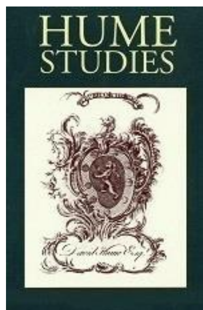

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The Two Forms of Doxastic Normativity in Hume's *Treatise*

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Abstract: Recent commentators have contended that Hume's skeptical arguments in the *Treatise* lead him to eschew a traditional epistemic account of justification in favor of a pragmatic account. While this view resolves some textual puzzles, others arise. Instead, Hume should be read as endorsing two completely distinct standards of doxastic normativity: the epistemic and the pragmatic. The epistemic grants beliefs philosophical approval, while the pragmatic circumscribes the domain of investigation to prevent reasoning that leads to extreme skepticism. I argue that the mixed account of justification makes better sense of key passages in the *Treatise* than either constituent can on its own. One notable virtue of this account is that it explains how Hume can hold that the vulgar can have all things considered warrant.

There is no explicit account of the normativity of belief in Hume's *Treatise.*[1] This has caused many interpretive problems. The most conspicuous of these problems, and the one that has perhaps vexed readers and commentators the most, is that Hume offers skeptical arguments in Book 1 with apparently devastating conclusions for all philosophical inquiry and then goes on to propose theories of the passions and morals in Books 2 and 3.[2] Without a clear account of doxastic normativity, it is difficult to understand how Hume is entitled to continue philosophizing, and, in fact, we seem to be put into the position of cobbling together an account of doxastic normativity based on patterns in what Hume *is* and *is not* willing to endorse.

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Most interpretations of Hume on doxastic normativity have focused on what Humean *epistemic* normativity must look like if it is to account for both pessimistic, skeptical Hume and optimistic, scientific Hume. In an effort to make Hume consistent, they have found ingenious ways to bend a theory of epistemic normativity in the Humean spirit,[3] or else to say that the scientific Hume is not playing the foundationalist epistemic game at all.[4] Others have taken up the pragmatist threads in Hume, and claimed that beliefs are justified practically or morally, rather than epistemically (or that the epistemic is really just a species of the practical/moral). In this paper, I will argue for an alternative account that has not been represented in the literature. The most straightforward way to make sense of the often Janus-faced text is to read Hume as applying two completely different forms of doxastic normativity—the epistemic and the natural. Natural justification applies to beliefs that are psychologically healthy, and so is a specific kind of practical justification. Others have argued that there are two forms of doxastic normativity in the *Treatise,* for example Michael Ridge.[5] While Ridge's account of non-epistemic normativity is different from the one I propose, the most significant difference between our views is that Ridge argues that non-epistemic (for him, moral) justification is the *only* warrant that beliefs can have in light of Hume's skeptical arguments. I will argue that, given key passages in the text, Hume thinks that beliefs can be both epistemically and naturally justified. And, further, this double-justification is the gold standard of belief for Hume. The epistemic gives philosophical approval, as it were, while the natural circumscribes the domain of philosophical/scientific inquiry so as to ward off extreme skepticism that is so destructive of belief and conduct.

I would like to make a couple qualifications at the outset. First, this is just part of the project of understanding doxastic normativity in Hume's *Treatise*. Though it is clear (and I will argue for this below) that Hume thinks that beliefs and belief-forming mechanisms *can* be epistemically justified, I will not be investigating here what epistemic justification amounts to for Hume. Second, I am only here concerned with the epistemology of the *Treatise.* I am moved by arguments that Hume's commitments in the *Treatise* differ from those in the *Enquiry* or *Dialogues*.[6] So I will limit myself to claims about the *Treatise* and resist the temptation (though it be great) to draw support from these other works.

Section 1: Conflicting Standards of Doxastic Normativity

Despite the infamy of Hume's skepticism, the vast majority of the *Treatise* contains what very much appears to be an implicit standard of doxastic normativity that approves of both everyday beliefs and the results of Hume's science of human nature. In fact, Hume's skeptical arguments are relegated mostly to a few sections of the final part of Book 1.[7] The introduction to the *Treatise* sets out the most ex-

plicit account of his method and standards, then throughout the rest of the work this method is employed, prodded, precisified, and, occasionally, despairingly critiqued.

> There is no question of importance, whose decision is not compriz'd in the science of man; and there is none, which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science. In pretending therefore to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security.
>
> And as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on *experience* and *observation.* (T Intro. 6–7; SBN xx; my emphasis)
> Later, Hume elaborates on his proposed method:
>
> [I]t seems evident, that the essence of the mind being equally unknown to us with that of external bodies, it must be equally impossible to form any notion of its powers and qualities otherwise than from careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular effects, which result from its different circumstances and situations. (T Intro. 8; SBN xvii)

Lastly, "we must endeavor to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes" (T Intro. 8; SBN xxi).

Note the optimistic ring and Newtonian flavor. This method involves foundational observations, making causal judgments about these observed phenomena by controlling for variables, and forming general principles based on patterns discovered in this set of causal judgments. Interestingly, nowhere in the introduction does Hume explicitly claim that the experimental method leads to knowledge by discovering truths. Instead, he claims that the results will be more *certain*[8] than those of the philosophers who use other methods (for example, the rationalists and scholastics), and also that by applying the method correctly, we may arrive at "just conclusions" (T Intro. 10; SBN xxiii).

