence excites in us feelings which are "delightful in themselves" (EPM 7.19; SBN 257). Since Hume is a pluralist about why we approve of courage and benevolence, there is good reason to read him as a pluralist about why we approve of doxastic wisdom.

A pluralistic interpretation is also supported by the texts. Hume clearly states that wisdom and "good sense" are "useful to the person possess'd of them" (T 3.3.4.8; SBN 611). And Hume also thinks that wisdom can be agreeable to oneself and others, for he writes that "Eloquence, genius of all kinds, even good sense, and sound reasoning, when it rises to an eminent degree and nice discernment; all these endowments seem immediately agreeable, and have a merit distinct from their usefulness" (EPM 8.7; SBN 263). We might speculate, too, that since the wise

person's reasoning is proportionate to the evidence, that very proportionality might be pleasing to the thinker or even to a spectator; writing in 1756, the Scottish philosopher Alexander Gerard suggested that beautiful objects are those which produce pleasure in a spectator due to their uniformity, variety, and proportion.[11] If Hume, too, thought that proportion is more pleasing than disproportion, then the proportionate reasonings of a wise person would be more pleasing than the sometimes disproportionate causal inferences of the unwise.

## 2. Who is Wise?

Hume's writings contain numerous passages contrasting different types of thinkers: he contrasts "shallow thinkers" with "abstruse thinkers" (ES 254); vulgar thinkers with wise thinkers (EHU 10.21; SBN 120); and vulgar thinkers with "philosophers" (T 1.2.3.11; SBN 37). Furthermore, within the category of "philosophers" he distinguishes proponents of the "easy and obvious philosophy" from those who pursue "accurate and abstruse philosophy" (EHU 1.3; SBN 6), as well as distinguishing between "true philosophy" and "false philosophy."[12] Unfortunately, these various distinctions do not map onto each other in straightforward ways; that is, we cannot simply take it that, because Hume sometimes contrasts the "vulgar" with "philosophers" and sometimes with the "wise," the vulgar are never wise or that philosophers always are. Nonetheless, it is possible to situate Humean wisdom among the other characterizations of good and bad thinking that appear in Hume's works.

Hume makes a tripartite distinction in the *Treatise*, where he writes of "a gradation of three opinions, that rise above each other, according as the persons, who form them, acquire new degrees of reason and knowledge" (T 1.4.3.9; SBN 222). He identifies these as (1) the opinions of the "vulgar," who engage in a "common and careless way of thinking," (2) false philosophy, and (3) true philosophy (T 1.4.3.9; SBN 222). While Hume does equate the vulgar with "all the unthinking and unphilosophical part of mankind," he also says that this means "all of us, at one time or other" (T 1.4.2.36; SBN 205). In other words, even those who become philosophers (both "true" and "false") remain members of "the vulgar."

Hume's reference to a "gradation" of the three types of thought suggests that becoming a true philosopher involves a certain progression of thinking. One's first, natural state is simply to accept the deliverances of common sense, taking things "according to their first appearance" (T 1.3.12.5; SBN 132). Thus the vulgar tend to "imagine they perceive a connexion betwixt such objects as they have constantly found united together" (T 1.4.3.9; SBN 223); that is, they take it that in their causal inferences they are perceiving actual connections between objects. Some people, questioning what they naturally believe, then begin to make additional comparisons among their ideas; thus "philosophers, who abstract from

the effects of custom, and compare the ideas of objects, immediately perceive the falsehood of these vulgar sentiments" (T 1.4.3.9; SBN 223). However, Hume says, these thinkers typically end up going beyond what experience can legitimately establish, and thus draw the wrong conclusions (T 1.4.3.9; SBN 223); for example, they conclude that there must be a "double existence of perceptions and objects" (T 1.4.2.52; SBN 215) or, to take a different example, that there must be some "unknown and invisible" stuff, "substance" (T 1.4.3.4; SBN 220). This is the stage of false philosophy, which Hume describes as a "confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions" (T 1.4.3.56; SBN 218). However, a thinker who draws a "just conclusion" will find himself or herself "return'd back to the situation of the vulgar" (T 1.4.3.9; SBN 223)—that is, back to reasoning on the basis of experience, but, as he puts it in the first *Enquiry*, in a more "methodized and corrected" way (EHU 12.25; SBN 162). That, Hume suggests, is true philosophy.[13]

Hume's distinction between true and false philosophers seems to be present in Section 12 of the first *Enquiry*, where Hume describes various forms of skepticism. Part 1 opens with a condemnation of an "incurable" and untenable version of what Hume calls "antecedent" skepticism—that is, the skepticism of the Cartesian meditator in the First Meditation. However, Hume says that no one can actually achieve this form of skepticism (EHU 12.3; SBN 149–50), and since it does not characterize any actual human beings, it presumably characterizes neither the vulgar nor either type of philosopher (although perhaps he would say that someone who *tries* to embrace such skepticism is a false philosopher).

After describing this unattainable "antecedent" skepticism, Hume describes a "moderate" form of "antecedent" skepticism, and this seems to be an account of the reasoning of the true philosopher, for Hume describes this type of thinking as a "necessary preparative to the study of philosophy" (EHU 12.4; SBN 150). This form of skepticism requires that we "begin with clear and self-evident principles, . . . advance by timorous and sure steps, . . . review frequently our conclusions, and examine accurately all their consequences" (EHU 12.4; SBN 150). Likewise, in part 3, Hume describes a "more mitigated skepticism" which "may be both durable and useful . . . when [Pyrrhonism's] undistinguished doubts are, in some measure, corrected by common sense and reflection" (EHU 12.24; SBN 161). Because Hume says that this mitigated form of skepticism involves the application of "common sense and reflection," he seems to be describing the reasoning of the true philosopher.

Finally, Hume's discussions of "consequent" skepticism (in part 1 of section 12) and of "excessive" or "Pyrrhonian" skepticism (in part 2 of section 12) seem to be accounts of "false" philosophy, for the discussion of consequent skepticism echoes his *Treatise* 1.4 discussion of philosophers' doctrines of a double existence and of substance, views which he called "fictions" in the *Treatise* (T 1.4.2.52; SBN 215 and T 1.4.3.8; SBN 222) and a "pretended philosophical system" in the *Enquiry*

(EHU 12.10; SBN 152), and he rejects Pyrrhonian skepticism on the grounds that it undermines itself (EHU 12.20; SBN 157–58).

The passage in the *Treatise* about three "gradations" suggests that the path to true philosophy must go through false philosophy first. Hume says, after all, that these "three opinions . . . rise above each other, according as the persons, who form them, acquire new degrees of reason and knowledge" (T 1.4.3.9; SBN 223), suggesting that the true philosopher must have struggled with false philosophy first. This is also suggested by his remark in the first *Enquiry* that the mitigated skepticism which he recommends "may, in part, be the result" of excessive skepticism (EHU 12.24; SBN 161). If this is so, then there must be very few true philosophers.

