

Quasi-Realism and Inductive Scepticism in Hume's Theory of Causation

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Abstract: Interpreters of Hume on causation consider that an advantage of the 'quasi-realist' reading is that it does not commit Hume to scepticism or an error theory about causal reasoning. It is unique to quasi-realism that it maintains this positive epistemic result together with a rejection of metaphysical realism about causation: the quasi-realist supplies an appropriate semantic theory in order to justify the practice of talking 'as if' there were causal powers in the world. In this paper, I problematise the quasi-realist reading of Hume on causation by showing how quasi-realism does not speak to inductive scepticism. I also offer evidence that Hume takes inductive scepticism to result from his theory of causation and that his scepticism is tied to his rejection of metaphysical causal realism.

Keywords: David Hume; Quasi-realism; Causation; Inductive Scepticism; Projectivism.

1. Introduction

For a *quasi-realist* about causation, any apparent mismatch between our causal language and the facts of the world ought not leave us in a sceptical position about causal claims. This is because the quasi-realist holds that causal claims are not in the business of describing facts at all, but are expressions of internal expectations. Vitaly, though, quasi-realists attempt to distinguish better expectations from worse ones based on objective data; even if there are no causal 'powers', there are still non-accidental connections between objects. The quasi-realist reading of *Hume's* theory

of causation uniquely holds the promise of accepting a face-value reading of Hume's more metaphysically anti-realist sounding passages whilst not reducing the *idea* of causation for him to mere constant conjunction. Here I argue that while the quasi-realist reading might avoid any problems deriving from the mismatch between thought/language and the world, the textual evidence for reading Hume as a sceptic about induction undermines the quasi-realist attempt to offer a defence of causal thought and language. In the course of this paper, I will argue that Hume's rejection of metaphysical realism about causation and the acceptance of inductive scepticism are bound up in the following way: Hume appeals to the fact that there is no feature of objects that ensures that past causal connections will continue in the future as a source of scepticism. Overall, I present a complication for the quasi-realist interpretation in order to shed light on the philosophical and textual issues in reading Hume's theory of causation.

In Section 2 of this paper, I will explicate further the quasi-realist reading of Hume on causation and describe the motivations for it. In Section 3, I will rehearse the sceptical reading of Hume on induction (focusing on the version from the *Enquiry*) and then show how quasi-realism about causation cannot curb doubts about causation that arise from the problem of induction as Hume understands it. In Section 4, I put forward evidence from Section 12 of Hume's *Enquiry* that suggests that the worry that the future will not resemble the past is a sceptical problem that Hume takes seriously and which he integrates into his final, considered outlook on philosophy and its appropriate methodology.

2. The Quasi-Realist Reading

2.1 Components

Quasi-realism about causation is the position that causal realist-sounding talk is rational even though metaphysical realism about causation is not true. Realism about causation in this context

pertains to the existence of *robust* causal connections (that is, causation that goes above mere regularity). The issue of causal realism for Hume is commonly framed in terms of Hume's attitude towards causal powers or, alternatively, inherent necessary connections in objects. Hume himself alternates between terms. As he says in the *Treatise*: 'I begin with observing that the terms of *efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, necessity, connexion, and productive quality*, are all nearly synonymous [sic]; and therefore 'tis an absurdity to employ any of them in defining the rest.' [T 1.3.14.4: SBN 157. Original emphasis].¹ For the remainder of this paper, I will treat the issue as concerning Hume's opinion on whether causal powers exist or not.

Quasi-realism has been defended by Blackburn [1984; 1993; 1998], who also reads Hume as endorsing such a view [1990]. Marušić [2014] groups Blackburn's reading of Hume together with Beebe's [2006] and Coventry's [2006], and she describes their quasi-realist positions as encompassing *projectivism* and *expressivism* [2014: 269–70]. There are some variances in usage amongst the scholars in question here. Beebe [2006] opts for the title 'projectivism' for her overall position on Hume, but Coventry [2006] thinks of projectivism merely as a variety of metaphysical anti-realism about causation. Here I will follow Marušić's terminology in taking 'quasi-realism' to be the most over-arching term. Thus apprehended, quasi-realism is the *defence* of the rationality of causal talk and thought in light of projectivism and expressivism. Causal talk being rational means that it is proper to treat some as better than others, or that it is 'appropriate . . . to treat causal utterances as claims to be asserted and denied,