After presenting a schematic account of his epistemic standards in the introduction, Hume employs and develops these standards throughout Book 1 of the *Treatise.* He continuously makes claims with clear epistemic normative content. For example, Hume repeatedly describes certain belief-forming processes as *justified* (or, more often, *just*). Interestingly, only seldom does he describe *beliefs* as justified (see, for example, T 1.4.2.56). Take this quintessential expression of Hume's empiricist method: "'Tis impossible to reason *justly*, without understanding perfectly

the idea concerning which we reason; and 'tis impossible perfectly to understand any idea, without tracing it up to its origin, and examining that primary impression from which it arises" (T 1.3.2.4; SBN 74; my emphasis). And here, where he establishes the importance of causal reasoning: "The only connexion or relation of objects, which can lead us beyond the immediate impressions of our memory and senses, is that of cause and effect; and that is because 'tis the only one, on which we can found a *just* inference from one object to another" (T 1.3.6.7; SBN 89; my emphasis). At the end of part 3 of Book 1, after giving his account of causation and its importance in reasoning, Hume provides the epistemic standards of causal reasoning—how to judge good causal reasoning from bad. "We shall," he writes, "take notice of some general rules, by which we ought to regulate our judgment concerning causes and effects" (T 1.3.13.11; SBN 149). By using these rules, we may know when causation has really occurred (T 1.3.15.2; SBN 173).

It is important to mention that all of this evidence that Hume believes in epistemic normativity comes before the most destructive skeptical arguments in T 1.4 (that is, except the problem of induction,[9] which comes *before* he tells us how we can know whether something really is the cause of something else!). These arguments, on their face, undermine the justification of both demonstrative and probabilistic reason (T 1.4.1), as well as the belief in mind-independent objects that exist when unperceived (T 1.4.2). Additionally, he revisits causation: though he previously endorsed it,[10] he is now deeply troubled by the non-rational ingredient—custom or habit—that is "seemingly so trivial and so little founded on reason" (T 1.4.7.3; SBN 265) and breaks the chain of pure rational justification (T 1.4.7.3–7; SBN 265–67). Perhaps Hume establishes a method with provisional epistemic authority just to show that, despite its relative humility, investigation reveals that we must give it up. But if so, why go on to use this method (with equal or even greater fervor) in Books 2 and 3? Perhaps Hume just cannot help himself.[11] But this seems like an extreme and implausible interpretation. In the end, the interpreter is forced to choose one of two options: either (i) say that Hume thinks he can (or is willing to) do without epistemic justification[12] for nearly every claim in the *Treatise,*[13] or (ii) allow that the skeptical arguments do not completely undermine the possibility of epistemic justification.

Section 2: The Limits of the Naturalistic Interpretation

This suggests that we have reason to think Hume is not monolithically skeptical—where this means that he thinks that substantial claims in the science of human nature *can* be epistemically justified (or morally/practically justified in the technical sense to be explored below). Epistemic justification of these claims would require that the outputs of probabilistic reasoning (specifically, causal judgments) *can* be justified, as well as claims about external bodies (for example, the kinds of

claims about other people that make Hume's moral theory possible). One type of interpretation that allows for this is the *naturalistic interpretation.* Common to naturalistic interpreters is that they hold that Hume has an account of doxastic normativity that (i) is epistemic and (2) this epistemic justification is at least partially constituted by a non-rational ingredient that makes it invulnerable to those skeptical concerns that would seem to undermine the kinds of claims necessary for the science of human nature.[14]

The naturalistic interpreter is right about one very important thing: the epistemic normativity that Hume endorses must have a non-rational component. Although Hume claims that reason *simpliciter* is naturally oriented towards truth (T 1.4.1.1; SBN 180), *causal* reasoning, for Hume, requires a non-rational element provided by the imagination ("custom" or "habit") that, as it were, breaks the truth-tracking chain. This is because the problem of induction has uncovered that our belief that past or observed regularities will hold in future or unobserved cases is not determined by reason. So, we have no reason to think that causal reasoning—reasoning concerning matters of fact that goes beyond what is immediately present to the senses—tracks truth. Therefore, in order to even have causal beliefs, their source must have some non-rational element. And causal reasoning makes up the bulk of the science of human nature, including Books 2 and 3 of the *Treatise.* Thus, if Hume thinks causal reasoning can be justified despite our having no reason to think it is truth-tracking, then Hume must believe that, at least in the domain of causal belief, justification does not track truth (or it does so only incidentally).[15]

But, contra the naturalistic interpreters, I do not think that epistemic normativity exhausts Hume's account of doxastic normativity in the *Treatise.* In what follows, I would like to look at key passages, places one would think to find substantive evidence for Hume's views on doxastic normativity. Ultimately, I will argue that a mixed account of doxastic normativity better makes sense of the passages themselves as well as how they fit into the rest of the *Treatise.*

The first is one of the few very revealing passages on this topic in the *Treatise.* Here, Hume is responding to an objection that he has been inconsistent. He has just criticized the ancient philosophers for being guided by "every trivial propensity of the imagination," while at the same time holding that "the imagination, according to my own confession, [is] the ultimate judge of all systems of philosophy" (T 1.4.3.11–1.4.4.1; SBN 224–25). To resolve this apparent inconsistency, he makes a distinction. He distinguishes between two kinds of "principles of the imagination" (belief-forming pathways from impressions to the enlivening of ideas):

(1) Those that are "received by philosophy": permanent, irresistible, universal, solid, consistent, the foundation of all thought an action, and the removal of which would destroy human nature. He also implies that these are necessary, unavoidable, useful to conduct and life, and not easily subverted by other principles of custom and reason.

