

Hume's Positive Argument on Induction

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Abstract: Discussion on whether Hume's treatment of induction is descriptive or normative has usually centred on Hume's negative argument, somewhat neglecting the positive argument. In this paper, I will buck this trend, focusing on the positive argument. First, I argue that Hume's positive and negative arguments should be read as addressing the same issues (whether normative or descriptive). I then argue that Hume's positive argument in the *Enquiry* is normative in nature; drawing on his discussion of scepticism in Section 12 of the *Enquiry*, I explain a framework by which he provides what I call consequent justification for our inductive practices in his positive argument. Based on this, I argue that his negative argument in the *Enquiry* should similarly be read as normative in nature.

1. Descriptivist and Normativist Interpretations of Hume's Negative Argument

Hume's treatment of induction comprises two different phases: a negative argument and a positive argument.¹ The negative phase concerns Hume's argument that inferences to the unobserved are not founded on reason, while the positive phase concerns his argument that custom is what determines inferences to the unobserved. These two phases are most clearly delineated in the first *Enquiry*, where they occupy different sections: Hume dedicates Section 4 to the negative argument, and Section 5 to the positive argument.

The question that has dominated Hume scholarship on induction is whether his negative argument is causal in nature or has a normative conclusion. On the one hand we have the 'descriptivist' interpretation, which argues that the conclusion of Hume's argument is the causal (or descriptive) one that, in making inferences to the unobserved, there is a step taken by the mind that is not itself caused by further reasoning;² as

¹ The terminology of positive and negative phases originally comes from Stroud (1977).

² A descriptivist cannot simply claim that Hume's intention is to argue that inferences to the unobserved are not caused by reasoning because, as Hume himself notes, all inferences to the unobserved are founded on the Uniformity Principle. Briefly, the Uniformity Principle can be roughly characterised as the thesis that the unobserved will resemble the observed, or as Hume puts it: 'that the future will be conformable to the past' (EHU 4.19). In arguing that the Uniformity Principle is not caused by further reasoning, it does not follow that inferences to the unobserved are not caused by further reasoning, as they could be caused by reasoning that invokes the Uniformity Principle itself. For example, Hume thinks that we can infer regularities from one experiment by reflecting on the

Garrett (1998, p. 184) puts it, ‘reasoning cannot cause the crossing of an inductive gap’. On the other hand we have the ‘normativist’ interpretation, which takes Hume’s conclusion to be a normative one in ruling out some form of justification for inferences to the unobserved; normativist lines can take various forms, such as taking Hume’s argument to deny inductive inferences all forms of justification, internalist forms of justification,³ deductive forms of justification, and so forth.

The most ferocious debates tend to occur between the closest positions, and the same is true of the descriptivist/normativist debate. Descriptive interpretations are often keen to stress that Hume’s negative argument does in fact have tremendous normative significance; Garrett, for example, says:

What [Hume] discovers about reason – which includes his famous conclusion about induction, but considerably more as well – has *enormous* normative epistemic fallout. Hume does, however, wisely defer the *assessment* of that fallout until after he has collected together *all* of his discoveries in the final section of Book 1 of the *Treatise* (and, largely, to the final section of the first *Enquiry* as well). (Garrett 1998, p. 180)

On the other hand, normative readings presuppose some causal explication as well – they often agree that Hume argues that inductive inferences include a step not caused by reason, but maintain that this causal claim has intrinsic normative implications.⁴ Loeb (2006, Section 5), for example, argues that Hume rejects ‘epistemic parasitism’, that is, the thesis that one could be internally epistemically justified by the mere availability of reasoning to a more reflective version of oneself, were one’s reason to be fully exercised in ideal circumstances. Thus, internal justification can only come from reasoning that one actually performs;⁵ denying that the

Uniformity Principle (THN 1.3.8.14). Note that in references to Hume’s texts throughout the paper, ‘THN’ refers to the *Treatise of Human Nature*, ‘EPM’ to the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ‘EHU’ to the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and ‘DNR’ refers to the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Arabic numerals refer to section and paragraph numbers (EPM and EHU), or to book, part, section, and paragraph numbers (THN). SBN numbers refer to pages in the Selby-Bigge and Nidditch editions of the *Treatise* and two *Enquiries*. DNR numbers refer to pages in the Kemp Smith edition of the *Dialogues* (Bobbs-Merill Educational Publishing, 1947). ‘L’ refers to Hume’s *Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh*, with Arabic numerals referring to paragraph numbers. ‘HL’ refers to *The Letters of David Hume*, J.Y.T Greig, ed., 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon press; Roman numerals refer to volume, while Arabic numerals refer to page numbers.

³ Briefly, internal justification is the sort that is available or potentially available to the agent, while external justification is justification that is not available to the agent (even in principle, according to some versions). Internal justification tends to take the forms of mental states (such as ratiocination, perceptions, or intuitions).

⁴ This is similar to how Hume normatively dismisses the legitimacy of certain ideas (such as the idea of external necessary connection, and of a singular self) by examining their causal origin, pointing out that they are not copies of some prior impression.

⁵ This characterisation is not complete, as it fails to allow for non-reasoning based internal states, such as perceptions, intuitions, presuppositions and so forth. Analogous points can be easily made for these cases; Loeb’s central claim is that a denial of epistemic parasitism entails that internal epistemic justification must derive from internal states actually possessed by the agent in question.

presupposition of the Uniformity Principle is caused by reason also denies it a certain form of epistemic justification, at least if one reads ‘reason’ as carrying intrinsic normative significance.^{6,7} Based on this, we can conclude that both parties agree that Hume’s argument has a causal upshot with normative implications, but differ in their reading of Hume’s conclusion in Section 4: descriptivists think his conclusion to be the causal claim, while normativists take the normative ramifications that follow to be Hume’s ultimate conclusion. In short, descriptivists think Hume to emphasise the causal story in his argument, and thus take his conclusion to be correspondingly causal; normativists on the other hand think the causal element merely instrumental with respect to the normative implications, and thus take his conclusion to be correspondingly normative.⁸ The normative and descriptive lines differ more in their assessment of the argument’s *emphasis* than its *content*.⁹

At any rate, disputants in this controversy have by and large ignored Hume’s positive argument, largely confining themselves to intricate debates within the negative argument itself. I believe that this is a mistake, for I think Hume’s positive argument to have significant implications for the interpretation of his negative argument. In this paper, I will argue that Hume’s positive and negative arguments should be read as addressing the same issues, whether normative or causal. I will then focus on the *Enquiry* version of Hume’s positive argument, arguing that it carries a significant normative conclusion: there, Hume argues that custom plays a normative role in justifying our inductive inferences. Given that Hume’s positive argument should be read as

⁶ The same point is made even by those who do not advocate a normative reading of Hume on induction. Loeb (2002, p. 64), who then defended a descriptivist line, also emphasises the fact that Hume’s descriptive accounts of beliefs goes in tandem with his normative claims about these same beliefs. Passmore (1980, p. 62-3) makes the same point: ‘what set out to be a theory of belief, in something like the ordinary sense of the word, has become, with no explicit acknowledgement of that fact, a theory of what it is ‘rational’ to believe’.