¹ In this paper I will follow the convention of referring to *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (or the *Enquiry*) as *EHU*, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (or the *Treatise*) as *T*, and *An Abstract of a Book lately Published, entitled, A Treatise of Human Nature, &c.* as *Abstract*. Arabic numerals refer to section and paragraph numbers for *EHU*, and book, part, section, and paragraph numbers for *T*, and paragraph numbers for the *Abstract*. The abbreviation SBN is used to indicate that the page numbers are to the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch editions of each of these works.

questioned, revised in the light of the evidence, and so on.’ [Beebe 2015: 29]. As Marušić puts it: ‘A causal quasi-realist claims that we ‘earn the right’ to realist-sounding talk about causation’ [2014: 270].² Coventry, for her part, characterises quasi-realism as an ‘intermediate position’ between realism and anti-realism and according to which, ‘there is *nothing wrong* with projecting properties, whether moral, modal, causal, etc., onto the world; in fact, it actually provides the grounds for asserting the claims that the realist makes.’ [2006: 46. Added emphasis]. In other words, the quasi-realist wants to hold on to causal reasoning being a *rational enterprise*. I will clarify the quasi-realist position by clarifying projectivism and expressivism in turn.

To be a projectivist in response to some question or puzzle is to adopt the general projectivist *pattern of explanation* with regards to that question or puzzle.³ The question or puzzle is typically a semantic or cognitive worry that arises from the denial of metaphysical realism about some phenomenon. In Hume’s philosophy, the puzzle is how some ideas come to have the content they do, given that there are no obvious features of reality, which may appear in impressions, that would give rise to those ideas (see [T 1.1.1.7: SBN 4]). The projectivist pattern of explanation is to say that even if some feature is not discoverable in external reality, we can still think that objects have that feature via the presence of some appropriately related internal reality (for example, pleasure and pain for the ideas of virtue and vice). In the context of Hume’s theory of causation, the relevant internal reality is the feeling of the mind’s customary transition

² A complication (and controversy) that I will ignore in this paper is that Blackburn [1984: 211] holds that, for the quasi-realist, causal claims earn the right to be called ‘true’.

³ Kail [2007: 3–4] draws a distinction between *feature* projection and *explanatory* projection, where the former involves attributions of features to a thing that do not belong to it (Kail gives the example of the anthropomorphization of nature), and the latter consists in an explanation of the sort that I describe. The two are not mutually exclusive, and Kail draws this distinction primarily in order to highlight the way in which not all projection is feature projection and thus not instantly open to the criticism that it describes falsely.

from a perception of a cause to a perception of its usual attendant, and the resultant idea is of causal power or necessary connection (see [T 1.3.14.23: SBN 166; T 1.3.14.29: SBN 169; *EHU* 7.28: SBN 75–6]). By means of the idea that derives from this impression, we are able to distinguish in thought between genuine causal connections and mere accidental regularities. Beebe [2006: 164–7] takes the explanation of this ability to be a prime advantage of her reading of Hume over the regularity reading.

The projectivist faces a problem to do with applying the idea derived from an internal reality to external realities: projectivism would threaten our ordinary confidence in employing the idea of causation if that idea simply *referred to* an internal feeling, because then it would always be a mistake to talk about causal relations holding between external objects themselves.⁴ Combining projectivism with *expressivism* is a natural move to make that will circumvent this problem, as expressivism avoids making causal claims a matter of description altogether.

An expressivist thesis concerning some class of statements or claims says those statements or claims are not ascriptions of states of affairs but expressions of some subjective reality, like an ‘attitude or habit or other commitment.’ [Blackburn 1984: 170–1]. At first blush, expressivism is faced with a host of problems, like explaining disagreement about, and embedded occurrences of, the claims that it says are expressions [Egan 2007: 206]. These are problems that apply to a rudimentary form of expressivism; the combination of expressivism and projectivism under the banner of quasi-realism is designed to specifically address such issues. On such a view, ‘fire warms’ or ‘water refreshes’ will be expressions of our habits of expecting that *if* there is fire then there will be warmth, that *if* I drink water I will be refreshed (examples taken

⁴ A reading of Hume that accepts that we *mistakenly* project internal sentiments onto external objects has been labelled ‘the *false projectivist view*’ by Stanford [2002: 341. Original emphasis]. See Stroud [1977: 81–7] for such a view.

from [T 1.4.7.11: SBN 270]).⁵ Quasi-realism offers a story for the rationality of causal talk by making *expectations themselves* rationally evaluable (this will be more fully explicated in Section 3.2 below). Quasi-realism is thus an attempt to walk the tight-rope of making causal claims neither literally true nor literally false, while leaving enough room for an evaluative, rational discourse – for a causal *science*, in other words. A major challenge for quasi-realist interpreters is to provide evidence for Hume having held an early modern prototype of expressivism. Marušić [2014: 270] claims that the lack of evidence for expressivism in Hume’s texts is the biggest obstacle for the quasi-realist view.