Where does wisdom fit into all of this? Hume evidently does not think that one must have reached the elevated status of "true philosopher" in order to count as *wise*; otherwise, he would hardly have included wisdom and good sense alongside such traits as "discretion, caution, enterprise, industry, assiduity, frugality, oeconomy . . . prudence, discernment," all of which may be possessed by ordinary humans from a range of walks of life (EPM 6.21; SBN 242). Wisdom, while surely a necessary condition for being a true philosopher, is not a sufficient condition; the vulgar may, on occasion, be wise.

## 3. Unwise Methods of Belief-Formation

Wise thinking, for Hume, is a better form of thinking, which the "true philosopher" necessarily possesses, but which is also attainable by "the vulgar." But in what, exactly, does this better form of thinking consist? I shall argue that Hume thinks that wisdom consists in tending to follow certain general rules of reasoning and abjuring other ways of forming beliefs. In this section, I examine what Hume takes to be unwise methods of forming belief; I turn in Section 4 to the methods that Hume takes to be wise.

In the *Treatise*, Hume says that a belief is "a particular manner of forming an idea" (T 1.3.7.6; SBN 97); specifically, a belief is an idea with more force and liveliness than an idea one is merely entertaining, but with less force and liveliness than an impression (T 1.3.7.6; SBN 97). His account in the first *Enquiry* is similar: "the difference between *fiction* and *belief* lies in some sentiment or feeling, which is annexed to the latter, not to the former" (EHU 5.11; SBN 48).[14] In both works, Hume turns from examining the *nature* of a belief to a study of the *causes* of belief. Belief occurs when an idea has been sufficiently "enlivened." It is a "general maxim" for Hume that "when any impression becomes present to us, it not only transports the mind to such ideas as are related to it, but likewise communicates to them a share of its force and vivacity" (T 1.3.8.2; SBN 98). This is the process he calls "enlivening."[15] It happens in causal reasoning, according to Hume's account: as we experience many similar conjunctions of objects, we develop a habit of thinking of the two.

Thus, a thinker becomes used to having impression *A* followed by impression *B*, so that the mind becomes habituated to thinking of them together. Eventually, an impression of *A* leads the thinker automatically to have an idea of *B*, and some of the vivacity and force of impression *A* is automatically communicated to the idea of *B*, sufficiently enlivening it that it is believed.

Referring back to the three principles of association that he describes at the beginning of the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry*, Hume says that relationships of resemblance, contiguity, and causation between an impression and an idea can enliven the idea (T 1.3.8.4; SBN 100). However, while a believed idea must have been sufficiently enlivened, not every enlivened idea is believed. Hume maintains that, of the three relations he describes, experience shows that "belief arises only from causation" and not from ideas that we are led to think of through the relationships of continuity or resemblance (T 1.3.9.2; SBN 107), although he adds that continuity and resemblance can further increase the vivacity of an idea that is already believed on the basis of causal reasoning.

Even if continuity and resemblance do not confer enough force and vivacity on an idea for it to be believed, Hume holds that there are other ways in which ideas can be enlivened so much that people believe them.[16] Some of these methods are forms of poor causal reasoning; other ways are not actually based on such reasoning at all.

Consider first some situations in which a person uses causal reasoning but uses it poorly. Hume provides a short list in *Treatise* 1.3.13 of ways in which thinkers can go wrong in their causal inferences. The section is called "Of unphilosophical probability," for these forms of probable reasoning are "disclaim'd by philosophers" (T 1.3.13.2; SBN 143). Thus, a causal inference based on some remembered fact will be "more or less convincing, according as the fact is recent or remote" (T 1.3.13.1; SBN 143). While this distinction in the force of an argument is "not receiv'd by philosophy as solid and legitimate," because it would make the strength of an argument depend on something as epistemically irrelevant as the length of time since we heard it (T 1.3.13.1; SBN 143), Hume nonetheless insists that ordinary thinkers are swayed more by arguments based on recently perceived facts than they are by those based on more distantly perceived facts. In another kind of case, Hume says that having to engage in probable reasoning which involves multiple steps tends to diminish the vivacity of one's conviction (T 1.3.13.3; SBN 144). Finally, one may form beliefs on the basis of rashly formed "general rules," in which one generalizes from cases that are insufficiently similar. This, Hume explains, is the source of "prejudice," such as the belief that all Irishmen are dull (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 146). While the doxastically wise are able to correct these mistakes using a second application of general rules (a process to be discussed in Section 4), the unwise do not do so. That is, while the wise follow "authentic" rules of causal inference (T 1.3.13.12; SBN 150), the vulgar are prone to making mistakes in their causal reasoning.

Elsewhere, Hume describes other cases which seem like more egregious cases of unreasonable thinking. In these cases, the thinker is so unduly influenced by some factor that the normal process of reaching a belief through causal reasoning based on experience is overridden. In these cases, a thinker comes to believe some idea through a different mechanism altogether; the degree of vivacity of the believed idea has been increased in some way other than the constant conjunction of resembling cases in one's own experience.

While Hume's expositions in the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry* sometimes include numbered lists of categories or arguments,[17] his presentation of unwise methods of belief-formation is not systematic in that way. Nonetheless, I think they can be grouped roughly into three categories. One such type of belief-formation, which Hume mentions in *Treatise* 1.3.10, is to be unduly influenced by passion, particularly by "admiration and surprise" (T 1.3.10.4; SBN 120). In a second kind of case, belief is induced through the mere repetition of an idea in one's mind, where that idea has not been associated with particular impressions in one's past experiences. A third unwise method of belief-formation involves putting undue trust in others' testimony. Each of these three mechanisms of belief-formation will be discussed in turn.

### *3.1 Belief-Formation Due to Passions*

In this sort of case, a belief is formed through the influence of the force and vivacity of some passion that the thinker is experiencing. Hume writes that "the passions . . . are very favourable to belief," citing as examples the coward who, due to his excessive fear, believes any report of danger, and the pessimist who believes anything melancholy (T 1.3.10.4; SBN 120). As Hume puts it, "This emotion passes by an easy transition to the imagination; and diffusing itself over our idea of the affecting object, makes us form that idea with greater force and vivacity, and consequently assent to it, according to the precedent system" (T 1.3.10.4; SBN 120). Thus, for example, while a coward might have the same experiences as someone who is not cowardly, the coward's beliefs are affected differently by his fear than are the beliefs of the non-cowardly person. Two travelers might both have heard of bridges breaking when crossed, or even have experienced such a situation; but if the first traveler reasons that many bridges have been crossed which have not broken, that this bridge looks different from those which were reported to have broken, and so on, then her reasoning is wiser than that of the traveler who believes that this bridge is unsafe to cross because of a strong passion that manages to infect and enliven his idea of the bridge's being dangerous. Indeed, two thinkers might hold the same belief, wisely in one case but not in the other. Suppose one traveler decides *not* to cross this shaky-looking bridge because of past experiences (whether first-hand or known through others' testimony) of shaky-looking bridges

collapsing, and a second traveler with the same experience decides not to cross this shaky-looking bridge, not because of the past experience but because fear has magnified his idea of the bridge collapsing. In practice, it would be quite difficult to tell which factor led the second thinker to the conclusion,[18] but, if it were possible to do so, then according to Hume's account of wise reasoning, the second thinker—the coward—should not be described as wise.