⁷ This accommodates seemingly ‘descriptivist’ passages, such as what Millican (2002b) calls ‘Hume’s coda’ in the first *Enquiry*, wherein Hume argues that his conclusion is confirmed by the fact that even infants and beasts can engage in inductive practice despite clearly lacking the cognitive capabilities to produce complicated ratiocination (EHU 5.23). According to this line, Hume is merely confirming his sceptical conclusion by pointing to the impossibility of our inductive beliefs being caused by reason; given the denial of epistemic parasitism, this entails the impossibility of a reliance on reason justifying inductive inferences. Of course, this accommodation is not perfect in light of Hume’s comment that ‘it is not *reasoning* which engages us to suppose the past resembling the future, and to expect similar effects from causes, which are, to appearance, similar. *This is the proposition which I intended to enforce in the present section.*’ (EHU 4.23, emphasis added). A rejoinder: Millican (2012) points out that Johnson’s 1756 dictionary states that ‘reasoning’ is derived from ‘reason’, and defines it as ‘argument’, which is in turn defined as ‘A reason alleged for or against any thing’; as this last definition seems a normative one, Hume’s usage of ‘reasoning’ might therefore be normative.

⁸ An anonymous referee raises the question of why we should read Hume’s negative argument as limited to Section 4, rather than as continuing into Section 12. I think the arguments in Section 4 and 12 are sufficiently self-contained that there is a case to be made for clearly delineating the two; in Section 4, Hume makes a neat and tidy argument for the conclusion that ‘... *the foundation of all conclusions from experience*’ (EHU 4.14) is not reason, and the disagreement between the normativists and descriptivists boil down to the meaning of this *particular* conclusion. Perhaps surprisingly, they can and do often agree substantially about Hume’s overall normative picture; Garrett’s (2007) and Millican’s (2012) views on Hume’s epistemology have substantial similarities, for instance.

⁹ Although, of course, there is considerable disagreement over the details of this normative upshot.

addressing the same issues as his negative argument, we should correspondingly read Hume's negative argument in the *Enquiry* as having a normative conclusion.

2. The Relation of the Positive Argument to the Negative

It will prove helpful to distinguish between two normative readings of Hume's treatment of induction. 'Strongly sceptical' interpretations take the threat of scepticism engendered by Hume's negative argument to be unaddressed by his positive argument. This is to be contrasted with 'weakly sceptical' interpretations, which take Hume's negative argument to rule out some form of justification for induction, only for his positive argument to grant it another type of justification. I take Hume's *Enquiry* argument to be weakly sceptical; strongly sceptical interpretations are untenable because they read the positive and negative phases of Hume's treatment of induction as addressing different issues.¹⁰

Owen (1999) argues that, given Hume's positive solution is meant to complement his negative argument, we should read the former as tackling the same issues as the latter:

If his negative account is as I described it, lacking concern with justification and warrant, then Hume's positive account is right on target... But if the problem is really a problem about justification and warrant, then Hume's solution is hopeless. It makes no mention of warrant or justification and thus completely avoids the allegedly central issue. (Owen 1999, p. 136)

Owen's consideration, if correct, rules out strongly sceptical interpretations, which read Hume's negative argument as normative in nature but take his positive solution to be descriptive.¹¹ In short, if one is to be a

¹⁰ Variants of the 'strongly sceptical' interpretation are defended by Flew (1961), Stove (1973), Winkler (1999) and Millican (2002b). Flew and Stove attribute a 'deductivist' reading of reason to Hume, an interpretation that has been decisively refuted by Millican (1995) and Garrett (1997). Winkler does think that Hume's statement that 'Nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever' (EHU 5.2) grants inductive inference a weakened form of normative endorsement that nevertheless falls short of what Winkler (p. 205) calls 'the love of truth', and Millican (2002b) appeals to coherentist considerations in distinguishing good inductive inferences from bad ones; Millican (2012) later reads EHU 12.3 as claiming that our inductive practices do not require justification. Loeb (2006, 2008) defends an externalist variant of the 'weakly sceptical' interpretation.

¹¹ As mentioned in the previous footnote, Winkler does read Section 5 as carrying a hint of a weakened 'normative insulation' of inductive inferences, but his interpretation is nevertheless strongly sceptical because he thinks this falls far short of an adequate justification for our inductive inferences. Admittedly, Owen's objection is less a problem for Winkler's account because of this, but I find this compromise position (that Hume only grants inductive inferences a weakened form of justification in his positive argument) unconvincing, because of Hume's seeming confidence in both custom and inductive inferences, as I shall point out in the course of this paper. Fogelin (2006) also takes Section 5 to be normative, but takes it to *confirm* Hume's sceptical doubts rather than answer

normativist, one should read Hume's positive solution as providing some form of justification for the Uniformity Principle. I will add that if Owen's reasoning is correct, the converse should hold as well: if we take Hume's positive account to provide justification for inductive inferences, then we should correspondingly read his negative argument as concerned with such justification as well.

It might be objected that, in the absence of textual evidence that clearly indicates Hume to take both phases to address the same issue, the above consideration is insufficient to motivate reading Hume thusly. For example, the proponent of the strongly sceptical interpretation has an answer to Owen's objection, at least so long as it stands unsubstantiated by textual evidence.¹² The rejoinder is that the choice between epistemological justification and causal explanation is a false one, as the two are not mutually exclusive. One may argue that Hume pursues *both* epistemological justification and causal explanation in his negative argument, but finds that reason neither causes nor plays a role in justifying inductive inferences. The objector might then claim that Hume now gives up the search for epistemological justification, since there is none to be found; his project is not quite done, however, as he still has to search for a *causal* explanation of our inductive inferences, to address what *can* be addressed from the negative phase. Hence, Hume's positive argument searches for and finds the causal explanation required in custom. Accordingly, Owen's objector will claim that there is nothing tangential about Hume's positive argument on this reading.

However, there is textual evidence that rules this counter-objection out. Owen misses a trick by 'relying almost exclusively on the *Treatise*' (1999, p. 206), for his point may be pressed by the following passage from the *Enquiry*:

Though we should conclude, for instance, as in the foregoing section, that, in all reasonings from experience, there is a step taken by the mind, which is not supported by any argument or process of the understanding; there is no danger, that these reasonings, on which almost all knowledge depends, will ever be affected by such a discovery. If the mind be not engaged by argument to make this step, *it must be induced by some other principle of equal weight and authority*; and that principle will preserve its influence as long as human nature remains the same. What that principle is, may well be

them, by pointing out that inductive inferences have their root in a mere instinct such as custom. In what follows I will argue that Section 5 is not only normative, but positively so.

¹² I focus on the strongly sceptical interpretation (that takes Hume's negative argument to be normative in nature, while reading his positive argument as purely causal) because the reverse position (that Hume's negative argument is causal, while his positive argument is normative) seems highly implausible.

worth the pains of enquiry. (EHU 5.2; SBN 41, emphasis mine)

Hume here clearly indicates that, in whatever state his negative argument leaves the Uniformity Principle, any threat to our probable reasoning is averted by a ‘principle of equal weight and authority’ to reason, which, as his positive argument will go on to reveal, turns out to be custom. The imagined defender of the sceptical interpretation contends that Hume looks to reason to play a normative as well as causal role in his negative argument, failing which he settles for custom playing a purely causal role in his positive argument. However, if this is so, then custom cannot be a ‘principle of equal weight and authority’ to reason, as it clearly fails in the normative dimension of reason’s expected role. The passage above clearly indicates that whatever we hoped reason to do for probable reasoning, custom does; this seems to rule out those strongly sceptical interpretations that take Hume to expect the two to play different roles. Hume’s positive and negative arguments should therefore be read as addressing the same issues: his concerns (whether normative or causal) with respect to reason are addressed by custom.