(2) Those that are "rejected" by philosophy: changeable, weak, irregular, avoidable, not necessary, not useful in the conduct of life, take place in weak minds, and easily subverted when in opposition with other principles of custom and reason. He also implies that these are liable to inconsistency (presumably, the beliefs produced are liable to inconsistency with other beliefs).

Then Hume gives an example.

> One who concludes somebody to be near to him, when he hears an articulate voice in the dark, reasons *justly* and *naturally;* tho' that conclusion be deriv'd from nothing but custom, which infixes and enlivens the idea of a human creature, on account of his usual conjunction with the present impression. But one, who is tormented he knows not why, with the apprehension of spectres in the dark, may, perhaps, be said to *reason*, and to *reason naturally* too: But then it must be in the same sense that a malady is said to be natural; as arising from natural causes, tho' it be contrary to health, the most agreeable and most natural situation of man. (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225; my emphasis)

Hume is saying that philosophy sanctions some principles of the imagination (belief-forming pathways from impressions to the enlivening of ideas), and gives some criteria for these. An attractive way to read this section is that Hume is giving a set of criteria for determining what is an *epistemically* justified belief-forming process, given that it will have to be naturalized (that is, not necessarily truth-tracking). But I propose that we read "justly and naturally" to be identifying two separate normative standards: "justly" being epistemic and "naturally" being something else entirely. Let us focus on the concept of *naturalness*. Hume seems to be invoking two senses of the word natural here: mechanistic and salubrious. The superstitious man reasons naturally, according to Hume, but only in the sense that a disease is natural—"as arising from natural causes" (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225). This is the mechanistic sense of "natural," and within the domain of things that can be studied by the empirical sciences, everything is going to be natural in this way. But then he contrasts this sense of "natural" with that which applies to health (and in the context of the discussion, doxastic health)—"the most agreeable and most natural situation of man." Despite Hume's antipathies with the Aristotelians (some of which he is defending in this very section), it seems Hume is using something like a teleological notion of naturalness here.[16] That is, it does seem that naturalness is grounding some kind of value standard that is derived from the demands of human nature. Just as it is natural/good to be physically healthy, so too is it natural/good to be doxastically healthy, which for Hume, in this passage, obtains when one's beliefs arise in accordance with the philosophical principles of the imagination.

I think it is uncontroversial that this notion of naturalness contains some kind of value standard (and so, normativity) associated with doxastic health as described above; but the important question this raises for our purposes is whether this value is *epistemic* (and so would ground epistemic normativity). I think it is not. Hume's pairing of "agreeable" with "natural" here is quite illuminating. The kind of value contained in "natural" is *agreeableness,* which should not be surprising. There is already a precedent for this kind of account in Hume's moral theory, where he identifies "good" and "evil" with "pain" and "pleasure," respectively. (T 2.3.9.8; SBN 439) This is not to say that this natural normativity is actually just moral normativity applied to belief. But it does seem that Hume is evaluating belief based on psychological agreeableness, and that this criterion does not show up in his account of the epistemic (for example, from the introduction).

In fact, tension arises at multiple points in the *Treatise* between epistemic integrity and agreeableness. This tension is expressed in no more striking terms than in the conclusion to Book 1 (T 1.4.7): "I still feel such remains of my former disposition, that I am ready to throw all my books and papers into the fire, and resolve never more to renounce the pleasures of life for the sake of reasoning and philosophy" (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 269). And later, "If I must be a fool, as all those who reason or believe any thing certainly are, my follies shall at least be natural and agreeable" (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 269). The tension arises because Hume thinks that his skeptical conclusions are epistemically justified, and yet *extreme* skepticism—for however long it can be sustained—is doxastically unhealthy, that is, causes real mental distress: "Sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady, which can never be radically cur'd" (T 1.4.2.57; SBN 218). And of course, the most notorious example of this comes in the skeptical panic attack of T 1.4.7. But extreme skepticism does not just cause psychological pain; it is also capable of temporarily destroying belief (for example, in the existence of mind-independent objects [T 1.4.2.57; SBN 218]). And since beliefs, specifically their liveliness, are necessary for action, this temporary sapping of liveliness from thought contributes to "indolence"—an inability to act for want of belief about *how* to act or what is worthy of pursuit.

The naturalistic commentator must interpret Hume's skeptical arguments as not intended to undermine epistemic justification, while at the same time recognizing that the methods and standards that led to those skeptical conclusions are just those of the science of human nature.[17] Don Garrett argues that Hume offers a considered, higher-order epistemic principle in the conclusion of Book 1 that circumscribes the domain of justified belief-formation to keep in scientific theorizing and keep out extreme skepticism. In the conclusion of Book 1, after describing the emotional character of the skeptical panic attack, Hume writes: "These are the sentiments of my spleen and indolence; and indeed I must confess, that *philosophy has nothing to oppose to them*, and expects a victory more from the returns of a seri-

ous good-humour'd disposition, than from the force of reason and conviction" (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270; my emphasis). Hume then gives what Garrett (*Cognition and Commitment,* 234) considers to be just this kind of higher-order epistemic principle:

> In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism. If we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise. Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination which we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner. Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate on us. (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270)

Here, Garrett refers back to Hume's discussion in T 1.4.4.1 of the principles of the imagination that are "permanent, irresistible, and universal." Garrett thinks that in both of these passages Hume is saying something about what makes a belief/belief-forming process epistemically justified, and that they square well with one another. He says that the above higher-order epistemic principle (expressed in the last two sentences of the passage), which he calls the "title principle," can sanction these principles of the imagination (for instance, probabilistic inference and the belief in continued, distinct existences) because "even lively reason that mixes with our propensities cannot ultimately destroy their force" (*Cognition and Commitment,* 234).