2.2 Motivation

The quasi-realist reading is attractive because Hume’s texts contain passages that suggest he finds no place for causal powers in his metaphysics. In this regard, the quasi-realist interpretation is supposed to enjoy a textual advantage over the ‘New Hume’ interpretation on which Hume does believe in causal powers.⁶ When Hume defines the meaning of ‘cause and effect’, any reference to a hidden ‘power’ is patently absent [T 1.3.14.31: SBN 170; EHU 7.29: SBN 76–7]. He says that we may define a causal relation as a pair of objects that are constantly conjoined *or* as a pair of objects such that the appearance of one raises the idea of the other. Of course,

⁵ This potentially leaves Hume open to the objection that he cannot determine which would be the cause and which the effect, since we draw inferences both ways (as Hume himself acknowledges at [EHU 5.22: SBN 55]). But for Hume, and not necessarily for contemporary philosophers, the cause *just is* the thing that happens first in time. See Beebe [2015: 25–6].

⁶ For the purposes of motivating the quasi-realist position, the *metaphysical* aspects of the New Hume position are most relevant. According to Wright [1983; 2012], Strawson [1989], and Buckle [2001], Hume’s scepticism is limited to the *nature* of causal powers, but not the fact of their existence; for them, Hume not only believes in causal powers but thinks there is some kind of justification for such a belief. Costa [1989], by contrast, holds that Hume believes in causal powers *despite* such a belief lacking justification. See especially Costa [1989: 175]. For discussion on the meaning of ignorance of the ‘nature’ of causal power see Beebe [2006: 193–201].

Hume's two definitions of causation are notorious, and his references to the imperfection of the definitions, in both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* versions, open up some interpretive possibilities. New Hume interpreters have claimed that Hume's apparent metaphysical anti-realism is really just indicative of his view that we contingently (but chronically) fail to directly grasp causal powers (see especially Kail [2003]). The tide has shifted away from such readings because, all things considered, it seems to strain the text to say that Hume *affirms* the existence of causal powers, even if he emphasises our lack of *awareness* of such powers in his arguments (on this, see especially Winkler [1991: 67–8]).

A dire illustration of Hume's anti-realism about causation appears in *T* 1.4.7 ('Conclusion of this book'). In this section of the *Treatise*, Hume reflects on the limitations of his rigorously experimental approach to the mind, and one of his highlights is his theory of causation:

We wou'd not willingly stop before we are acquainted with that energy in the cause, by which it operates on its effect; that tie, which connects them together; and that efficacious quality, on which the tie depends. This is our aim in all our studies and reflections: *And how must we be disappointed, when we learn, that this connexion, tie, or energy lies merely in ourselves*, and is nothing but that determination of the mind, which is acquir'd by custom, and causes us to make a transition from an object to its usual attendant, and from the impression of one to the lively idea of the other? [*T* 1.4.7.5: SBN 266–7. Added emphasis]

Hume here openly laments the conclusions of his discussion on causation, in light of the desire for there to be more to causation than the determinations of the mind. Hume, of course, has more to say in this section, including how he is driven from extreme sceptical despair to a happy return

to philosophy, so we need not read him as disowning his project altogether (see especially [T 1.4.7.11–13: SBN 270–2]). The point is, reading Hume as a realist on causation sits uncomfortably with some parts of his texts.

The quasi-realist interpretation offers a distinctive way of rejecting the New Hume approach without reverting to the regularity reading or a radically sceptical reading. The quasi-realist holds that causal talk is more robust than a description of regularities, because causal talk is not a matter of describing what the world is like at all. The character of quasi-realism as a middle-ground position seems, to some scholars, just right for capturing Hume's rather complex views on causation.