In describing how passion can affect belief, Hume's examples focus on two main types of passions: fear and surprise. The example just cited from T 1.3.10.4 (SBN 120) clearly involves fear, so does another example Hume offers, of a man locked in an iron cage, hanging from a high tower, who, despite having considerable experience of the solidity of iron, "cannot forbear trembling, when he surveys the precipice below him" (T 1.3.13.10; SBN 148). For this person, "the circumstances of depth and descent strike so strongly upon him, that their influence cannot be destroy'd by the contrary circumstances of support and solidity. . . . His imagination runs away with its object, and excites a passion proportion'd to it. That passion returns back upon the imagination and enlivens the idea" (T 1.3.13.10; SBN 148). The idea of falling becomes so enlivened that it overwhelms the less vivid idea of staying put. The passion of fear also plays an important role in Hume's account of the cultural development of religious belief, where he writes about the ways belief can be influenced by "the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst of revenge."[19]

Another type of passion mentioned several times in Hume's works as a source of unreasonable belief is surprise. Hume uses various terms in this connection: not just "surprise," but also "wonder," "admiration," and "astonishment." He writes,

> Admiration and surprise have the same effect as the other passions; and accordingly we may observe, that among the vulgar, quacks and projectors meet with a more easy faith upon account of their magnificent pretensions, than if they kept themselves within the bounds of moderation. This first astonishment, which naturally attends their mysterious relations, spreads itself over the whole soul, and so vivifies and enlivens the idea, that it resembles the inferences we draw from experience. (T 1.3.10.4; SBN 120)

Hume develops this point further in his discussion of miracles in the first *Enquiry*, where he identifies four reasons why there has never yet been evidence compelling enough to establish a reasonable belief in a putative miracle. The second of these reasons is that "[t]he passion of *surprize* and *wonder*, arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards the belief of those events, from which it is derived" (EHU 10.16; SBN 117). The "gazing populace," he says, "receive greedily, without examination, whatever sooths superstition, and promotes wonder" (EHU 10.30; SBN 126). Curiously, Hume here suggests that the

*agreeableness* of the emotion plays some role in its transfer of vivacity to the idea which caused the emotion; in the example of the man in the iron cage, however, the emotion of fear is surely not an agreeable one, yet it, too, manages to produce belief in the idea which caused the emotion. Perhaps the explanation is not that Hume thought that agreeable emotions were particularly likely to lead to belief, but simply that emotions in general, especially strong emotions, are "favourable to belief" (T 1.3.10.4; SBN 120).

An extreme case of a passion infecting an idea is madness or folly. Hume's explanation here is (unusually for him) physiological: in this sort of case, an idea has been enlivened though the action of an imagination which has been affected by some "extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits" (T 1.3.10.9; SBN 123). Any idea formed by such a disordered imagination is believed; "every chimera of the brain is as vivid and intense as any of those inferences, which we formerly dignify'd with the name of conclusions concerning matters of fact, and sometimes as the present impressions of the senses" (T 1.3.10.9; SBN 123). In this passage, Hume's use of the Newtonian notion of force becomes literal; the blood itself is in so much motion that it somehow has the force to enliven all sorts of ideas which ought not—if good causal reasoning is our guide—be believed.

### *3.2 Belief-Formation Due to Repetition of an Idea*

In a second type of alternative mechanism of belief-formation, belief is induced through the repetition of an idea in a thinker's mind. Belief resulting from causal inference also results from repetition, of course: as we have seen, Hume holds that ordinarily, when one learns something through experience, one's idea of a thing comes to be enlivened through its constant conjunction with an impression. In the unwise kind of case, however, "a mere idea" is repeatedly introduced into the mind without having been associated with any particular impressions in one's experiences (T 1.3.9.16; SBN 116). An example Hume mentions at several points in the *Treatise* is that of a liar who comes to believe his own lies. Custom does play a role, in the sense that the liar forms a habit of repeating the lie, but the idea comes to be enlivened—and thus believed—simply because it has been present in the mind so often, rather than because of the vivacity of a present impression and a customary, habitual transition between that type of impression and another, as occurs in causal reasoning. Thus Hume describes liars "who by the frequent repetition of their lies, come at last to believe and remember them, as realities; custom and habit having in this case, as in many others, the same influence on the mind as nature, and infixing the idea with equal force and vigour" (T 1.3.5.6; SBN 86).

It is worth mentioning that Hume does not think one can intentionally bring oneself to believe something through repeating it to oneself. He writes, "In general we may pronounce, that a person, who wou'd *voluntarily* repeat any idea

in his mind, tho' supported by one past experience, wou'd be no more inclin'd to believe the existence of its object, than if he had contented himself with one survey of it" (T 1.3.12.23; SBN 140; emphasis in original). The liar who comes to believe her own lies thus cannot have intended to do so.

Hume offers another example of how people form beliefs simply by repeating ideas: education. In education, the same ideas appear frequently in the mind, and their frequent appearance gradually gives the ideas "a facility and force" (T 1.3.9.16; SBN 116). Hume writes that "custom and education produce belief by such a repetition, as is not deriv'd from experience," a process which "requires a long tract of time, along with a very frequent and *undesign'd* repetition" (T 1.3.12.23; SBN 140; emphasis in original). Perhaps surprisingly, education thus seems to be on a par with repeating lies to oneself. This is clear from another passage, in which Hume explicitly compares education with lying:

> I am perswaded, that upon examination we shall find more than one half of those opinions, that prevail among mankind, to be owing to education, and that the principles, which are thus implicitly embrac'd, over-ballance those, which are owing either to abstract reasoning or experience. As liars, by the frequent repetition of their lies, come at last to remember them; so the judgment, or rather the imagination, by the like means, may have ideas so strongly imprinted on it, and conceive them in so full a light, that they may operate upon the mind in the same manner with those, which the senses, memory or reason present to it. (T 1.3.9.19; SBN 117)

He goes on to say that the maxims of education are changeable and "frequently contrary to reason" and thus, that education is "never upon that account recogniz'd by philosophers" (T 1.3.9.19; SBN 117). In the second *Enquiry*, too, he groups education with prejudice and passion, suggesting that these three influences prevent people from perceiving truths that others find obvious (EPM 3.36; SBN 198). On this view, education is nothing more than the sort of rote memorization used to learn one's multiplication tables or, more likely in Hume's day, one's catechism. It is thus a kind of indoctrination, which may lead people to believe otherwise well-founded propositions (such as multiplication facts), but which may also lead people to accept views Hume would characterize as superstition, maxims that are "contrary to reason."