But I believe that in both passages (T 1.4.7.11, 1.4.4.1; SBN 270, 225), Hume is employing a non-epistemic evaluative standard of belief. When Hume says that "if we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise," he is using "pains" in at least two senses. It pains us to try to remain in the forced state of skeptical suspense because our nature is constantly pushing us back to belief and action. It also pains us to be skeptical because skepticism (of the extreme form) is attended with very unpleasant emotions. A better way to interpret this passage is to attribute to Hume a doxastic standard in addition to the epistemic that is based on what is "natural" in the sense of *agreeable* or *psychologically healthy.* On this reading, the "ought" in the so-called "title principle" is expressing this latter kind of normativity, and should be interpreted as a rival principle to the epistemic. The subject of the title principle is *reasoning;* Hume is saying *of* reasoning (and, presumably, epistemically good reasoning) that it should be assented to only if it is "lively and mixes with some propensity," that is, is doxastically healthy/natural. For example, justified reasoning about the best chisel to use on one's sculpture ought to be assented to, while Cartesian skeptical arguments that lead to bedroom-entombing ennui should be avoided.

It is attractive to conflate these two standards of doxastic normativity because Hume thinks that *typically* both those who form beliefs in accordance with the

unphilosophical principles of the imagination (from T 1.4.4.1 [SBN 225] above), *and* those in the grips of extreme skepticism are doxastically unnatural, disagreeable, and unhealthy. Belief that an invisible demon visits your room at night may be as harmful to your psychological health as suspending belief on whether one is systematically deceiving you. So *typically*, beliefs formed on the basis of philosophical principles of the imagination will fare well on both epistemic and natural evaluation.

We should expect to find the most compelling evidence for positing two forms of doxastic normativity in places where they come apart. I have already argued that this occurs in the case of extreme skepticism, which is epistemically, but not naturally, sanctioned. But Hume also believes that one's doxastic practices could be naturally, but not epistemically, sanctioned. And, in fact, Hume thinks that between these two sub-optimal choices, the latter is preferable. That is, natural normativity is in most cases a defeating principle; when it comes into conflict with epistemic norms it should win out. By distinguishing between these two forms of doxastic normativity, the *epistemic* and the *natural,* we are able to make sense of why Hume thinks philosophy—or even epistemic virtue more generally—is not necessarily for everyone. In T 1.4.7.14 (SBN 272), he discusses the "honest gentlemen" of England, who spend their time employed in domestic affairs and amusements. Of them, he writes: "They do well to keep themselves in their present situation; and instead of refining them into philosophers, I wish we cou'd communicate to our founders of systems, a share of this gross earthy mixture" (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272).

According to Louis Loeb, who thinks that justification in Hume amounts to stability of belief under the agent's *actual* level of reflectivity *(Stability and Justification,* 92–96), Hume is committed to the view that the honest gentlemen's beliefs are justified because their vulgar level of reflectivity is insufficient to destabilize their beliefs. Loeb accepts that this can be formulated into an objection: that on his interpretation, "justification comes too easy" (*Stability and Justification,* 93). But he notes, quite correctly, that Hume does not condemn the honest gentlemen. Loeb concludes:

> The beliefs of the unreflective person occupy a preferred epistemic status. I believe that securing this paradoxical result was among Hume's intentions in the *Treatise.* Hume seeks to show that an epistemic preference for reflection is a prejudice. As a matter of temperament, I suspect, Hume took delight in disparaging intellectual reflection. (*Stability and Justification*, 97–98)

I believe this is a bit course-grained. It is true that Hume does not, all things considered, endorse maximal reflectivity. But he does repeatedly criticize the vulgar on epistemic grounds (T 1.3.12.5, 1.3.12.20, 1.3.13.12, 1.4.3.9, 1.4.3.10; SBN 132,

138, 149, 222, 224). The "honest gentlemen," though doxastically approved by Hume, are still vulgar in the pejorative sense. According to Loeb's interpretation, if the vulgar's unphilosophically-generated beliefs are *actually* stable (versus, for example, being counterfactually stable), then they are justified. I think this is both an implausible view—as the most ignorant and least reflective will fare best epistemically—and incompatible with Hume's attitude toward the vulgar in the *Treatise*.

The reason why Hume doxastically condones the honest gentlemen is because they are living natural and agreeable doxastic lives—that is, they are naturally successful. As noted above, this is the more important of the two doxastic norms for Hume. This does not mean that Hume must countenance epistemically egregious doxastic practices so long as they lead to naturally beneficial outcomes. If this were the case, Hume might have to, all things considered, endorse superstitious belief-forming processes. There are ways to be epistemically suboptimal without believing things that are egregiously epistemically unjustified. One way is to not hold any beliefs at all regarding some topic of purported importance. This is exactly the position of Hume's honest gentlemen. They are not religious zealots, isolated indigenous tribesmen, or scholastic metaphysicians; they are modern men of action who have few, if any, properly philosophical beliefs. When Hume looks back over his tumultuous skeptical saga, he is hesitant to put those who are in this relatively benign, yet still suboptimal, epistemic position in danger. If doing philosophy would jeopardize one's doxastic health, then it ought to be avoided. See this passage near the end of Book 1:

> Human nature is the only science of man; and yet has been hitherto the most neglected. 'Twill be sufficient for me, if I can bring it a little more into fashion; and the hope of this serves to compose my temper from that spleen, and invigorate it from that indolence, which sometimes prevail upon me. If the reader finds himself in the same easy disposition, let him follow me in my future speculations. If not, let him follow his inclination, and wait the returns of application and good humour. (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272)

Note that not only should philosophy be avoided if it will lead to psychic sickness, but it should be pursued if it will lead to psychic health (for example, "to compose [one's] temper" from spleen and indolence). The latter is employed in Hume's return to philosophy after the skeptical panic attack. When considering this return, Hume describes the inclinations that are pulling him back toward philosophy (for example, curiosity). Of these, he writes: "These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition; and shou'd I endeavor to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I *feel* I should be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy" (T 1.4.7.12; SBN 270).