Further substantiation for reading both phases as tackling the same issues can be found in Hume’s nomenclature of his sections. Hume names Section 4 (containing his negative argument) ‘Sceptical Doubts’, and titles Section 5 (containing his positive argument) ‘Sceptical Solution of these Doubts’, which naturally suggests that the two sections are meant to address the same issues: whatever ‘sceptical doubts’ raised by the negative argument are at the very least engaged with by the positive ‘solution of these doubts’ (which is admittedly only a ‘sceptical’ solution). The strongly sceptical interpretation is pressured by this consideration, as it is not immediately obvious how a purely descriptive positive argument could be in any way a solution to the sceptical worries raised by the negative argument.

More support for treating the positive and negative phases as addressing the same issues can be found in the negative phase itself, in Section 4:

I shall content myself, **in this section**, with an easy task, and shall pretend only to give a negative answer to the question here proposed [*What is the foundation of all conclusions from experience?*]. (EHU 4.15; SBN 35, boldface added)

What is crucial here is Hume's qualification that he shall content himself with the easy negative task *in this section*; this strongly implies that in another section he will strive to give the harder, positive answer to this question – otherwise, Hume would have omitted this qualification, saying only that 'I shall content myself, with an easy task, and shall pretend only to give a negative answer...'. While Section 4 points out that reason does not answer this question, Section 5 argues that custom *does*; custom would therefore play the same role that reason was expected to.

In what follows, I will argue that Hume's positive account in the *Enquiry* is not merely causal but also normative in nature, in that he thinks a legitimate reliance on custom justifies our inductive inferences. Given that custom is a principle of 'equal weight and authority' to reason, this gives us reason to think that Hume's negative argument also concerns a question of justification above and beyond a causal investigation – Hume finds in his negative argument that an appeal to reason cannot justify our inductive inferences, but finds in his positive argument that a legitimate reliance on custom's truth-conduciveness is able to do so.¹³

Hume's negative argument should therefore be read as having a normative conclusion, contrary to Garrett's (1998) claim that Hume defers his treatment of the normative implications of his negative argument in the *Enquiry* until later in Section 12.¹⁴ Note that in keeping with the denial of epistemic parasitism, both the positive and negative arguments contain causal claims as well: a reliance on reason cannot justify inductive inferences partly because reason does not cause them, and a reliance on custom can only justify inductive inferences because custom does cause them.

Of course, the relevant notion of 'justification' will have to change from the negative phase to the positive; clearly a reliance on custom cannot justify inductive inferences in exactly the same way that a reliance on reason would have (such as via demonstrative or probable arguments). In this way, Hume's argument is weakly sceptical; it denies our inductive inferences some form of justification, though granting them another. This interpretation makes sense of why Hume's positive argument is a 'sceptical solution of these doubts' – it is

¹³ Note that not all operations of custom are epistemically relevant, for example, the suboperations of custom that involve one habitually biting one's nails. Henceforth I use custom to refer to the suboperation of custom that produces inductive inferences, unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁴ I do take Section 12 to be highly relevant to Hume's normative argument in Section 5 by providing the more general normative framework and methodology that Hume's treatment of induction takes place in, as I explain later in this paper. Nevertheless, Hume addresses normative issues in Sections 4 and 5 head on.

both *sceptical* (in denying inductive inferences a form of justification we assumed them to have, that is, reason-based justification) and yet still crucially a *solution* to the problem of how our inductive inferences are justified (in justifying them in a different way, by means of a reliance on the associative mechanism of custom).¹⁵ Custom manages to do the same job that reason was supposed to, even if in by an alternative route, and therefore deserves to be labelled a ‘principle of equal weight and authority’ to reason.

3. The Normative Endorsement of Custom in the *Enquiry*

Hume’s positive argument, when examined at all, has typically been interpreted as descriptive (c.f. Stroud 1977, Owen 1999, and Millican 2002, for example).¹⁶ However, this neglects a clear normative overtone to Hume’s positive argument in the *Enquiry*. Hume begins his positive argument by discussing his ‘academical or sceptical philosophy’, noting that we need not ‘fear, that this philosophy, while it endeavours to limit our enquiries to common life, should ever undermine the reasonings of common life’ (EHU 5.1-2). Hume shortly goes on to point out that even his negative argument does not undermine the reasonings of common life; such undermining is avoided because ‘[i]f the mind be not engaged by argument to make this step, it must be induced by some other principle of equal weight and authority’; Hume then characterises his positive argument as identifying this principle: ‘What that principle is, may well be worth the pains of enquiry’ (EHU 5.2). Hume’s discussion of the fear that his academical philosophy will ‘undermine the reasonings of common life’ suggests that his concern in Section 5 is the normative one of quelling the threat of scepticism; having noted that readers may be fearful of looming scepticism upon encountering his negative argument, Hume goes about assuaging these fears by searching for a principle of ‘equal weight and authority’ to reason which would be capable of dispelling these sceptical clouds, and this principle turns out to be custom. Note the implausibility of the causal reading of ‘undermine the reasonings of common life’ (EHU 5.2). For the causal reading to be true, it would have to be the

¹⁵ Fogelin (2006, p. 99) reads the title of Section 5 differently, emphasising the ‘sceptical’ as the expense of the ‘solution’: ‘In that sense of *solution*, a *sceptical solution* is no solution at all; instead, it is a mere description of the mechanisms that lead the mind to operate as it does’. I think that this does not make adequate sense of Hume’s positive argument being a ‘sceptical solution’; my interpretation explains how Section 5 is a *solution* in a full-blooded sense, despite being sceptical.

¹⁶ A notable exception is Loeb (2006, 2008), who takes custom to provide external justification for inductive inferences. My position is closest to Loeb’s, although I am apprehensive about the anachronism of attributing externalism to Hume, given that early modern epistemology by and large tended to be wholly internalist (Descartes’ foundationalism is a prime example of this). I instead think custom to possess what I call *consequent* justification, which is internalist, and (I argue) has firm textual basis. I will explain this more in the course of this paper.

case that there was at least an inkling of a worry that discovering that our inductive beliefs are not caused by reason would destroy the vivacity or influence (rather than, say, justification) of these beliefs. But this seems wildly implausible; why would a purely causal discovery about the genesis of our inductive beliefs have any impact on their vivacity or influence? Indeed, it seems that only a sceptical worry could cause such a causal discovery to destroy the vivacity or influence of beliefs; if there were a normative worry that our beliefs would be *unjustified* if they did not arise from reason, then this would plausibly result in the destruction of their vivacity or influence. Either way, it seems that Hume's claim regarding the undermining of the reasonings of common life is normative in nature. Therefore, it seems that Hume begins Section 5 by indicating his normative intentions.