I agree with Marušić that the lack of textual evidence for expressivism in Hume's texts is a problem for the quasi-realist. However, this objection alone leaves room for the quasi-realist to reply that they offer a neat *modification* of Hume's philosophy – one that captures the core fundamentals – even if it involves some extrapolation beyond the text. The quasi-realist, could, in short, say what view Hume *should have* endorsed, even if they concede the anachronism of their suggestion (thus, that Hume was a quasi-realist *manqué*)⁷. In the next section, I will show how quasi-realism about causation cannot in fact curb doubts about causation that arise from the problem of induction. There is a general lesson to be gleaned here: any account that seeks to defend the rationality of some class of claims without worldly correspondence might *defer* the justification of rationality to some internal reality, but sceptical doubts can still be raised about such realities. An explanation does not, in itself, make a justification. This, of course, is not a refutation of quasi-realism in general, as the import of this distinction between explanation and justification will be relative to how predisposed one is to take doubts about justification

⁷ I modify this phrase from Raynor [1990: 232] who applied it to Hume on realism about external objects.

seriously. But this raises a serious issue for Hume scholarship, since Hume does indeed grapple with inductive scepticism.

3. Induction and Causation

3.1 Hume's Putative Scepticism about Induction

The central argument for the reading of Hume as an inductive sceptic is given at [T 1.3.6.4–11: SBN 88–92; *EHU* 4.14–23: SBN 32–9; *Abstract* 8–16: SBN 649–52]. In the *Treatise*, Hume proceeds by arguing that all of the possible means for justifying the following ‘uniformity principle’ fail: ‘*that instances, of which we have had no experience, must resemble those, of which we have had experience, and that the course of nature continues uniformly the same.*’ [T 1.3.6.4: SBN 89. Original emphasis].⁸ In the *Enquiry*, Hume employs a slightly different approach by examining two different propositions and pressing on a missing justificatory connection between them (‘U’ for ‘uniformity’):

U1: Such an object has always been attended with such an effect.

U2: Other objects, which are in appearance similar, will be attended with similar effects.⁹

The *Enquiry* version of the argument considers, and rejects, four putative justifications for the inference from U1 to U2. Hume first rules out any direct *sensory* acquaintance with causal powers that subsist in objects as an answer. Taking the case of bread and nourishment, Hume says the senses can inform us of the colour, weight, and consistence of bread but never a causal power that brings about nourishment. Hume rules out *intuition* because that mental activity

⁸ More precisely, in tune with his aversion for absolute claims, Hume rules out all the possible means *that he can think of* and asserts the difficulty of coming up with any additional means. See [*EHU* 4.22–3: SBN 38–9].

⁹ These are paraphrased from [*EHU* 12.22: SBN 34].

involves grasping the immediate agreement or disagreement between ideas, but the very fact that there is a gap between previous experience and future experience reveals a lack of such agreement (see Buckle [2001: 164–5]). After these two possibilities have been rejected, Hume turns to the more familiar consideration of any ‘reasoning and argument’ supplying the missing link. Hume says we cannot provide a demonstrative argument because that would only be possible if the negation of U2 was a contradiction, which it is not. For Hume, demonstrations produce *certainty* and what is certain cannot be entertained as false (see [T 1.2.4.8–16: SBN 42–4; T 1.3.1.1–6: SBN 69–72]). He reflects quite plainly that he can conceive of snow that ‘has yet the taste of salt or feeling of fire’ and that ‘all the trees will flourish in DECEMBER and JANUARY, and decay in MAY and JUNE’ [EHU 4.18: SBN 35]. Hume does not distinguish between different types of modalities and he does not have the vocabulary to specify whether he means snow *in the actual world could one day* have the taste of salt, or whether snow *in some possible world* could have the taste of salt. Since, in context, Hume is making a claim about inferences from the actual past to the actual future, he is best understood as making not just a bare metaphysical modal claim, but an epistemological modal claim.¹⁰ Hume continues by arguing that we cannot use a probable argument to supply the link between U1 and U2 because probable arguments proceed by assuming that U2 is true in the first place and so could only be viciously circular [EHU 4.20: SBN 36].