By "origin" here, I interpret Hume to mean motivational origin. This is further evidence that any doxastic activity that will lead to psychic health (a natural and agreeable state of mind) is prima facie doxastically good. And yet, philosophy is full of psychic dangers. Some philosophical activity, though epistemically justified, will reliably lead to unnatural and disagreeable psychological states. After Hume discusses skepticism with regard to reason and the senses (T 1.4.1–2), he writes of the attempt to defend these two faculties: "As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects [i.e., reason and the senses], it always increases, the farther we carry out our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it" (T 1.4.2.57; SBN 218). It is no coincidence that Hume limits himself to mostly non-epistemological inquiries in Books 2 and 3. These are first-order science of human nature par excellence: using the method without examining the method with the method (that is, using the method on things other than the method itself).[18] Though the epistemic norms of the science of human nature *can* be employed to investigate the epistemic credentials of reason and the senses, it is harmful to our doxastic health to do so. So *natural* concerns put a barrier around the parts of human nature that ought not be investigated. One function of *Treatise* 1.4 is to vividly demonstrate this, and thus excuse (by natural normativity) Hume from, for example, solving the puzzle in T 1.4.2 about how it is even possible to think about mind-independent objects, before proceeding to investigate human moral behavior in Book 3.

Section 3: The Practical/Moral Alternative

I am not original in thinking that agreeableness figures into doxastic normativity for Hume. Practical/moral interpreters believe that the bulk of doxastic normative approval is practical or moral. The practical and moral are lumped together because according to Hume's theory of moral normativity, we call "virtuous" character traits that are useful or agreeable to the bearer or others. So, given (i) that Hume has a developed account of moral normativity and no explicit account of doxastic normativity, (ii) that clearly beliefs and belief-forming processes can be useful and agreeable to oneself or others, and (iii) Hume's apparent pessimism about the possibility of traditional epistemic justification, it is very tempting to take this theory of moral normativity and apply it to belief. Specific practical/moral (hereafter, PM) commentators have come to different accounts about how belief, practicality, morality, normativity, and the epistemic are related. Michael Ridge argues that Hume has an account of epistemic normativity that is completely independent of his account of the practical normativity of belief. But Ridge thinks that Hume concludes at the end of Book 1 that we cannot have epistemic (or, in his words, "theoretical") justification for belief, since that would require that the "understanding certifies itself." (*Epistemology Moralized,* 179). So, if belief is to be justified, it is

to be justified practically.[19] Hsueh Qu proposes an alternative PM account (which he ultimately rejects) on which the epistemic is not a rival to the practical, but a species of it, alongside the moral.[20] Though I agree with PM interpreters that agreeableness is a component of Hume's overall theory of doxastic normativity, I do not think that the practical/moral compose the entirety of this account. Hume has an epistemic standard of belief that is independent of practical concerns. In this section, I will look at Ridge and Qu's PM accounts, some problems with those accounts, and how a mixed theory of doxastic normativity is capable of avoiding those problems (while still taking advantage of the textual support for PM).

Ridge, like many skeptical interpreters, thinks that Hume concludes from his failure to certify the understanding in Book 1 that the products of reason cannot be epistemically justified (*Epistemology Moralized*, 181). This skeptical conclusion precipitates the skeptical panic attack in the conclusion of Book 1 (T 1.4.7) that causes Hume to briefly swear off philosophy. But Ridge noticed that the reasons Hume gives for returning to philosophy after the panic attack appear pragmatic, and that previous commentators—including skeptical interpreters—have not taken these reasons seriously enough. Recall T 1.4.7.12 (SBN 270). I quote it in full because it is the key text for the PM interpretation:

> At the time, therefore, that I am tir'd with amusement and company, and have indulg'd a *reverie* in my chamber, or in a solitary walk by a river-side, I feel my mind all collected within itself, and am naturally *inclin'd* to carry my view into all those subjects, about which I have met with so many disputes in the course of my reading and conversation. I cannot forbear having a curiosity to be acquainted with the principles of moral good and evil, the nature and foundations of government, and the cause of those several passions and inclinations, which actuate and govern me. I am uneasy to think I approve of one object and disapprove of another; call one thing beautiful, and another deform'd; decide concerning truth and falsehood, reason and folly, without knowing upon what principles I proceed. I am concern'd for the condition of the learned world, which lies under such deplorable ignorance in all these particulars. I feel an ambition to arise in me of contributing to the instruction of mankind, and of acquiring a name by my inventions and discoveries. These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition; and shou'd I endeavor to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I *feel* I should be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy. (T 1.4.7.12; SBN 270)

Ridge thinks that because this passage appears in the context of Hume's "attempt to justify his not being stymied by his own skepticism," his natural inclination to

return to philosophy "is doing some justificatory work" (*Epistemology Moralized,* 181). Ridge also gives what he calls a "hedonistic" reading of the title principle passage, which directly precedes T 1.4.7.12 (SBN 270). When Hume writes "where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to," Ridge interprets "lively" as pleasurable, and "propensity" as an inclination to engage in pleasant activities (*Epistemology Moralized,* 181). *So*, like Garrett, Ridge reads the title principle passage as Hume's all things considered normative principle for belief. But unlike Garrett, Ridge thinks it contains a pragmatic, not epistemic (even in Garrett's naturalized sense), account of justification. Recall that according to Ridge's epistemically skeptical interpretation, Hume has given up on the possibility of epistemic justification. So, in the title principle passage he is merely *settling* for the practical—hence "the melancholy tone at the end of Book 1" (*Epistemology Moralized,* 179).