There are, however, some passages in which Hume uses the term "education" in an apparently approbatory way. He does so in passages concerned with moral training. For example, he says that children require education in order to develop a sense of justice and injustice (T 3.2.1.17; SBN 483) as well as "a sense of honour and duty in the strict regulation of our actions with regard to the properties of others" (T 3.2.6.11; SBN 534). This could be problematic, for if education really

is a different, less reasonable method of belief-formation than causal reasoning based on constant conjunction, then Hume seems to be committed to the suggestion that our sense of justice is no better than a superstition learned by rote. Clearly, though, he wants to distinguish these: "But there is this material difference between *superstition* and *justice*, that the former is frivolous, useless, and burdensome; the latter is absolutely requisite to the well-being of mankind and existence of society" (EPM 3.38; SBN 199). In other words, Hume seems sometimes to praise and sometimes to condemn education.

This apparent discrepancy in Hume's views can be explained if we consider Hume's account of moral training. As Elizabeth Radcliffe points out,[20] Hume holds that moral training reinforces our natural associations of virtue with pleasure and vice with pain (see EPM 9.9; SBN 275). He writes that "precept or education . . . may frequently encrease or diminish, beyond their natural standard, the sentiments of approbation or dislike" (EPM 5.3; SBN 214). In other words, moral training is not a matter of simply repeating the same idea to a child; it is a matter of reinforcing certain associations between ideas and impressions, and that means it is actually a form of causal reasoning. In his discussions of moral education, then, Hume is using "education" in a distinctive sense, in which education is a version of causal reasoning which has no pejorative connotations.

### *3.3 Belief-Formation Due to Influences from Others*

In the *Treatise*, Hume discusses "credulity," that "remarkable propensity" of people to believe the testimony of others, particularly concerning "apparitions, enchantments, and prodigies," even when the reported putative fact flies in the face of our own experience (T 1.3.9.12; SBN 112–13). Recognizing that people must constantly rely on testimony from others, Hume writes that "there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators" (EHU 10.5; SBN 111). Sometimes, however, people place undue trust in the reports of others.

According to Hume's account of testimony, when someone claims to be reporting a fact, the listener takes it that the speaker's words are associated with ideas in the speaker's mind, and that those ideas represent certain "facts or objects" in the world (T 1.3.9.12; SBN 113). This belief that testimony is generally truthful arises, explains Hume, "from the very same origin as our inferences from causes to effects, and from effects to causes; nor is there anything but our *experience* of the governing principles of human nature, which can give us any assurance of the veracity of men" (T 1.3.9.12; SBN 113; emphasis in original). In other words, it is our experience of human nature (including experience of our own psychology[21]) that leads us to the general belief that testimony is trustworthy. In the first *Enquiry*, Hume

says more about the relevant features of human nature which cause this belief: "Were not the memory tenacious to a certain degree; had not men commonly an inclination to truth and a principle of probity; were they not sensible to shame, when detected in a falsehood: Were not these, I say, discovered by *experience* to be qualities, inherent in human nature, we should never repose the least confidence in human testimony" (EHU 10.5; SBN 111; emphasis in original).

Through experience, we form the belief that humans have these traits, and thus that testimony is reliable.[22] Although Hume does not explicitly characterize trust in testimony as a "general rule," it seems to fit his characterization later in the *Treatise* of such rules, for "general rules" can be the source of "prejudice" when they are "rashly" formed (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 146). Similarly, trust in testimony sometimes goes too far, for while he grants that "the words or discourses of others have an intimate connexion with certain ideas in their mind; and these ideas have also a connexion with the facts or objects, which they represent," Hume goes on to say that "this latter connexion is generally much over-rated, and commands our assent beyond what experience will justify" (T 1.3.9.12; SBN 113). In other words, while we tend to trust that a speaker's words are an "image" of some fact in the world, this trust is not always warranted; the speaker might himself or herself have used an unwise method of belief-formation in coming to hold the belief being expressed, or may simply be lying. In the section on miracles in the first *Enquiry*—the same section where Hume refers to the "wise man" who "proportions his belief to the evidence"—Hume suggests that a good causal reasoner will temper that trust if, for example, there is contrary testimony, or the testifier is not known to be reliable, or the report is delivered with either too much hesitation or too much confidence, and so on (EHU 10.5–7; SBN 111–13). Wise thinkers develop an initial general rule ("testimony is reliable," for example) but then go on to use other general rules (such as the ones Hume identifies in T 1.3.15, to be discussed in Section 4 below) to modify that general rule. Thus they end up with qualified general rules, such as "testimony is reliable so long as the testifier does not have a vested interest in others' coming to believe the report" or "testimony is reliable unless delivered in a hesitating way." Unwise thinkers do not sufficiently modify their trust in testimony and thus may believe reports from others even when those reports conflict with their own experiences.

To summarize, Hume's writings contain four categories of widely used but unwise mechanisms of belief-formation: (1) believing an idea due to poor causal reasoning; (2) believing an idea because it has been enlivened by a passion; (3) believing an idea because one has heard it repeated so often; and (4) believing testimony uncritically. But what exactly is wrong with forming beliefs in these ways? In accordance with the pluralistic account of wisdom as a virtue offered earlier, I suggest that Hume would advance no single answer to that question. He would say, I think, that experience has shown us that forming beliefs in these other ways

tends not to be useful to oneself or society, but surely the dangers of these other ways vary, depending on the belief in question and the mechanism used. As Miriam McCormick points out, belief in superstitions may be harmful to society, since "those in power can bend the superstitious masses to their will, thus undermining liberty and tolerance" (McCormick, "Why Should We Be Wise?," 14); it may also be harmful to oneself, if the fearfulness inspired by the superstitious belief leads to misery, as Hume suggests is possible in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (DNR 12.29; 128). In other cases, though, forming a belief through one of these other mechanisms may be bad for the thinker but may have no broader pernicious consequences. Thus, say, *A*'s coming to believe that scientists have created mice with fully-functioning human brains simply because of the conviction with which *B* insists that it is true may be harmful to *A*, but it would not necessarily result in any damage to others.[23] In other cases, Hume might say that alternative forms of belief-formation are simply not *pleasing* to others.