Those who read Hume as a sceptic about induction insist that Hume has revealed that, as a matter of justification, we need the assumption of the uniformity of nature for reasonings from experience and that this principle itself is devoid of justification (see Fogelin [1985; 2009];

¹⁰ Hume describes his ‘conceivability principle’ in general in the *Abstract* as ‘whatever we *conceive* is possible, at least in a metaphysical sense’ [Abstract 11: SBN 650. Original emphasis]. For Hume’s further statements of this principle, see [T 1.1.7.6: SBN 19–20; T 1.2.2.8: SBN 32; T 1.4.5.5: SBN 233]. For a critical discussion of the principle see Casullo [1979].

Millican [2002; 2007; 2012]; De Pierris [2015]). Proponents of such a reading can concede that Hume insists on the psychological compulsion attached to causal reasoning and that his philosophy would be flagrantly inconsistent if he advised *against* engaging in such reasoning. But Hume's position is rightly characterised as sceptical for these interpreters because there is nothing else to be said for the justification of causal reasoning. On this picture, causal science is founded on an unjustified *assumption* and the historical Hume wilfully aimed to establish this fundamental sceptical doubt.

3.2 *The Anti-Sceptical Quasi-Realist Story*

Beebe explicates the quasi-realist strategy for making expectations rationally evaluable in her 'Causation, Projection, Inference, and Agency' [2015].¹¹ The quasi-realist can take causal statements to be non-truth-apt 'indicative' conditionals. On this approach – which has its roots in Ramsey's [1929] treatment of causal expressions – a causal statement like 'the pie will make me sick' is not understood as a material conditional ('if p , then q '), but as, 'I will get sick, on the supposition that I do in fact eat the pie.' As a material conditional, the statement would be true automatically if I do not eat the pie, or if I get sick for some entirely unrelated reason. The indicative conditional reading, by contrast, captures the neutrality of the fact of whether I *actually* eat the pie or not. So Beebe's starting point is to take it that assigning a value to some causal conditional will be like assigning a value to q/p (' q given p ') [2015: 39].

When it comes to disagreement about causal claims, the quasi-realist no longer says one person takes to be true what another takes to be false, but rather, that they have different levels of *credence* towards the claim in the question and, thus, different levels of willingness to act and

¹¹ Beebe intends her analysis to apply to Blackburn's quasi-realist approach as well as Huw Price's [1998; 2007] perspectivalist theory of causation.

judge accordingly [Beebee 2015: 36]. The quasi-realist strategy is to lay down norms for assigning credences to indicative conditionals. Suppose we start off with a causal conditional ‘ q given p ’. Sometimes the value of q is high independently of p , but we would not want to say that my high credence in the sun rising tomorrow *given* that it starts raining soon means that rain *causes* the sun to rise. This is avoided by saying, for one thing, that I am committed to p causing q only if the probability I assign to q/p is higher than $q/\text{not-}p$ [Beebee 2015: 39]. But this rough picture needs to be modified even more, for we do not always want to be committed to p causing q whenever our credence in q/p is greater than $q/\text{not-}p$. Beebee tells us:

If we want a workable theory, of course, the evidential relationships on which we build causal relations will have to be a lot more sophisticated.

Here, however, the projectivist has some grounds for optimism. After all, there is a huge wealth of literature, particularly in the ‘causal modelling’ tradition, whose purpose is to shed light on the norms that govern the inference from probabilistic to causal relationships, and which, in some cases, explicitly aims to shed light on the nature of causation itself . . . [T]he projectivist can, in effect, help herself to the results while interpreting them in a distinctively projectivist spirit. [Beebee 2015: 40]

Beebee does not go into detail but points us to Woodward [2003] who, entirely independently of concerns about quasi-realism, tells us how to get from beliefs about probabilistic relationships between events to causal relationships. Even though Woodward is concerned with objective probabilities, Beebee is confident that the quasi-realist can still use the causal modelling tradition to understand credences with no harm done. Beebee [2006: 145] also points to the simpler rules

prescribed by Hume in ‘Rules by which to judge of causes and effects’ [*T* 1.3.15: SBN 173–6] as norms that would govern the formation of expectations about objects.

In fact, Beebee tells us that for the quasi-realist, ‘the norms that distinguish causal from accidental regularities just *are* the norms that distinguish between rational and irrational expectations’ [2006: 166. Original emphasis]. To use an illustration adapted from Beebee [2006: 166], if I get sick every time I eat a tomato in a new town, I may discover something that reveals it was nothing to do with the tomatoes themselves that brought about my sickness. It may have been the water used to wash the tomatoes that brought about the effect. If I travel to another part of the town that uses different water, then I would have no reason to think the sickness will come about. Ordinarily, we would say that the water causes sickness and not the tomato; the quasi-realist just says this is a projection of our willingness to expect the water to bring about sickness and not the tomato itself.