Let us more closely examine Hume's claim that '[i]f the mind be not engaged by argument to make this step, it must be induced by some other principle of equal *weight and authority*...' (EHU 5.2, emphasis added). This passage is quite naturally read in a normative way, as claiming that a reliance on custom is as capable of justifying inductive inferences as reason is. However, the matter is not clear-cut, as this passage may also be given a causal reading. Both the terms 'weight' and 'authority' have causal and normative readings. Stating that a principle has weight might be seen as claiming that it has substantial causal influence, but it could also be read as giving a normative endorsement of it (e.g. 'his arguments carried much weight'). And indeed, Hume uses 'weight' in both senses: the causal usage is present in THN 1.3.10.10 and EHU 5.12, while the normative usage is present in THN 1.2.4.17, THN 3.2.10.10, THN 3.3.4.14, and EHU 10.25. Similarly, 'authority' has both a causal and a normative reading. The normative reading of 'authority' is perhaps the most natural, but the OED gives one of the definitions of it as 'power to influence action, opinion, belief'. And indeed, Hume uses the term in both the causal sense (THN 1.3.19.13, A 35, EHU 5.10, EHU 7.11, EHU 7.12, EHU 7.18, and EHU 7.26) and the normative sense (THN Intro 1, THN 1.3.4.2, THN 1.3.13.20, EHU 4.20, EHU 7.24, EHU 9.1, EHU 10.1, and EHU 10.28).¹⁷ Examining Hume's usage of the specific phrase 'weight and authority' delivers similarly ambiguous results. Hume uses the phrase three other times in his work; two of these usages are normative, and one is causal. See EHU 6.4:

¹⁷ Thanks to an anonymous referee for making this point, as well as bringing to my attention the OED definition above and several passages whereby Hume uses 'authority' causally. This has enabled me to develop and improve this section considerably.

Though we give the preference to that which has been found most usual, and believe that this effect will exist, we must not overlook the other effects, but must assign to each of them a particular weight and authority, in proportion as we have found it to be more or less frequent. (EHU 6.4)

Here, in claiming that we ‘must assign’ to outcomes ‘a particular weight and authority’ in proportion to their frequency, Hume seems to be making a normative claim about the appropriate epistemic status of different probable outcomes. The causal reading is implausible here, given that Hume is talking about *assigning* outcomes ‘a particular weight and authority’, which the causal reading would preclude since the causal influence of the idea of an outcome is not something we can control or assign; besides, the ‘must’ Hume uses in the passage seems to be normative rather than causal, given that it is certainly possible for us to be influenced disproportionately to the frequency of different probable outcomes. EHU 8.9 seems similarly normative:

And though virtue and honour be allowed their proper weight and authority, that perfect disinterestedness, so often pretended to, is never expected in multitudes and parties; seldom in their leaders; and scarcely even in individuals of any rank or station. (EHU 8.9; SBN 84)

Again, in saying that ‘virtue and honour be allowed their proper weight and authority’, Hume seems to be stating that virtue and honour have a privileged normative status, rather than that they have a causal influence on us (although of course they should ideally have both, if we are moral). However, THN 2.1.11.19 seems causal:

Popular fame may be agreeable even to a man, who despises the vulgar; but ’tis because their multitude gives them additional weight and authority. (THN 2.1.11.19; SBN 324)

Here the causal reading is more plausible than the normative one; Hume is plausibly read as claiming that popular fame has causal influence even on men who despise the vulgar because of their multitude. In short, examining Hume’s usages of the terms ‘weight’ and ‘authority’ (individually or jointly) is inconclusive.

However, note that Hume makes the claim that a ‘principle of equal weight and authority’ to reason induces the mind to ‘make this step’ to substantiate his claim that the academical philosophy will not undermine the reasonings of common life. As argued earlier, this latter claim seems a normative one; in light of this, there is some pressure to read the former claim involving ‘equal weight and authority’ normatively as well, to make

sense of the fact that Hume cites it in *support* of the latter normative claim. If we read ‘weight and authority’ normatively, it becomes obvious how the one claim substantiates the other: Hume claims that the academical philosophy does not engender scepticism, pointing out that even his negative argument does not threaten the beliefs of common life, as the threat of scepticism is averted by a principle of equal normative significance to reason. If we accept this reading, then the fact that Hume characterises his positive argument as searching for this principle indicates that he is searching for the *justification* for inductive inferences in Section 5, and this justification is found in custom.¹⁸

Such a reading is borne out by an examination of the rest of Section 5, which clearly carries a normative overtone. Hume describes custom as ‘the great guide of human life’, the principle without which ‘we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact, beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses’ (EHU 5.6). Hume also emphasises the normative nature of his investigation when contending that inferences to the unobserved must be grounded in a current memory or sense perception:¹⁹

In a word, if we proceed not upon some fact, present to the memory or senses, our reasonings would be merely hypothetical; and however the particular links might be connected with each other, the whole chain of inferences would have nothing to support it, nor could we ever, by its means, arrive at the **knowledge** of any real existence. **If I ask, why you believe any particular matter of fact, which you relate, you must tell me some reason; and this reason will be some other fact, connected with it.** But as you cannot proceed after this manner, *in infinitum*, you must at last terminate in some fact, which is present to your memory or senses; or must allow that your belief is **entirely without foundation.** (EHU 5.7; SBN 45, boldface added)

Here Hume claims that without being grounded in a current memory or perception, a chain of inferences would not allow us to ‘arrive at the *knowledge* of any real existence’, and knowledge implies justification.²⁰

¹⁸ An anonymous referee notes that the causal reading is substantiated by the fact that Hume follows his claim about custom having equal weight and authority to reason by saying: ‘... and that principle will preserve its influence as long as human nature remains the same’; notably, ‘influence’ is suggestive of a causal rather than normative reading. I concede that this is certainly congenial to the causal reading, but the normative reading can nevertheless accommodate it; plausibly, this statement is an add-on to the normative claim made just before, which would make sense given the close relationship between normative and causal relations, as noted earlier in this paper.

¹⁹ Thanks to Don Garrett for very helpful and extensive discussions on the following passage.

²⁰ Hume follows Locke in thinking knowledge (in a strict and proper sense) to mean ‘assurance arising from the comparison of ideas’ (THN 1.3.11.2), that is, those certain propositions that are relations of ideas. That being said, Hume often uses the term in its more ordinary sense as meaning something like a true justified belief (Gettier worries aside), as evinced here. Clearly Hume does not mean in EHU 5.7 above that our causal beliefs may be knowledge in his strict sense, that is, beliefs regarding relations of ideas.

Furthermore, he claims that we *justify* our inductive inferences by pointing to an associated memory or perception: if you are asked as to why you believe an inductive inference, ‘you must tell me some reason; and this reason will be some other fact, connected with it’. The question of ‘why you believe any particular matter of fact’ is not a causal one: when I ask you why you believe that Bob will not show up tomorrow, I am not asking about the causal processes that lead to such an inference; rather, I am asking what *justification* you have for this belief.²¹ This is further substantiated by Hume’s demanding a *reason* for the inductive belief, which is also suggestive of justification.