One might wonder whether it might sometimes be beneficial to a thinker to believe something formed in an unreasonable way. For example, an overly optimistic belief in one's ability, caused by a strong desire to be admired, might actually help one perform some task better than one might have been able to without that belief.[24] Hume himself suggests this in the *Treatise*, where, after pointing out that we need to know our own strengths and merits in order to have the confidence to undertake any projects, he goes on to observe that overrating one's merits is better than underrating them, since "[f]ortune commonly favours the bold and enterprising; and nothing inspires us with more boldness than a good opinion of ourselves" (T 3.3.2.9; SBN 597). One might then worry that this undermines Hume's account of wisdom; after all, if virtuous (wise) methods of belief-formation are those which are useful or pleasing to the thinker or others, and believing something false is useful, then perhaps he has to say that it can be wise to believe something false. Hume can accommodate this sort of example, however, by emphasizing that his account of doxastic wisdom is not an account of which *beliefs* are useful or agreeable to the possessor or others, but of which kinds of mental qualities are agreeable or useful. It is the *mental quality* of tending to form beliefs on the basis of certain kinds of causal reasoning—and not on the basis of passion or other mechanisms—which is agreeable or useful to the possessor or others. That someone holds a particular useful or agreeable belief does not indicate either wisdom or foolishness; what matters, for Hume, is the tendency of the method of belief-formation that the person used to form that belief.

## 4. Believing Wisely

Thus Hume thinks there are various unwise ways in which people come to hold beliefs. Hume also thinks these are natural; that is, most people cannot avoid

being affected in these ways and thus coming to hold beliefs on suspect grounds. However, Hume also suggests that some people—the wise—are not as susceptible to forming beliefs in these ways.

Hume clearly thinks that one fundamental requirement for doxastic wisdom is that one reason on the basis of experience. Of course the unwise also rely on causal inference—for no human or other animal who eschewed causal inference would survive for long. As Hume says, "Without the influence of custom, we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact, beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses. We should never know how to adjust means to ends, or to employ our natural powers in the production of any effect. There would be an end at once of all action, as well as of the chief part of speculation" (EHU 5.6; SBN 45). However, the unwise also use the other sorts of methods of belief-formation discussed in the previous section. Thus while reasoning on the basis of custom is certainly necessary for wisdom, it is not sufficient, since there are good and bad ways of reasoning causally, and there are other methods of forming beliefs. The wise person, then, must have something else that the unwise vulgar lack.

What Hume says in the *Treatise* is that the wise thinker is influenced by general rules in a way that the vulgar thinker is not. The unwise make causal inferences even when the items involved are not very similar, and they do not have a tendency to correct such inferences. Hume says this is the "first influence of general rules" (T 1.3.13.12; SBN 150). The wise, however, "take a review of this act of the mind, and compare it with the more general and authentic operations of the understanding"; when they realize that the judgment was "irregular," they can correct it (T 1.3.13.12; SBN 150). Hume makes a similar point in a discussion of the errors to which we are prone in *demonstrative* reasoning: since we tend to make such errors, "we must . . . in every reasoning form a new judgment, as a check or controul on our first judgment or belief" (T 1.4.1.1; SBN 180). Both causal and demonstrative reasoning may thus require regulation. For the wise, "our reason must be consider'd as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect; but such-a-one as by the irruption of other causes, and by the inconstancy of our mental powers, may frequently be prevented" (T 1.4.1.1; SBN 180). In other words, a wise person, having realized (through causal reasoning based on experience) that his or her acts of reasoning are not always conjoined with true judgments, can compare new judgments—or, more specifically, the process by which new judgments are made—with the successful judgments of the past (T 1.4.1.5; SBN 182); if necessary, the new judgments can then be revised in accordance with better rules of reasoning. The "second influence of general rules," then, is the new judgment by which a wise reasoner realizes (through comparison with past good inferences) that the first generalization either did or did not conform to the method by which past good inferences were made.

As Hume emphasizes in *Treatise* 1.4.1.6 (SBN 182–83), there is a risk here, for recognizing that one's reason can lead to both good and bad inferences may cause a thinker to wonder whether the second application of general rules was itself poorly made and in need of a check of its own—a third application of general rules, as it were. For example, suppose someone makes the hasty and prejudiced generalization that "an Irishman cannot have wit" (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 146). The wise person, comparing the way in which this generalization was formed with the ways that she or he made good generalizations in the past, will realize that this one is significantly different; perhaps it was not made after nearly the same amount of experience, or was based on cases that were not relevantly similar. This is the second application of general rules, in which "the nature of our understanding, and our reasoning from the first probability become our objects" (T 1.4.1.5; SBN 182), and it will lead the wise person either to endorse or reject the first generalization; in the case of "An Irishman cannot have wit," the wise thinker would reject the generalization.

But, Hume suggests, a thinker might now realize that she has in the past made both good and bad inferences, and wonder whether her assessment and rethinking of "An Irishman cannot have wit" were themselves cases of good reasoning. Even if one decides that it was wise to rethink the first judgment, or if one decides that the original judgment was sound, Hume suggests that the very act of doubting one's own reasoning ability further reduces one's confidence in the original judgment. And, one might wonder further, is it wise to doubt one's own reasoning ability? This question, Hume says, reduces one's confidence even more, until finally there is "a total extinction of belief and evidence" (T 1.4.1.6; SBN 182–83). What started as an apparently reasonable check on one's reasoning abilities ends with skepticism. We are faced, Hume says in the "Conclusion of this Book," with "no choice . . . but betwixt a false reason and none at all" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 268). The thinker who raises this skeptical worry, instead of merely stopping after the second application of general rules, is now on the road to false philosophy—as well as to "philosophical melancholy and delirium" (T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269). This position is ultimately curable, Hume thinks, by true philosophy, which is, in essence, a return to the thinking of the wise vulgar (T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269–70).

Some of the rules by which Hume thinks the wise can correct their causal inferences are included in *Treatise* 1.3.15, which contains a list of eight "rules by which to judge of causes and effects" (T 1.3.15.2; SBN 173). These are, essentially, rules for *good* causal reasoning; as Hume puts it, they are the rules "by which we ought to regulate our judgment concerning causes and effects" (T 1.3.13.11; SBN 149). Thus Hume writes, for example, that "the cause and effect must be contiguous in space and time" (the first rule) and that "the same cause always produces the same effect, and the same effect never arises but from the same cause" (the fourth rule) (T 1.3.15.3 and 1.3.15.6; SBN 173).