3.3 Scepticism Strikes Back

In this section, I will look at some of Hume’s rules for judging of cause and effect, since these are supposed to be representative of his confident outlook on causal reasoning. The purpose of this section is to bring out clearly how, for Hume *qua* inductive sceptic, even if we know how objects have been connected in the past, the failure of the uniformity of nature could upset our expectations that have been derived from past experience.

The first three of Hume’s rules are a restatement of the components of the idea of the relation of cause and effect, namely contiguity, priority, and constant conjunction [*T* 1.3.2.6–7: SBN 75–6; *T* 1.3.6.3: SBN 87–8], but these are not what are doing the heavy-lifting in providing

a science of causal reasoning.¹² The very next rule, however, is more robust and comes close to being a restatement of the uniformity principle:

4. The same cause always produces the same effect, and the same effect never arises but from the same cause. This principle we derive from experience, and is the source of most of our philosophical reasonings. For when by any clear experiment we have discover'd the causes or effects of any phænomenon, we immediately extend our observation to every phænomenon of the same kind, without waiting for that constant repetition, from which the first idea of this relation is deriv'd. [T 1.3.15.6: SBN 173–4]

What should we make of Hume recommending this as a rule for causal reasoning? Whatever one thinks about the uniformity principle must apply here also. Contrary to Beebee's [2006: 42] suggestion, the mere fact that Hume takes this to be a rule for causal science is not a blow to the sceptical reading, since we have seen that this reading can take Hume to engage in causal reasoning with the uniformity principle as a mere unjustified assumption. If we look at rules five and six, now, Hume directly tells us they depend on rule four. He writes:

5. There is another principle, *which hangs upon this, viz.* 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. For as like effects imply like causes, we must always ascribe the causation to the circumstance, wherein we discover the resemblance.

6. The following principle *is founded on the same reason.* The difference in the effects of two resembling objects must proceed from that particular, in which they differ. For as

¹² Beebee [2006: 42] suggests that Hume might have considered the first three rules analytic.

like causes always produce like effects, when in any instance we find our expectation to be disappointed, we must conclude that this irregularity proceeds from some difference in the causes. [*T* 1.3.15.5–6: SBN 174. Added emphasis]

Hume is aware that *unless* rule four is already presumed, there is no way that it could be a rule that different objects producing the same effect must share some quality, nor could it be a rule that any differences in effects must result from a difference in qualities.

There is no way Hume can be committed to scepticism about the uniformity principle without being committed to scepticism about these rules. Consider the tomato example adapted from Beebe again. Even if the water is discovered to have produced sickness, we could still conceive the tomatoes by themselves producing sickness and the water producing health. As per Hume's argument from *T* 1.3.6 and *EHU* 4, there is nothing that rules out this epistemological possibility. Similarly for the causal modelling tradition exemplified by Woodward [2003]: whatever the merits of that, it does not serve the role of providing a justification for the uniformity of nature, and so it leaves scepticism about induction untouched.

At this point, the argument being made may sound unfair, as if quasi-realism is being accused of failing to resolve all of the intricate issues that have to do with reading Hume on causation. Admittedly, the argument exploits a sceptical possibility that, for the most part, philosophers are content to put to the side, and so a few words are in place on the relevance of the issue of the justification of causal reasoning for the quasi-realist reading of Hume. As a general point, the idea that quasi-realism plays some justificatory role is embedded in the literature, at least the literature as it pertains to Hume scholarship. Coventry [2006] presents quasi-realism as a general means for justifying causal thought and language: 'The idea behind quasi-realism is to provide an explanation and *justification* of the realist-sounding discourse and

the role it plays in our lives . . .’ [2006: 65. Added emphasis]. Beebee [2015], we have seen, points to some specific guidelines by which the quasi-realist can distinguish better causal claims from worse ones, but still in view of solving an epistemic problem, namely, of making causal reasoning a rational enterprise despite the absence of causal powers. The present paper serves as a reminder that there is a more fundamental philosophical issue that underpins the justification of causal reasoning and that this philosophical issue is relevant to Hume interpretation.