Furthermore, Hume’s use of ‘foundation’ in EHU 5.7 above likewise seems normative. Admittedly, Hume’s use of ‘foundation’ in his philosophy can often be read both normatively or causally, but surely this usage cannot be causal; he takes for granted the fact that the inductive belief exists, and everything that exists has a cause, according to the causal maxim (discussed in THN 1.3.3).²² To say that a belief is without foundation is therefore most naturally read as meaning that the belief is unjustified (rather than uncaused). One might object by reading Hume as taking ‘without foundation’ to mean something like ‘unstable’ or ‘lacking in force and vivacity’ in EHU 5.7. This is somewhat substantiated by Hume’s statement that ‘if we proceed not upon some fact, present to the memory or senses, our reasonings would be merely hypothetical’; Hume might be read as simply claiming that our reasonings would lack the vivacity of belief without such a grounding. However, this reading seems unsatisfactory. First, it seems incongruous with the previously noted normative elements in this passage, when Hume talks of ‘knowledge’ and demands ‘reasons’. Moreover, surely a belief about ‘any particular matter of fact’ could be extremely vivacious and stable, despite not terminating in a current memory or perception: for instance, education may produce vivacious beliefs about the unobserved which fail to terminate in a current memory or impression.²³ Hume says that you ‘*must* allow that your belief [regarding any particular matter of fact that does not terminate in the memory or senses] is entirely without foundation’ (EHU 5.7, emphasis mine). His wording rules out the *possibility* of such a belief having *any*

²¹ Of course, I could be asking for both, and indeed if you are epistemically responsible the two will coincide; nevertheless, it seems that my question is primarily (if not solely) concerned with the justificatory aspect.

²² Although Hume is widely considered to subscribe to the causal maxim, there are dissenters to this received view. Harris (2005), for example, denies Hume’s acceptance of this maxim; Millican (2010) powerfully refutes this by citing the *Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh*, wherein Hume takes this maxim to be ‘supported by *moral Evidence*’ (L 26). In a separate letter to John Stewart in 1754, he clearly states: ‘I never asserted so absurd a Proposition as that any thing might arise without a Cause’ (HL i 187).

²³ Also, mistaken memories can feel every bit as forceful and vivacious as real memories; however, it is debatable whether a mistaken memory is present to one’s memory: is memory a success faculty?

foundation at all, which is difficult to reconcile with the above reading of ‘without foundation’ as meaning unstable or lacking in vivacity, since it seems at least possible that such an ungrounded belief about ‘any particular matter of fact’ could be vivacious and stable.

It may be objected that in EHU 5.7, Hume is merely claiming that the normative status of a belief is contingent upon its being connected to a current impression or memory, rather than providing any normative endorsement of custom *per se*. However, the current impression or memory is linked to the belief regarding the unobserved *by means of custom*; it is not merely the existence of the current impression or memory *but also its appropriate connection to the inductive belief* that justifies it. After all, if the two components were not related in any way whatsoever, the inductive belief would not be justified; even if they were connected, this would not provide adequate foundation for the inductive belief if such a connection were merely random. The inductive belief has to be linked to a current memory or impression in a systematic and consistent way to be justified, and custom facilitates this. Therefore it seems that custom is justificatorily relevant here.

This passage might also be seen to support the normativist line with respect to the negative phase more directly. Hume’s question in his negative argument in the *Enquiry* is: ‘*What is the foundation of all conclusions from experience?*’ (EHU 4.14). If in EHU 5.7 Hume indeed uses ‘foundation’ in a normative sense, as I argued above, this suggests a correspondingly normative usage of it in the negative phase of his argument; in short, Hume’s negative argument rules out reason as a normative foundation for inductive inferences. Of course, Hume uses the term ‘foundation’ in a myriad of ways in his work, but it seems reasonable to take him to use the term consistently within the same argument (albeit in different phases of it).

Continuing our survey of Section 5, Hume confirms his normative intentions in his conclusion of this section, favourably comparing custom with reason in a normative way:

Here, then, is a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas; and though the powers and forces, by which the former is governed, be wholly unknown to us; yet our thoughts and conceptions have still, we find, gone on in the same train with the other works of nature. Custom is that principle, by which this correspondence has been effected; so necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct, in every circumstance and occurrence of human life. Had not the presence of an object instantly excited the idea of those objects, commonly conjoined with it, all our knowledge must have been limited to the narrow sphere of

our memory and senses; and we should never have been able to adjust means to ends, or employ our natural powers, either to the producing of good, or avoiding of evil. (EHU 5.21; SBN 54-5)

Here Hume is pointing out that custom has been found to reliably track the course of nature, and we are therefore justified in relying on it.²⁴ Hume continues in the same vein shortly after:

I shall add, for a further confirmation of the foregoing theory, that, as this operation of the mind, by which we infer like effects from like causes, and *vice versa*, is so essential to the subsistence of all human creatures, it is not probable, that it could be trusted to the fallacious deductions of our reason, which is slow in its operations; appears not, in any degree, during the first years of infancy; and at best is, in every age and period in human life, extremely liable to error and mistake. It is more conformable to the ordinary wisdom of nature to secure so necessary an act of the mind, by some instinct or mechanical tendency, which may be infallible in its operations, may discover itself at the first appearance of life and thought, and may be independent of all the laboured deductions of the understanding. (EHU 5.22; SBN 55)

The operations of reason have been found to be ‘fallacious’, which might be seen to rule out our legitimately relying on them for something as crucial as our inductive beliefs.²⁵ On the other hand, the ‘instinct or mechanical tendency’ of custom ‘may be²⁶ infallible in its operations’.²⁷

All in all, it clearly seems as though Hume’s tone in Section 5 is on the whole unambiguously normative; Hume clearly seems to provide an endorsement of custom, suggesting that he sees a legitimate

²⁴ Passmore (1980, p. 147) thinks this passage ironic and therefore unrepresentative of Hume’s beliefs due to Hume’s rather sardonic reference to ‘pre-established harmony’. However, it seems quite clear that while Hume’s phrasing is ironic, his underlying point that custom reliably tracks the world is not.

²⁵ Hume is needlessly hyperbolic here, as he cannot mean that reason is completely unreliable, given he happily employs it in his philosophy. Rather, his point is that reason is, compared with custom, relatively liable to error and mistake; between the two, custom is the much more reliable foundation for inductive beliefs.

²⁶ Hume’s hedging of the proposition with the words ‘may be’ causes Passmore (1980, p. 147) to doubt that Hume genuinely endorses it, but Hume also prefaces his other claims regarding custom in this sentence with ‘may be’, and these are clearly things he holds true (such as custom being independent of the understanding, and being present from the first appearance of life and thought).

²⁷ In correspondence, Don Garrett points out that ‘infallible in its operations’ might be read as lauding custom’s causal reliability rather than its truth-conduciveness; the key question is whether Hume is contrasting this quality of custom with reason’s producing ‘fallacious deductions’ (vs custom’s being *infallible* in its operations), or reason’s being ‘slow *in its operations*’ (vs custom’s being infallible *in its operations*). I concede the plausibility of the causal reading, but EHU 5.21 nevertheless stresses the truth-conduciveness of custom, as I argued earlier. If the causal reading of EHU 5.22 is right (and I am not saying it is), perhaps Hume did not want to repeat himself in the space of two consecutive paragraphs, and decided to stress other advantages custom enjoys over reason in EHU 5.22.

reliance on custom as being the justificatory basis for inductive beliefs, which is why his positive argument is a ‘sceptical solution’ to the doubts raised by his negative argument.²⁸