Here there is an interesting divergence between the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry*. The *Enquiry* omits the discussions of rules and methods found in the *Treatise*, mentioning only one general rule, the principle in "Of Miracles" that "a wise man . . . proportions his belief to the evidence" (EHU 10.4; SBN 110). However, the *Enquiry* does contain a long footnote in which Hume addresses the question of "how it happens, that men so much surpass animals in reasoning, and one man so much surpasses another" (EHU 9n20; SBN 107n1). There he lists nine ways (and he says the list is not exhaustive) in which one person may be better at reasoning than another—that is, I take it, nine ways in which the wise person's thinking differs from that of a not-so-wise person. Rather than offering a list of rules of good reasoning, he lists various cognitive capacities possessed by a wise person: for example, a better ability to think of a "whole system of objects," an ability to "carry on a chain on consequences to a greater length than another," greater "attention, accuracy, and subtilty," and a "greater promptitude of suggesting analogies" (EHU 9n20; SBN 107n1). This list has no parallel in the *Treatise.*

Because of these differences between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, it may seem as if Hume has changed his view about what wisdom entails. But I do not think that this is the case. The *Treatise* discussions of the rules of good reasoning and the *Enquiry*'s list of cognitive capacities possessed by a wise person are related in an important way, for the cognitive capacities are what make it possible for someone to follow the appropriate rules of reasoning. Consider the fifth and sixth rules in *Treatise* 1.3.15. The fifth rule states that "where several different objects produce the same effect, it must be by means of some quality, which we discover to be common amongst them," while the sixth rule advises that "the difference in the effects of two resembling objects must proceed from that particular, in which they differ" (T 1.3.15.7–8; SBN 174). The ability to determine which quality is appropriately described as the cause in these two kinds of cases requires an ability to focus carefully on the various objects and qualities in order to identify the shared quality (in the first kind of case) or the unshared quality (in the second kind of case). But this seems to be just what Hume is describing in the fifth item on his list of what I am calling cognitive capacities: "The circumstance, on which the effect depends, is frequently involved in other circumstances, which are foreign and extrinsic. The separation of it often requires great attention, accuracy, and subtilty" (EHU 9n20; SBN 107n1). Possessing this greater "attention, accuracy, and subtilty," the wise thinker is able to follow rules five and six with greater consistency than someone who lacks those powers of attention and accuracy.

In addition to being necessary conditions for following the appropriate rules of good causal reasoning, possession of these cognitive abilities also seems to be sufficient for such rule-following. Hume holds that there is no basis for the distinction between power and the exercise of a power (T 1.3.14.34; SBN 171), so to describe someone as (for example) "able to carry on a long chain of consequences

to a greater length than another" means simply that the person consistently does that. To have the cognitive capacities described in the first *Enquiry* is thus to follow the rules of good reasoning explicitly listed in the *Treatise*. I would argue, then, that while the first *Enquiry* does not explicitly discuss all the rules of good reasoning listed in the *Treatise*, it does implicitly endorse those rules, insofar as possessing the abilities described in footnote 20 enables a thinker to apply those rules.

To sum up, the Humean wise thinker possesses various cognitive habits allowing her to follow certain rules of causal reasoning; her character is such that she consistently follows those rules and is not led to form beliefs by non-causal processes, such as the influence of her own passions or the mere repetition of an idea.

Of course, causal reasoning—what Hume actually calls "moral" reasoning (EHU 4.18; SBN 35)—is one of two types of Humean reasoning. But what about the role of the other form of reasoning, "demonstrative reasoning," in Hume's account of wise thinking? David Owen has shown that Humean demonstrative reasoning is a process of relating ideas via a chain of ideas, such that the relation between any two ideas is known through intuition (Owen, *Hume's Reason*, 91). To perceive a relation by intuition is to perceive a relation of which we can be absolutely certain (*Hume's Reason*, 97). On Hume's account, the only relations of which we can be intuitively certain are resemblance, contrariety, degrees of quality, and proportions in quantity or number; but he holds that only the last type requires *chains* of ideas, since the first three are "discoverable at first sight" (T 1.3.1.2; SBN 70). Therefore, demonstrative reasoning is essentially mathematical reasoning. It is also, in Hume's view, a uniquely human ability. While he does not rule out the possibility that animals might intuit relations in quantity and number, he evidently holds that animals lack sufficient powers of observation and attention to carry on chains of such ideas.[25] Thus, some of the same cognitive abilities needed for good causal reasoning are also necessary to carry out demonstrative reasoning. The Humean wise person can do both.

## 5. Becoming a Wise Thinker

In his book *Hume's Intentions*, John Passmore suggests that there must be more to Humean doxastic wisdom than just possessing a set of good cognitive habits. He writes, "It does not seem possible to explain, purely in terms of natural endowments, why some attentive and observant men, confronted by a particular set of evidence, accept it as a proper foundation for believing *q* and others do not. Wisdom is not the same thing as having good 'faculties' of the sort Hume has enumerated."[26] I think Passmore is wrong about this. The problem is that Passmore assumes that the capacities and cognitive habits of the wise are merely "natural endowments." Now, it is true that Hume does suggest that the differences between the wise and the unwise are due to nature; for example, in his essay "The Sceptic," he writes,

"The fabric and constitution of our mind no more depends on our choice, than that of our body" (*Essays*, 168–69), and he does describe good sense as a "natural ability" in the *Treatise* (T 3.3.4.1; SBN 607). Some people, apparently, are born wiser than others. But even if "the generality of men have not even the smallest notion, that any alteration in this respect can ever be desirable" (*Essays*, 168–69), Hume evidently believes that people can in fact become wiser. This is clear from his essay "On the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature," in which he contrasts humans with non-human animals. Of human animals, he writes, "we see a creature . . . who traces causes and effects to a great length and intricacy; extracts general principles from particular appearances; improves upon his discoveries; corrects his mistakes; and makes his very errors profitable" (*Essays*, 82). The situation is quite different for animals. Hume writes, "On the other hand, we are presented with a creature the very reverse of this: limited in its observations and reasonings to a few sensible objects which surround it; without curiosity, without foresight; blindly conducted by instinct, and attaining, in a short time, its utmost perfection, beyond which it is never able to advance a single step" (*Essays*, 82). Thus while animal reasoning may well be a matter of "natural endowments," which cannot be improved beyond a certain point, Hume clearly thinks that human reasoning about matters of fact can be continually improved.

Let us take it, then, that Hume means that people should aspire to be wise thinkers. How does Hume think one could do this? As we have now seen, Humean doxastic wisdom involves both cognitive skills—that is, a habit of applying the rules of good causal reasoning—and an invulnerability to the various types of alternative mechanisms which can lead to belief. Someone who aspires to become wiser, then, must try to inculcate in herself the habits of thought typical of the wise and try to break those habits of thought that lead to unwise belief.

Consider Hume's advice that "the wise man proportions his belief to the evidence." This may seem to suggest that a person who is initially inclined to believe a report of a putative miracle should take pause, examine the evidence, and adjust her belief accordingly. Yet the notion that one could simply adjust one's beliefs does not sit very well with Hume's assertion that belief is a "sentiment or feeling . . . which depends not on the will, nor can be commanded at pleasure" (EHU 5.11; SBN 48). In Hume's system, one cannot simply decide to believe something,[27] although one can control what beliefs one would form by controlling which mechanisms of belief-formation one uses.[28] One way to do this would be simply to remove oneself from the kinds of circumstances in which unreasonable beliefs get formed: avoid believing unreliable reports by avoiding others altogether; avoid coming to believe something false by refusing to listen to sources of alleged information that try to induce belief simply through repeating the same beliefs over and over; avoid being in situations where one is likely to hear the sort of astonishing claims to which one has been susceptible in the past. But these strategies are not always feasible,

and, indeed, it would surely be un-Humean in the extreme to suggest that social isolation is the best strategy for acquiring knowledge.