Beebee [2006] is acutely aware of the interpretive issues surrounding *T* 1.3.6 and *EHU* 4 and it is certainly not her contention that sceptical worries about the future not resembling the past are expected to dissipate once we prescribe some means for discriminating between causal connections and mere accidental regularities (although she does suggest, in one place, that the very presence of the rules in the *Treatise* is a hurdle for the sceptical reading to overcome; see Beebee [2006: 42]). It is also not the case that Beebee has nothing to say about the evidence that seems to push us towards reading Hume as a sceptic about induction. In order to cast doubt over that reading, Beebee adds her own voice to the suggestion that Hume’s personal intention was not to establish a conclusion about the justification of causal claims at all, much less a negative conclusion specifically [2006: 38–40]. The justification for this is that the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* each begin as investigations into the *genesis* of ideas in view of improving our understanding of the human mind (see [*T* Introduction: SBN xiii–xix; *EHU* 1.12–15: SBN 12–15]). Hume seems to pay close attention to causal reasoning precisely because of its psychological significance as the only ideational relation that takes us beyond memory and sense experience [*T* 1.3.2.2: SBN 73–4]. Even the infamous argument concerning the uniformity principle appears in the middle of Hume’s genetic investigation, and, considered by itself, the language certainly suggests that a genetic conclusion was Hume’s intention (there are no overt references to the erroneousness of causal reasoning). Beebee also appeals to the suggestion that Hume’s conclusion about the mind

not being determined by reason in *T* 1.3.6 is a narrow claim about the role of a psychological *faculty* in inductive reasoning, not a normative conclusion (see Garrett [1997: 94–5]; Owen [1999: 118–42]). Given this, Beebe suggests that Hume tacitly adopts a *reliabilist* theory of the justification of causal reasoning and that he is well within his rights to do so [2006: 71–4].

However, the view that Hume is not concerned with justification at all does not stand up in light of a full examination of his texts. As Loeb [2002: 60–5] has convincingly argued, even in *T* 1.3, Hume moves subtly from discussing the genesis of the idea of cause and effect to discussing appropriate and inappropriate methods for deriving causal beliefs. More significantly, in both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, Hume offers some sustained reflections on sceptical objections, some of which derive from the results of his own philosophy (see Ainslie [2015: 218–26] for an overview). My view is that, if we consider *T* 1.3.6 or *EHU* 4 alone, the view that Hume’s argument makes only a psychological conclusion because it appears in the context of a wider genetic investigation will remain an attractive one. A more profitable way of making progress in the debate is to examine Hume’s fuller treatments of scepticism. In the next section, I will suggest that Hume himself uses his anti-realism about causation to motivate a sceptical position on causal reasoning in *EHU* 12.

4. Realism and Hume’s Mitigated Scepticism

The pivotal issue in reading Hume’s scepticism about induction is how seriously he takes the worry that future events might not resemble past experience. I offer here evidence from *EHU* 12 that Hume considers the possibility that past experience will be unreliable for determining future events to be a pressing sceptical concern that motivates his considered position of ‘*mitigated* scepticism’ (*EHU* 12.24: SBN 161. Original emphasis).

Section 12 of the *Enquiry* is an essay on philosophical scepticism. The section involves, in part, an examination of a series of sceptical objections in view of answering the question ‘how far it is possible to push . . . doubt and uncertainty?’ [*EHU* 12.2: SBN 149]. Hume decides that some well-known sceptical objections are shallow and defective, but that others are efficacious. For present purposes, the sceptical objections pertaining to *matters of fact* – that is, contingent, empirical facts [*EHU* 4.2: SBN 25–6] – are most relevant. Hume disdains ‘popular’ objections to matters of fact but endorses the ‘philosophical’ objections. The popular objections are superficial reflections on the limitedness of human understanding and on the ubiquitousness of disagreement amongst persons. Hume does not think that it follows from these considerations that no opinion on matters of fact is better than any other; for Hume, mere *variation* of opinions is insufficient to show that no person’s opinions are better than anyone else’s. However, Hume does think that the ‘philosophical’ objections provide the sceptic with ample triumph. Hume describes these philosophical objections by offering up a compendium of his own views on causation from *EHU* 4–5:

Here he [the sceptic] seems to have ample matter of triumph; while he justly insists, that all our evidence for any matter of fact, which lies beyond the testimony of sense or memory, is derived entirely from the relation of cause and effect; that we have no other idea of this relation than that of two objects, which have been frequently *conjoined* together; that we have no argument to convince us, that objects, which have, in our experience, been frequently conjoined, will likewise, in other instances, be conjoined in the same manner; and that nothing leads us to this inference but custom or a certain instinct of our nature; which it is indeed difficult to resist, but which, like other instincts, may be fallacious and deceitful. While the sceptic insists upon these topics, he shows his

force, or rather, indeed, his own and our own weakness . . . [EHU 12.22: SBN 159.