4. The Direction of Normative Explanation

Despite Hume’s normative endorsement of custom in his positive argument, it may nevertheless be maintained that this endorsement is not intended to provide justification for inductive inferences. Here are two plausible grounds for this denial: perhaps it is a trust in our inductive beliefs that justifies custom rather than vice versa, or perhaps they are both justified by our legitimate reliance on our faculties. In dismissing these two possibilities, I will further flesh out my account of custom’s normative role. I argue that custom normatively grounds our inductive beliefs in the same way that the virtues ground moral actions. Furthermore, I claim that the type of justification possessed by custom is consequent justification, that is, justification deriving from being approved by our faculties (which are themselves accorded *prima facie* but defeasible authority).

a. Reversing the Direction of Normative Explanation

A descriptivist who wishes to accommodate Hume’s normative endorsements of custom may attempt to reverse the direction of normative explanation and argue that, instead of citing custom as the justificatory basis for inductive beliefs, Hume instead takes for granted that inductive beliefs are justified, and concludes that whatever causes them must therefore be similarly justified.²⁹ The descriptivist would then be free to claim that Hume’s negative argument does not concern justification, since Hume already takes for granted that our inductive beliefs are justified. This is somewhat supported by passages wherein Hume makes clear that he assumes inductive inferences to be justified:

I shall allow, if you please, that the one proposition [*I foresee, that other objects, which are, in appearance, similar, will be attended with similar effects*] may justly be inferred from the other [*I have found that such an object has always been attended with such an effect*]: I know in fact, that it always is inferred. (EHU 4.16; SBN 34)

²⁸ Note that this reliance on custom need not be an explicit one. We do not have to deliberately decide to rely on custom for us to rely on it, no more than we have to deliberately decide to breathe in order to breathe. In trusting our capacity to make sound inductive inferences, we are implicitly relying on custom.

²⁹ Thanks to Don Garrett for pressing this point to me.

Though we should conclude... that, in all reasonings from experience, there is a step taken by the mind, which is not supported by any argument or process of the understanding; there is no danger, that these reasonings, on which almost all knowledge depends, will ever be affected by such a discovery. (EHU 5.2; SBN 42)

However, these passages do not contradict my claim that Hume thinks inductive beliefs to be justified by a legitimate reliance on custom. For we can read Hume's negative argument as asking not *whether* inductive inferences are justified (which is granted in his discussion), but rather *how* they are justified. Assuming their justification, Hume finds in Section 4 that a reliance on reason does not justify our inductive inferences; in Section 5, Hume then finds that a legitimate reliance on custom does. Holding the assumption that inductive beliefs are justified is not to assume that they are justified *by default*; we can (and should!) still ask *in virtue of what* they are so. Indeed, Hume does exactly this in his ethical theory when he assumes that certain acts are morally good, but investigates what grounds this goodness. He finds the answer to be that they are good in virtue of indicating an underlying disposition: 'Actions are, indeed, better indications of a character than words, or even wishes and sentiments; but 'tis only so far as they are such indications, that they are attended with love or hatred, praise or blame' (THN 3.3.1.5). This is not dissimilar to the way I read Hume's positive argument: assuming that inductive inferences are justified, he searches for the grounds of this justification, which is also an underlying disposition (that is, custom).

Indeed, we can draw further parallels with Hume's moral theory.³⁰ Occurrent beliefs, like actions, are too transient to be the source of epistemic normativity – a lively idea is insufficiently enduring to be able to elicit the sentiments of approbation or blame which Hume thinks to form the basis of normative evaluation. Actions are unfit as the proper subjects of moral appraisal precisely because they are not durable enough to have an influence on human sentiments:

If any *action* be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character. Actions themselves, not proceeding from any constant principle, have no influence on love or hatred, pride or humility; and consequently are

³⁰ There is a tradition of drawing significant parallels between Hume's moral and epistemic accounts, notably Ridge (2003) and Owen (1999). Nevertheless, there are significant differences between the parallels we draw. Ridge and Owen argue that Hume thinks beliefs to be justified in virtue of their usefulness and agreeableness, while I argue that Hume (at least in the *Enquiry*) thinks the justification of beliefs to be intimately related to truth-conduciveness, rather than usefulness or agreeableness. I think the situation is much less clear in the *Treatise*.

never consider'd in morality.... We are never to consider any single action in our enquiries concerning the origin of morals; but only the quality or character from which the action proceeded. These alone are *durable* enough to affect our sentiments concerning the person. (THN 3.3.1.4-5; SBN 575)

Presumably, for something to be the grounds of epistemic assessment, it must similarly have an influence on human sentiments – otherwise, where would the normativity come from?³¹ Since occurrent beliefs are vivacious ideas and therefore impermanent in nature, they are not durable enough to have an influence on human sentiments, and it seems doubtful that Hume would consider them the proper subjects of epistemic evaluation – although they are of course epistemically evaluable, they can only be derivatively so, insofar as they indicate an underlying disposition. When we epistemically assess a person, we should do so on the basis of the nature of his belief-forming dispositions, rather than on the basis of the beliefs themselves.³² Meanwhile, the associative belief-forming disposition that is custom is certainly durable, and is therefore an appropriate proper subject of epistemic evaluation.

Moreover, custom seems directly analogous to the moral virtues with respect to its causal role, which suggests that it might play a similar normative role to the virtues; given epistemic justification requires a causal connection (in keeping with a denial of epistemic parasitism), a parallel causal relation suggests a parallel normative relation.³³ In the moral case, Hume takes the virtues to be the proper subjects of moral approbation and blame, insofar as we morally evaluate a person with respect to these qualities. Virtues seem to be dispositions to occurrent actions: generosity, justice, allegiance, and industry (EPM 9.12) are dispositions to perform certain actions with certain motives (such as donating to the poor, upholding the law, loyal behaviour,

³¹ The details of these epistemically relevant sentiments is somewhat orthogonal to my purposes in this paper, but ‘curiosity, or the love of truth’ (THN 2.3.10) seems a likely candidate, as does an uneasiness at discovering one’s beliefs are false (thus motivating one to ensure the truth of her beliefs).

³² Loeb (2002) argues that Humean beliefs are best read as dispositional despite the fact that Hume’s official theory treats them as occurrent, but nevertheless agrees that ‘[t]he justificatory status of a belief derives from the justificatory status of the mechanism that produces it’ (p. 13). Marusic (2010) argues that such a dispositional reading would render beliefs unable to perform the causal roles Hume thinks them to, and therefore rejects Loeb’s view that Hume’s fundamental commitment is to a dispositional account of beliefs.