One virtue of Ridge's PM view is that it rules out justification for reasoning that leads to skepticism, since skepticism is not useful or agreeable to the skeptic or others. But one might object that Ridge's account of justification, like Loeb's, still does not rule out enough. It does not rule out certain vulgar forms of reasoning that Hume explicitly criticizes. Specifically, the PM view may have trouble ruling out superstitious beliefs. The belief in the afterlife, for example, appears—at least on its face—to be quite useful to the believer, since it mollifies one's fear of death.[21] The worry is that this view commits Hume to a Pascalian form of pragmatism about religious belief that is plainly un-Humean. For only a few paragraphs after the title principle passage, Hume says we should not embrace hypotheses "merely for being specious and agreeable" (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272).[22]

Ridge recognizes that this objection can be raised against PM. He also recognizes that to respond by saying the afterlife myth is false begs the question, since the responder must claim that the reasoning leading to this is justified (and to the afterlife myth, unjustified). His proposed solution is that we can practically justify the use of the understanding because we know directly (that is, non-inferentially) that we desire to philosophize—that is, use the understanding to this end—and this gives us provisional practical justification for its use. Here, Ridge is contrasting the faculty of the understanding with superstitious belief-forming processes. So, presumably, once we have this provisional warrant for the understanding, we have some non-question-begging reason to prefer philosophy to superstition. But clearly, the "we" is important here; the religious enthusiast has no such desire to philosophize, and so no such provisional warrant, nor do the norms of philosophical reason have any authority over her. If Hume is willing to accept that we are beholden to the norms of good reasoning only if we have an antecedent passion for reason (for example, desire to philosophize) that is directly accessible, then he seems to be stuck with a fairly extreme doxastic relativism a la Loeb's interpretation. He seems to have no ground from which to criticize the religious enthusiast

whose direct access to the passion for superstition would, *mutatis mutandis,* give *the enthusiast* provisional warrant to use superstitious belief-forming mechanisms. This does not seem to square with his criticism of the superstitious person in T 1.4.4.1 (SBN 225). Qu does not think this is a problem for the PM interpretation, since the title principle only says that *reason* ought to be assented to if it is lively and mixes with some propensity, and superstitious belief-formation is not properly reasoning (*Practically Epistemic*, 507). But this appears to contradict T 1.4.4.1 (SBN 225): "But one, who is tormented he knows not why, with the apprehension of spectres in the dark, may, perhaps, be said to *reason*, and to *reason naturally* too: But then it must be in the same sense that a malady is said to be natural" (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225; my emphasis). Perhaps Hume is using "reason" loosely here, and that its use in the title principle is narrow and technical. But even if Qu is right that superstitious belief-formation does not fall under Hume's conception of reasoning, this does not seem to exonerate Ridge; rather, Ridge's PM view *conflicts* with the title principle (conceived as a supreme normative principle for belief). Here is another normative principle for belief-formation that PM cannot rule out: *superstition,* when lively and mixed with some propensity, ought to be assented to. Either this superstitious principle conflicts with the title principle, or—closer to the letter of the passage—the title principle says *nothing at all* about whether to endorse superstitious beliefs, since it only puts a limitation on what *reasoning* ought to be assented to; it says nothing about divination, revelation, wishful thinking, and so on.

But even assuming that justification does not come too easy on Ridge's PM view, there is another objection, raised by Qu, that does seem fatal. Ridge wants to subsume all doxastic normativity under the moral. But as Qu points out, Hume appears to insist on a distinction between the epistemic and the moral. First, Hume claims that actions can be subject to moral but not rational evaluation, while he often calls beliefs and belief-forming mechanisms "reasonable" and "unreasonable" with clear normative force. But this segregation of rational and moral evaluation only applies to actions; it leaves open the possibility that "reasonable" is just the sentiment of moral approbation that can be applied to belief. And yet, Hume does not seem to accept this kind of connection between belief and morality. Qu cites T 3.1.1.12 (SBN 459): "[T]hese errors [of beliefs relating to conduct] are so far from being the source of all immorality, that they are very innocent, and draw no manner of guilt upon the person who is so unfortunate as to fall into them . . .. No one can ever regard such errors as a defect in my moral character" (T 3.1.1.12; SBN 459). In the passage in which this is embedded, Hume is arguing that we are not morally responsible for mistakes of fact or mistakes of right (beliefs about right conduct). So even on Hume's broad account of the moral realm, beliefs are not objects of moral evaluation. This means there must be epistemic normativity in addition to the moral to make sense of Hume's evaluations of belief throughout the *Treatise*. Qu

thinks that this closes the door on a straightforward moralized account of doxastic normativity, but it still leaves open the possibility of an alternative "usefulness and agreeableness" interpretation (I will continue to use "PM" to designate this kind of interpretation). Moral normativity, Qu proposes, judges by the standard of the usefulness and agreeableness of *sentiment*-forming dispositions, like benevolence, gratitude, greed, envy, and so on. (*Practically Epistemi*c, 516). But this leaves Hume the possibility of an account of epistemic normativity that judges by the standard of the usefulness and agreeableness of *belief*-forming dispositions. So, Qu is here suggesting a theory of doxastic normativity that parallels, but is not subsumed under, Hume's theory of moral normativity. We judge an epistemic agent on the basis of her disposition to form beliefs that have the feature of usefulness and agreeableness (either to the agent or others).[23]