Original emphasis]

Here, far more directly than any passage in *EHU* 4–5, Hume identifies the sceptical implications of his own theory of causation: causal inferences are products of custom, but this custom ‘may be fallacious and deceitful.’ The quasi-realist agrees that there is nothing in the objects that guarantees that causal connections will remain uniform over time, but here we see Hume ponder the sceptical implications of this. As is well-known, Hume goes on in this section to endorse a position of ‘*mitigated* scepticism’ [EHU 12.24: SBN 161. Original emphasis]. It is precisely by remaining open to sceptical objections being strictly unanswerable that Hume arrives at such a position: he says, ‘There is, indeed, a more *mitigated* scepticism . . . which may, in part, be the result of this PYRRHONISM, or *excessive* scepticism’ [EHU 12.24: SBN 161. Original emphasis]. It is easy to overlook the fact that Hume repudiates only a certain kind of *response* to sceptical problems – that of the Pyrrhonist, of rejecting ‘all belief and reasoning’ [T 1.4.7.8: SBN 268] – and offers nothing by way of a solution to the worries expressed in *EHU* 12.22. Sceptical doubt is moderate, for Hume, precisely because the effects of sceptical worries are *moderated*, or ‘corrected by common sense and reflection.’ [EHU 12.24: SBN 161]. So Hume’s wider views on causation are not irrelevant to reading his final epistemological position; on the contrary, Hume’s anti-realist metaphysics and corresponding psychology of causal reasoning open the door to sceptical attitudes for him.

Hume endorses two elements or ‘species’ of mitigated scepticism [EHU 12.25: SBN 162]. In his explication of these two species, we see a more concrete illustration of how sceptical considerations inspire moderate scepticism. The first species of mitigated scepticism is the adoption of epistemic modesty, an attitude which involves not forming one’s opinions hastily nor

asserting them with arrogance, and the second is the dismissal of some questions as inappropriate for philosophy, or any human intellectual enterprise, to adequately answer. Hume's description of these species of mitigated scepticism are rather vague. He does, however, provide one example of a topic of investigation that mitigated scepticism rules out, and in doing so, he shows how the sceptical objections recounted earlier in *EHU* 12 motivate mitigated scepticism:

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

This is a startling passage because it reveals a sceptical attitude towards causal reasoning even as it acknowledges the possibility of 'a thousand experiments' displaying uniformity. What *exactly* is inadequate with a thousand experiments? Well, Hume's view, which he argued for in *EHU* 4 and reminded his readers of at *EHU* 12.22, is that there is no justification, whether in the form of a demonstrative argument or probable argument or otherwise, that could take us from how events have been in the past to how they will be in the future. Hume appeals to this inability to justify causal claims about ordinary objects of experience as a reason to be suspicious of our ability to answer *extraordinary* questions. We cannot actually suspend belief altogether as a result of sceptical argumentation, but Hume thinks that the force of scepticism, including sceptical objections pertaining to future expectations, should inspire us with new attitudes and a new methodological outlook for philosophy.

The quasi-realist reading of Hume seeks to accept a straightforward reading of the anti-realist sounding passages in Hume's texts, while sidelining any epistemological problems that may arise for causal reasoning. However, Hume does indeed ponder the epistemological implications of his theory of causation and the results of his pondering are unfavourable for those who read Hume as desisting from sceptical conclusions.

5. Conclusion

Sceptical worries about induction have traditionally been at the heart of Hume's theory of causation. In this paper, I have argued that if doubts about causal reasoning arise from the problem of justifying induction, then quasi-realism offers no help. Furthermore, Hume reasserts the problem of failing to justify expectations about the future on the basis of past experience as part of his considered philosophical outlook. This gives us reason to consider that Hume takes such a problem seriously, and that, since the problem is expressed as arising from his own theory of causation, that he understood that theory to have sceptical consequences.¹³

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