³³ Of course, a parallel causal relation does not *entail* a parallel normative relation: Hume famously points out that a young tree that overgrows and kills its parent is not culpable of patricide (THN 3.1.1.24). This is because of the fact that trees lack characters, which are the basis on which agents are morally evaluated (THN 3.3.1.4-5). Hume’s point in this passage is not that causal relations and normative relations are entirely unrelated; rather, he is arguing against Samuel Clarke’s strong claim that the fitness or unfitness of actions derive from individuals standing in certain relations which correspond to *eternal* and *necessary* relations which determine moral worth. Hume only denies the claim that parallel causal relations *entail* parallel normative relations, but this is entirely consistent with him thinking there to be some contingent connection between the two. And indeed, given that our sentiments (which dictate moral worth) will in general respond to the same kinds of stimuli (e.g. similar kinds of individuals and similar relations between them), Hume should hold such a view.

or working assiduously), for instance.³⁴ Analogously, custom is the associative disposition that produces inductive beliefs (among other things): ‘All inferences from experience, therefore, are effects of custom’ (EHU 5.5). In the moral case, what normatively grounds occurrent actions are the durable dispositions that produce them; it therefore seems very plausible that in the epistemic case, what normatively grounds occurrent inductive beliefs is also the durable disposition that produces them, that is, custom. Insofar as we think Hume’s account of epistemic normativity to be analogous to his account of moral normativity, we have strong reason to think that custom grounds the justification of our inductive beliefs in the same way that virtues ground the justification of our actions; custom seems to be a key element of our epistemic character in the same way that virtues and vices are key elements of our moral character. Therefore, it seems that the direction of normative explanation should flow from custom to beliefs, rather than vice versa.³⁵

b. *Prima Facie* Authority and Consequent Justification

Alternatively, the descriptivist might defend his account by arguing that custom and inductive beliefs are both justified by our legitimate reliance on the faculties; it is therefore not the case that Hume is looking to a legitimate reliance on custom to justify our inductive beliefs in his positive argument. Hume dismisses antecedent scepticism (that is, scepticism that questions even our faculties) precisely because he thinks us unable to obtain any knowledge without employing our faculties, which suggests that he accords our faculties with *prima facie* authority (c.f. Garrett 2007):

There is a species of scepticism, *antecedent* to all study and philosophy... It recommends a universal doubt, not only of all our former opinions and principles, but also of our very faculties of whose veracity, say they, we must assure ourselves, by a chain of reasoning, deduced from some original principle, which cannot possibly be fallacious or deceitful. But neither is there any such original principle, which has a prerogative above others, that are self-evident and convincing: **Or if there were, could we advance a step beyond it, but by the use of those very faculties, of which we are supposed to be already diffident.** The Cartesian doubt, therefore, were it ever possible to be attained by any human creature (as it plainly is not) would be entirely incurable; and no reasoning could ever bring us to a state of assurance

³⁴ For the purposes of this paper, I take dispositions to refer to their causal bases; I do not wish to reify dispositions by taking them as entities in their own rights.

³⁵ This account is incomplete as it stands, as it does not tell us what kind of justification our inductive beliefs enjoy. I will attempt to explain this issue in the next section, and complete the account (or at least render it less incomplete).

and conviction upon any subject. (EHU 12.3; SBN 149-50, boldface added)

Here Hume certainly seems to be granting the faculties *prima facie* authority: he makes the point that we can only advance beyond some mythical self-evident original principle ‘by the use of those faculties, of which we are supposed to be already diffident’ (EHU 12.3). Hume rejects antecedent scepticism, according our faculties *prima facie* (although not indefeasible) authority. With this in mind, the descriptivist might claim that it is a legitimate reliance on the faculties that justifies both our inductive beliefs and the operation of custom, rather than a legitimate reliance on custom justifying inductive beliefs. Therefore, Hume is not providing justification for inductive beliefs when he endorses custom in his positive argument, and correspondingly his negative argument does not intend to deny them any kind of justification either.

Even on this picture, it is unclear that custom does not play a role in the justification of inductive inferences: after all, the faculties might be thought to justify beliefs only through the operation of custom. Custom is the operation by which the faculties cause inductive beliefs, and without such a causal connection, a reliance on the faculties would do nothing to justify our inductive beliefs; thus, it seems reasonable to think that a legitimate reliance on custom plays a crucial role in the justification of inductive beliefs, even if it is the faculties that are the ultimate source of epistemic authority.³⁶

In any case, I think that it is not *prima facie* authority that a legitimate reliance on custom confers to inductive inferences, but consequent justification; the issue of *prima facie* authority is therefore somewhat orthogonal to Hume’s positive argument in Section 5. *Prima facie* authority is surely not the complete story, for it comes too cheaply: it fails to allow for how we can hold some operations of the faculties to be *unjustified*. Rather, it is only a starting point for Hume in that it gives us some way to begin our epistemic enquiries, but being as fragile as it is, it is not what ultimately matters. The considered normative status of the faculties will be determined by whether they prove themselves worthy by lights of our faculties themselves; if the *prima facie* authority of the faculties is found to lack defeating considerations, the faculties will be accorded consequent

³⁶ Indeed, Millican (2012) goes further, reading EHU 12.3 as stating that our inductive practices needs no justification, rather than as justifying this practice via the faculties or their operations. I disagree with Millican in thinking that *prima facie* justification is what ultimately matters; as I go on to argue, it is but a first step in Hume’s epistemic roadmap.

justification.³⁷ In investigating this further, we will find that a legitimate reliance on custom justifies our inductive beliefs in virtue of the consequent justification that custom possesses – what justifies inductive inferences is our legitimate reliance on custom, and this reliance is legitimate precisely because custom is consequently justified.

This reflexive process of justification (whereby the faculties possess consequent justification by judging themselves fit) is highlighted by Hume’s consequent scepticism, which is engendered by the failure of some of our faculties to pass this reflexive test:³⁸

There is another species of scepticism, *consequent* to science and enquiry, when men are supposed to have discovered, either the absolute fallaciousness of their mental faculties, or their unfitness to reach any fixed determination in all those curious subjects of speculation, about which they are commonly employed. (EHU 12.5; SBN 150)

Such a form of scepticism casts doubt on those faculties that have been found to be fallacious upon investigation by our faculties themselves. Where does such scepticism leave us? Say we have found that reason and the imagination have tended to produce mixed results, on the whole: they generate largely good beliefs, but they also generate some bad beliefs. Two options present themselves: we can dismiss our faculties wholesale, or we can distinguish between good and bad operations of the faculties.

These two approaches are borne out in the two forms of consequent scepticism that Hume examines: ‘excessive’ or ‘Pyrrhonian’ scepticism on the one hand, and ‘mitigated’ or ‘Academical’ scepticism on the other. Both these versions of scepticism recommend differing responses to the mixed results of the faculties.³⁹ Excessive scepticism takes such mixed results to be reason to question all faculties and instincts, including the suboperation of custom concerned with inductive inference:

...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

³⁷ Is this not a circular justification? Hume points out that we cannot have any other; the alternative is to embrace antecedent scepticism, which Hume clearly recoils from. Such circularity is unavoidable if we are to make any progress in our epistemic endeavours.

³⁸ In this way there is an element of truth to ‘reflexivity’ interpretations such as Baier (1991) and Korsgaard (1996), although they give it a much more prominent role than I do: as Baier puts it, ‘*Successful reflexivity is normativity*’ (pp. 99-100).

³⁹ Of course, excessive and mitigated scepticism differ in other ways; I focus on this difference in this paper, because I think it best clarifies Hume’s normative appeal to custom in Section 5.

certain instinct of our nature; which it is indeed difficult to resist, *but which, like other instincts, may be fallacious and deceitful*. (EHU 12.22; SBN 159, emphasis added)⁴⁰

Here custom is dismissed as an adequate grounding for our inductive inferences not because it has been found fallacious, but simply because *other* instincts have been found unfit, and so there is a risk that custom may be fallacious and deceitful as well; the *only* reason Hume (playing the role of a Pyrrhonian sceptic) gives to doubt custom here is that other instincts are fallacious. In short, according to excessive scepticism, if some instincts are bad, there should be a presupposition that *all* instincts are bad. Hume quickly dismisses such scepticism, because it is psychologically untenable: ‘Nature is always too strong for principle’ (EHU 12.23).