But in patching up Ridge's PM account, Qu recognizes that he has removed the bandage from one wound to cover another. The motivation for the PM account was that ambition and curiosity were supposed to justify the use of the understanding for the purposes of philosophy. This was interpreted to be the significance of the title principle passage and T 1.4.7.12 (SBN 270) quoted above (in which Hume is returning to philosophy because of its benefits). Reasoning was to be assented to only if (and, ultimately, because) it satisfies one's ambition and curiosity. But ambition and curiosity are *passions*, not beliefs. So, if ambition and curiosity are to justify the use of the understanding for the purposes of philosophy, this will have to be a *moral* justification on Qu's PM schema. So, Qu's proposed updated PM view leaves him in a position in which he is unable to appeal to the text that was so important for overcoming extreme skepticism.

There is one more way in which Qu's proposed solution neutralizes one of the virtues of Ridge's view, and this is not one that Qu addresses. Recall that Ridge thought Hume was a skeptic with regard to epistemic justification, so he could take Hume's skeptical arguments at face value. This is one of the benefits of Ridge's interpretation over, for example, the naturalistic interpreter, who is burdened with explaining why Hume rejects the skeptical conclusions that he really does *seem* to accept, and offer some principled grounds for this rejection. On Qu's proposed account, we are again faced with a theory of the epistemic that is capable of circumscribing inquiry in a way that rules out the legitimacy of Hume's skeptical arguments. To make this account plausible, we will need to hear how this can work.

A mixed account of doxastic normativity is capable of accepting the criticisms of Ridge's PM account, without accepting the liabilities of Qu's proposed updated PM account (a proposal that, again, he ultimately rejects [*Practically Epistemic,* 523]). According to the mixed account, Hume has fairly stable standards of epistemic normativity throughout the *Treatise*. These are laid out initially in the introduction, then developed and refined throughout Book 1 (especially in T 1.3). But there is another standard of doxastic normativity at work in the *Treatise—natural*

normativity—that approves of beliefs that contribute to the most "natural and agreeable" state of the human being. The first problem with Ridge's account was that it struggled to rule out justified superstition. It seemed that according to *moral* normative standards, some superstitious belief-forming mechanisms could be justified, as some superstitions are plausibly useful to oneself or others. But according to the mixed account, belief is beholden to both natural and epistemic standards. Even if a superstitious belief did pass the natural test, it would still be epistemically condemned. And recall that though the natural is preferable to the epistemic, and will typically defeat in cases of conflict (for instance, extreme skepticism and the "honest gentlemen" who are content to not philosophize at all), Hume would not accept that the epistemic should be disregarded in *egregious* cases. After all, Hume takes pains to critically describe species of "unphilosophical probability" in T 1.3.13—epistemically illegitimate ways of forming empirical beliefs—and then goes on to give rules by which we ought to form causal empirical beliefs at T 1.3.15. Forming illegitimate beliefs is not on par epistemically with ignorance. This tracks an intuitive distinction between, for example, withholding certain things from children to preserve their happiness and innocence, and telling them outright lies.

The mixed view also exonerates the title principle of endorsing superstition. For Ridge's PM view, the title principle gives us Hume's supreme doxastic standard. But his hedonic interpretation of the title principle appears to condone reasoning that is merely useful and agreeable, however epistemically unsavory it might be. Either this or, if Qu is right, the title principle—again, the supreme doxastic principle—is completely silent on whether superstition ought to be believed (since, according to Qu, superstitious belief-formation is not reasoning, and the subject of the title principle is reasoning). But on the mixed view, given the context in which the title principle passage occurs, all it is saying is that epistemically good reasoning ought to be assented to only if is *also* naturally good. It functions to prevent inquiry that would lead to extreme skepticism. It is not the sole, ultimate, or master doxastic normative principle; it is an expression of one form of doxastic normativity—the natural. For Hume's *epistemic* normative principles, we should instead look to the Introduction and part 1.3.

The second problem with Ridge's account was that Hume seems to accept a distinction between epistemic and moral normativity, such that it is possible for beliefs to have the first but not the second. The first half of this claim is clearly unproblematic on the mixed account. All claims in the *Treatise* that would be straightforwardly read as regarding epistemic justification for some belief or doxastic practice, *do* regard the epistemic justification of that belief/practice. The second half—that beliefs cannot have moral justification—requires more analysis. Natural normativity is not the same as moral normativity. It is true that traits are in fact called virtuous or vicious if they have or lack usefulness or agreeableness, respectively. And natural normativity does track usefulness and agreeableness. But

this does not commit Hume to the claim that all human traits that can be evaluated on their usefulness and agreeableness must be evaluated morally. We can ask the question of whether a certain belief is agreeable or disagreeable without encroaching on Hume's domain of the moral.

NOTES

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2 This is sometimes referred to as the "integration problem" after Phillip Cummins's appellation in "Hume's Diffident Skepticism."

3 This form of naturalistic interpretation goes back to Kemp Smith (see especially *Philosophy of David Hume*) and has as its characteristic feature the claim that there is some natural psychological property of a belief that is non-epistemic and contributes to the justification of that belief. For Kemp Smith, this feature was irresistibility. A leading recent interpretation of this kind is Louis Loeb's, *Stability and Justification*. For Loeb, the naturalistic property is stability under an agent's actual level of reflectivity.