A more Humean approach might be the following. For Hume, belief is simply a matter of ideas having acquired a certain degree of force and vivacity. A belief that *p* could be replaced by a belief that *not-p* if the force and vivacity of the latter came to be greater than that of the former. Suppose a thinker holds an unwisely-formed belief that *p*. In order to come to hold an idea with sufficient vivacity to counteract that belief, one would need to use a different sort of general rule; only then would the alternative idea come to be sufficiently enlivened to be a belief.[29] But why would anyone decide to use the general rules of the wise thinker unless he or she were already inclined to use them? If one already believes *p*, why would one be inclined then to follow a rule which led one to believe not-*p*, unless one already had a tendency to doubt the wisdom of one's belief-forming methods? Arguably, this is just what is involved in becoming wiser. Presumably someone who becomes aware that she thinks like "the vulgar" but wants to develop the character trait of wisdom has already grasped that her current methods of forming beliefs are not as good as they could be and is open to trying causal reasoning in cases when she sees that her belief was itself not caused by causal reasoning. Engaging in causal reasoning, or better causal reasoning, may thus be able to counteract the effects of the other mechanisms of forming beliefs.

## Conclusion

I have suggested that Hume's account of good causal reasoning can be fruitfully understood as an account of an epistemic virtue that he calls "wisdom" or "good sense." This virtue is one which the Humean "true philosopher" necessarily possesses but which Hume also thinks is attainable by "the vulgar." It consists both in tending to follow certain "authentic" general rules of causal inference (T 1.3.13.12; SBN 150) and in not succumbing to unreliable methods such as believing an idea because it has been enlivened by a passion, because it has been often repeated so often, or simply because anyone else reports that it is true. Moreover, since the vulgar are prone to making mistakes in their causal reasoning, wisdom also consists in what Hume characterizes as a second application of general rules, in which the reasoner compares the process by which she made her current judgment with the processes which led to past good inferences. This comparison could, of course, be iterated indefinitely; in fact, it is precisely his "memory of past errors and perplexities" (T 1.7.1) that leads Hume at the end of Book 1 of the *Treatise* to skepticism, despair, and melancholy. Realizing that such reflections can lead that way, the Humean wise person compares her new inferences with past successful ones, but stops at that.

## NOTES

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1 John Leland, *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers of the Last and Present Century*, vol. 2 (London: B. Dod, 1755), 8. Quoted in *Early Reponses to Hume's Metaphysical and Epistemological Writings*, vol. 1, 2nd edition, ed. James Fieser (Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 141.

2 Louis Loeb, "Inductive Inference in Hume's Philosophy," in *A Companion to Hume*, ed. Elizabeth S. Radcliffe (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 112–14. See also Louis Loeb, "Psychology, Epistemology, and Skepticism in Hume's Argument about Induction," *Synthese* 152 (2006): 321–38.

3 References to the *Treatise* are to David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), hereafter cited in text as "T" followed by Book, part, section, and paragraph number, and to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), hereafter cited in text as "SBN" followed by page number.

4 David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, in *Principal Writings on Religion*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), hereafter cited in the text as DNR with part and paragraph number followed by page numbers.

5 Numerous papers and several books have recently been devoted to Hume's naturalism and the challenges of reconciling that naturalism with his expressions of skepticism about inductive reasoning. See, for example, Janet Broughton, "Hume's Skepticism and His Naturalism," in *A Companion to Hume*, ed. Elizabeth S. Radcliffe (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 425–40; Graciela de Pierris, "Hume's Pyrrhonian Skepticism and the Belief in Causal Laws," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 39 (2001): 351–83; Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); H. O. Mounce, *Hume's Naturalism* (London: Routledge, 2002). Karánn Durland gives a very clear overview of some of this recent literature, focusing on naturalism and skepticism in the *Treatise*, though she is pessimistic about the prospects of a successful reconciliation of the two. See Karánn Durland, "Extreme Skepticism and Commitment in the Treatise," *Hume Studies* 37 (2011): 65–98.

6 For an exception, see Rico Vitz, "Doxastic Virtue in Hume's Epistemology," *Hume Studies* 35 (2009): 211–29.

7 At T 3.2.2.4 (SBN 486), Hume refers to the "superior strength and wisdom" of parents; at T 3.2.11.18 (SBN 566), he refers to the "wisdom of the laws and of the parliament"; and at T 3.3.4.30 (SBN 611), he refers to "wisdom and good sense." The "wise" are contrasted with the vulgar at T 1.3.13.12 (SBN 150), with "fools" at T 2.1.11.29–20 (SBN 321), and with "mad-men" at T 2.3.1.13 (SBN 404).

8 References to the first *Enquiry* are to David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), here-

after cited as "EHU" followed by section and paragraph, and to *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), hereafter cited in text as "EHU" followed by page number.

9 References to the second *Enquiry* are to David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals: A Critical Edition*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), hereafter cited as "EPM" followed by section and paragraph number, and to *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), hereafter cited in text as "SBN" followed by page number.

10 According to Don Garrett, Hume's view is that we approve of wisdom because wisdom involves proportioning belief to the evidence, "inductive proportioning of belief to the evidence is typically productive of truth," and truth is useful. Don Garrett, "Hume on Testimony concerning Miracles," in *Reading Hume on Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 327; see also Don Garrett, 158–59. This is a plausible reading of Hume's view, but Hume does not explicitly make such claims; Garrett does not cite any texts in support of the interpretation. Miriam McCormick has offered an interpretation that is more clearly based on the texts. She suggests that it is wisdom's *social utility* which makes Hume treat it as a virtue. According to McCormick, "Hume's approval is politically motivated; he thinks we would organize ourselves in a more fair and just manner if more people regulated their beliefs according to the rules of good reasoning." Miriam McCormick, "Why Should We Be Wise?," *Hume Studies* 31 (2005): 3–20, 4. McCormick points out Hume's suggestion that wisdom can help reduce the formation of political factions, which have a pernicious effect on society, as well as reduce the dangerous consequences of having a population easily swayed by superstition (ibid., 14). This is supported by some of Hume's comments in the first and second *Enquiries* (EHU 1.9; SBN 10 and EPM 6.16; SBN 240). However, McCormick also writes that "Hume seems to think that one can locate the *main* source of approval for the various mental qualities we call virtues as falling predominantly into one of these four qualities [of being useful to the possessor, useful to others, pleasing to the possessor, or pleasing to others]" ("Why Should We Be Wise?," 12). She thus rejects the suggestion that Hume might think we approve of wisdom because it is useful to its possessor. I see no reason for attributing to Hume the view that public interest is the only, or even the main, reason for approving of wisdom.