4 See especially Donald Ainslie, *Hume's True Scepticism*, 237–246.

5 Michael Ridge, "Epistemology Moralized."

6 For a good treatment of the topic, see Hsueh Qu, *Hume's Epistemological Evolution*.

7 Specifically, T 1.4.1, 1.4.2, and 1.4.7. One exception is the problem of induction at T 1.3.6, though it is matter of controversy whether Hume's discussion of probability here is epistemically-loaded.

8 This point is echoed at the end of Book 1 (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272). Qu writes that by T 1.4.7, "Hume does not think his contribution consists in his managing to attain truth, but merely in identifying regions where 'assurance and conviction' might be found (Qu, *Hume's Epistemological Evolution*, 165).

9 See note 6.

10 "The only connection or relation of objects, which can lead us beyond the immediate impressions of our memory and senses, is that of cause and effect; and that is because 'tis the only one, on which we can found a just inference from one object to another" (T 1.3.6.7; SBN 89).

11 Janet Broughton, in "The Inquiry in Hume's *Treatise*," argues that the skeptical episode at the end of Book 1 shows that Hume thinks that nearly all of our beliefs are unjustified. And yet, because the decision to return to philosophy, too, has a non-rational source, the skeptical realizations cause an ironic detachment from (but not total disavowal of) his positive philosophical conclusions.

12 Along with the moral/practical interpretations to be discussed below, there are commentators who have proposed subtle distinctions within the epistemic to make Hume's positive theorizing consistent with his skepticism. For example, Yuval Avnur draws a distinction between justification and excuse ("Excuses for Hume's Skepticism"). According to Avnur, Hume thinks that our belief-forming processes are not justified but are excused. That is, we cannot be blamed for believing, for example, that an external world exists, since it is a natural and universal tendency of our species.

13 Except, perhaps, at least some beliefs produced by intuition, which for Hume require neither demonstrative nor probabilistic inference. This would almost certainly include beliefs about the content of ideas directly perceived (T 1.4.2.7, 2.2.6.2; SBN 190, 366), but also, plausibly, some intuitive (rather than demonstrative) relations of ideas, that is, those that are "discoverable at first sight" (T 1.3.1.2; SBN 70).

14 See, for example, Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, Loeb, *Stability and Justification*, and Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy*.

15 "All probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. 'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy" (T 1.3.8.12; SBN 103).

"*All our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and [. . .] belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures*" (T 1.4.1.8; SBN 183; Hume's emphasis).

16 This use of "natural" does not appear to fall within any of Hume's three definitions of "natural" at T 3.1.2.7–9 (SBN 473–474).

17 The most conspicuous example of a principle of the science of human nature having devastating skeptical consequences occurs between T 1.3.12.9 (SBN 134) and T 1.4.1.1–6 (SBN 180–82). At T 1.3.12.9 (SBN 134), Hume claims that when presented with "contrariety of causes"—that is, when one experiences exceptions to an otherwise constant conjunction—one should proportion one's belief that a particular kind of effect will follow the next occurrence of that kind of cause to its past frequency. A specific form of this general rule shows up at T 1.4.1.1–6 (SBN 180–82), where the cause is reason and the contrary effects are truth and falsity. It is the iterative application of this rule that drives this skeptical argument against reason.

18 A similar point is made by Donald Ainslie, *Hume's True Scepticism*.

19 David Owen holds a similar position: "The moral approval we feel towards the wise and reasonable person, on he grounds that characteristics of that sort are pleasing or useful to their possessors or others, is the ultimate ground for Hume's preference for reason" (*Hume's Reason*, 220).

20 Hsueh Qu, "Hume's Practically Epistemic Conclusions?" Qu offers a PM interpretation that avoids problems that he raises for Ridge's account, but ultimately, he concludes that any PM account would be highly problematic for Hume. Nevertheless, he does not think this is sufficient evidence that Hume did not *in fact* hold a PM view in the *Treatise* (Ibid., 23). Elsewhere, Qu argues that Hume presents a very different account of justification in the *Enquiry (Hume's Epistemological Evolution*).

21 Of course, Hume holds that in many respects religious belief can be harmful and disagreeable. Hume claims that superstition "is often able to disturb us in the conduct of our lives and actions" (T 1.4.7.13; SBN 271). Later in the passage, he writes, "generally speaking, the errors in religion are dangerous." But this does not entail that no religious beliefs at all could be useful or agreeable.

22 Qu claims that Hume also rejects the principle that a view ought to be avoided just because it has harmful consequences. (Qu, "Hume's Practically Epistemic Conclusions?" 509) For this he cites T 2.3.2.3 (SBN 409). But in this passage, Hume is specifically discussing dangerous consequences "to religion and morality." This leaves open the possibility that Hume thinks one ought to consider the negative consequences of a view on other things. I argue that extreme skepticism is an example of a view (though it is doubtful that Hume would even consider this a coherent view rather than, say, a mood) that Hume would recommend avoiding because of its dangerous consequences.

23 Qu raises the possible objection that this is a prima facie implausible account of epistemic normativity since "it makes no reference to truth or probability of truth" (*Practically Epistemic,* 518). But he thinks this account can "incorporate truth in a meaningful way." Whether it can or not, I do not think this objection is a very serious one, since it appears to apply to any interpretation on which Hume thinks beliefs or belief-forming mechanisms can be epistemically justified. As discussed above, the problem of induction and Hume's theory of causation give us no reason at all to think causal judgments track truth. Nevertheless, good causal reasoning is the gold standard for Hume, and makes up the bulk of the science of human nature.

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