David Owen has argued that reason is a Humean virtue since the reasonable person is not only useful to society but also personally happier and better off. David Owen, *Hume's Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 212. Marie Martin argues that Hume thought that wise reasoning, being orderly and coherent, appeals to humans' natural preference for order. Marie Martin, "The Rational Warrant for Hume's General Rules," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31 (1993): 254. Both readings are supported by the text, although, again, I would argue that Hume thinks wisdom can be virtuous for a variety of reasons.

11 Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste* (London: Printed for A. Miller, 1759), 31. For discussion of Gerard's views, see Peter Kivy, *The Seventh Sense: Francis Hutcheson and Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 186–87.

12 In his essay "The Immortality of the Soul," Hume distinguishes between "metaphysical topics," which lead to a mistaken conclusion about the immortality of the soul, and "just metaphysics," which does not (David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller [Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985], 590–98). This seems to correspond to the distinction between false and true philosophers.

13 Hume's distinctions are echoed in the comments of Cleanthes and Philo in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. "Popular religion" is what the "generality of mankind" endorse (DNR 12.28; 127), and it is a gloomy and terrifying set of beliefs (DNR 12.25–28; 127); indeed, Philo characterizes it as "vulgar superstition" (DNR 12.20; 125). Those who have thought about religion more than the vulgar are classified by Hume into two groups: the "theologians" or "divines" on the one hand (DNR 12.13; 122–23), and "philosophers, who cultivate reason and reflection" (DNR 12.15; 124), on the other. In the case of religion, however, Hume treats the beliefs of the vulgar and the beliefs of the theologians as forms of false religion, opposing both to "true religion," which he seems to think is very rarely found (DNR 12.22; 125–26).

14 Hume shifts from saying (in the *Treatise*) that the force and vivacity of a belief are in the believed idea itself to saying (in the first *Enquiry*) that the force is in an impression *annexed to* the believed idea, but this distinction does not affect the claims I make here.

15 The first *Enquiry* does not contain a statement of this maxim. However, Hume refers to ideas' being "enlivened," and includes the same example (the Catholic mummeries) as in the *Treatise* (EHU 5.15–16; SBN 512). Later he describes the process by which causal reasoning enlivens ideas, suggesting that when the mind moves from having an impression to thinking of the related idea, the mind "conveys to it all that force of conception, which is derived from the impression present to the senses" (EHU 5.20; SBN 54). This appears to echo the maxim in the *Treatise* that impressions can communicate their force and vivacity to ideas.

16 Lorne Falkenstein has called these the "natural causes of belief," and he identifies three main ways in which Hume thinks beliefs are caused: demonstrative reasoning, various types of associations of ideas with impressions or memories, and the repetition of ideas. Lorne Falkenstein, "Naturalism, Normativity, and Scepticism in Hume's Account of Belief," *Hume Studies* 23 (1997): 29–72, 32–33.

17 For example, in the *Treatise* Hume lists seven sources of "philosophical relation" (T 1.1.6; SBN 14–15), eight "rules by which to judge of causes and effects" (T 1.3.15; SBN 173–74), and three arguments against the claim that justice is a natural virtue (T 3.2.6.5–9; SBN 526–33).

18 According to Hume's own account of causal reasoning, the cause would be the factor which is constantly associated with the decision not to cross the bridge, or which leads an observer (who would have to have access to the reasoner's mental states) to infer that the reasoner will decide not to cross the bridge; thus, strictly speaking, we would need information about the traveler's other bridge-crossing decisions in order to assess this case.

19 David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, in *A Dissertation on the Passions and the Natural History of Religion: A Critical Edition*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 2.5.

20 Elizabeth Radcliffe, "Hume on Motivating Sentiments, the General Point of View, and the Inculcation of 'Morality,'" *Hume Studies* 20 (1994): 37–58, 50.

21 This point is stressed by Sarah Wright in "Hume on Testimony: A Virtue-Theoretic Defense," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 28 (2011): 247–65.

22 Some commentators, most notably C. A. J. Coady, have interpreted Hume as requiring that belief based on testimony ultimately be reduced to testimony-free first-person experience. C. A. J. Coady, "Testimony and Observation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1973): 149–55; see also Frederick F. Schmitt, "Justification, Sociality, and Autonomy," *Synthese* 73 (1987): 43–85, especially 48–53. More recent scholarly work has rejected various aspects of Coady's reading; see Saul Traiger, "Experience and Testimony in Hume's Philosophy," *Episteme* 7 (2010): 42–57; Saul Traiger, "Humean Testimony," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 74 (1993): 135–49; Fred Wilson, "Hume and the Role of Testimony in Knowledge," *Episteme* 7 (2010): 58–78; and Wright, "Hume on Testimony."

23 One might try to argue that it is damaging to society for there to be poor reasoners. While that is probably true, that fact cannot (without circularity) explain why this is a case of poor reasoning.

24 This objection was raised by an anonymous referee.

25 Deborah Boyle, "Hume on Animal Reason," *Hume Studies* 29 (2003): 3–28, 15.

26 John Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, 3rd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1980), 170.

27 For discussion of Hume's account of volition, or "conative impulses," see Fred Wilson, "Hume's Theory of Mental Activity," *McGill Hume Studies*, ed. David Fate Norton, Nicholas Capaldi, and Wade L. Robison (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1979), 101–20.

28 For further discussion of how Hume can maintain that belief is under one's control, see the appendix to Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, 160–76. Passmore argues persuasively that "Hume . . . is trying to persuade us to adopt a 'belief policy': the policy of examining critically all beliefs which arise from such suspect sources as 'education,' i.e. our upbringing. To that degree he is suggesting that however vivid an idea may be we ought sometimes to be prepared to set it aside, temporarily at least" (176–77).

29 Kathleen Wallace proposes an account along these lines, suggesting that the Humean wise person regulates belief through mitigating the influence of passions or beliefs that might otherwise lead him or her astray. Kathleen Wallace, "Hume on Regulating Belief and Moral Sentiment," *Hume Studies* 28 (2002): 83–112, 87–88. On her reading of Hume, a person could correct a faulty belief by becoming aware, through reflection, that a different belief is correct. Thus, regarding Hume's example of the man in the iron cage, she writes that "'Correction' or regulation in this case consists in the reflective awareness that the verdict of judgment is the (more probably) correct one

and that awareness mitigates, or at least prevents, any further increase in the vivacity of the opposing belief and fear" (ibid., 88). The force and vivacity of the new belief would thereby counteract the force and vivacity of the original, mistaken belief. However, this account of becoming wiser cannot be quite right. In order to come to hold an idea with sufficient vivacity to counteract that of the original, unwisely-formed belief, one would have to *believe* the new idea, but in order actually to believe the new idea it is not enough simply to "reflect" on some alternative general rule for belief-formation; one would need actually to *use* that general rule.