Hume instead endorses mitigated scepticism, which in one form encourages diffidence in our opinions, but in another form encourages us to limit the scope of our enquiries:

Another species of *mitigated* scepticism, which may be of advantage to mankind, and which may be the natural result of the Pyrrhonian doubts and scruples, is the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding. (EHU 12.25; SBN 162)

This form of scepticism encourages us to limit our enquiries to the matters that are ‘best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding’. This can be read as a response to the excessive sceptic, who doubts *all* instincts merely because some have proven fallacious; the natural and correct reply is not to dismiss all instincts, but to carefully align our enquiries with those that *haven’t* proven fallacious, and indeed have proven reliable and truth-conducive, that is, ‘the narrow capacity of human understanding’. Instead of throwing out a basket of apples because of a few rotten ones, we should instead pick out and set aside those apples which are still fresh. Mitigated scepticism spurns the ‘undistinguished doubts’ (EHU 12.24) of Pyrrhonism, which does not distinguish between good and bad operations of the faculties; instead, it corrects such doubts ‘by common

⁴⁰ Winkler (1999) reads EHU 12.22 differently, taking it to prove Hume’s inductive scepticism. Winkler argues that although Hume dismisses excessive scepticism, ‘he does not quarrel with the truth of the argument’s conclusion’ (p. 196), noting that Hume thinks that mankind is unable ‘to satisfy themselves concerning the foundation of these operations, or to remove the objections, which may be raised against them’ (EHU 12.23). I think that such a reading fails to appreciate the extent to which excessive scepticism is a *methodology* rather than simply a ‘set of doctrines or truths’, as Stroud (1999) rightly points out (Stroud calls it a ‘way of life’, p. 241). If we adopt such a philosophical methodology of doubting instincts ‘by analogy’, as it were, then such doubts would indeed be unanswerable, as Hume notes in the passage Winkler cites. Luckily, Hume does not adopt this methodology, nor does he think such a methodology to be adoptable. From the point of view of Hume’s own methodology of mitigated scepticism, such ‘doubts by analogy’ do not even arise, and do not require answering.

sense and reflection' (*ibid.*), trusting the good operations and abandoning speculation resulting from bad operations, such as the operations of the imagination when unrestrained by custom:

The *imagination* of man is naturally sublime, delighted with whatever is remote and extraordinary, and running, without controul, into the most distant parts of space and time in order to avoid the objects, which custom has rendered too familiar to it. A correct *Judgment* observes a contrary method, and avoiding all distant and high enquiries, confines itself to common life, and to such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience. (EHU 12.25; SBN 162)

Mitigated sceptics such as Hume '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' (EHU 12.25); careful reflection on the various strengths and weaknesses of our faculties allows us to restrict our enquiries to those that result from reliable rather than unreliable, justified rather than unjustified operations.

Let me restate my case in a way that will more clearly bring out the normative role of the operations and suboperations of the faculties in delivering consequent justification. In response to the discovery that some faculties generate mixed results, excessive scepticism recommends a wholesale presumption of their untrustworthiness, but mitigated scepticism is more subtle in its approach. Mitigated scepticism investigates *why* these faculties sometimes generate good beliefs and generate bad beliefs at other times. This requires us to pursue a more fine-grained investigation, given that simply examining the faculties generates unclear results. To adequately cash out a normative theory, we need to distinguish between the differing operations (and indeed suboperations, if we need to further fine-tune our investigation) of our faculties, and determine good ones from bad. Where a mechanism produces bad beliefs (such as the suboperation of custom⁴¹ that concerns education), we strip this dysfunctional operation of its derivative *prima facie* authority.⁴² But where an operation produces good beliefs (such as the suboperation of custom that concerns inductive inferences), we grant it *consequent* justification, and so are able to legitimately rely on such an operation in trusting the resulting beliefs it

⁴¹ As previously indicated, I typically use custom to refer to the suboperation of custom that concerns inductive inferences unless otherwise indicated. Here I am indicating otherwise: in this paragraph, I use custom more broadly to encompass operations such as education. I revert to my typical usage after this paragraph.

⁴² Examine, for instance, Hume's treatment of education: he says that 'its maxims are frequently contrary to reason, and even to themselves in different times and places...' (THN 1.3.9.19).

produces.⁴³ The generation of false beliefs gives us reason to strip certain suboperations of their *prima facie* justification, but note that the generation of true beliefs does not *grant* justification to our epistemic suboperations – the generation of good beliefs is merely a *sign* that the relevant suboperation is justified, rather than the source of its justification. Again, a comparison with the moral case is useful: we judge a disposition to be morally justified if it generates useful and agreeable actions, but it still remains that these dispositions normatively ground our actions rather than vice versa.

So much for Hume's normative framework in Section 12. But does he consciously tie in this framework with his positive argument in Section 5? There is no doubting that Hume's positive argument should be read in light of his mitigated scepticism.⁴⁴ Hume begins Section 5 by discussing the 'ACADEMIC or SCEPTICAL philosophy', which 'endeavours to limit our enquiries to common life' (EHU 5.1-2). This is clearly a forward reference to Section 12, particularly the brand of mitigated scepticism that limits the scope of our enquiries (which Hume refers to as the '*academical* philosophy' in EHU 12.24). Moreover, Hume explicitly points out that this species of philosophy will not 'undermine the reasonings of common life' (EHU 5.2). He points out that even his negative argument does not lead to such an undermining, because a principle of 'equal weight and authority' to reason will play the role reason was expected to play, and Hume's positive argument concerns the discovery of this principle. This reveals several things. First, as previously noted in Section 3 of this paper, Hume's discussing the worry of the undermining of the reasonings of common life suggests that his concern in his positive argument is the normative one of quelling the threat of scepticism. Moreover, Hume characterises both his negative and positive arguments as a part of his '*academical* philosophy'; given his positive argument concerns quelling the sceptical threat, this is excellent evidence that Hume thinks his argument in Section 5 to be a consequent justification of our inductive beliefs through the methodology of mitigated scepticism, thus avoiding undermining the 'reasonings of common life' (of which inductive inferences constitute a large

⁴³ There is an interesting question of how finely grained our individuation of the operations of the faculties should be, but it seems plausible that the suboperation of custom that concerns inductive inferences can be uncontroversially distinguished from the suboperation of custom that concerns education; education confers vivacity by repetition, while inductive beliefs gain their vivacity by having it transferred by a current belief or memory, among other differences.

⁴⁴ This is not to say that Section 5 does not stand on its own. Rather, Section 5 has a self-sufficient argument with the normative conclusion that a legitimate reliance on custom justifies our inductive inferences. Section 12 gives the more general framework and apparatus 'behind the scenes' of the argument of Section 5, as it were.

portion). In short, there is significant evidence that the normative apparatus of Section 12 sees application in Hume's positive argument.

The interpretation of Hume's positive argument that I propose is this: Hume argues that custom causes our inductive inferences, and points out that this suboperation possesses consequent justification because it has proven itself to be truth-conducive and reliable; in virtue of this consequent justification, our reliance on custom is legitimate, and thus is able to justify our inductive beliefs. On pain of repeating my argument in Section 3 of this paper, the conclusion of Section 5 of the *Enquiry* certainly seems like a consequent justification of custom:

Here, then, is a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas; and though the powers and forces, by which the former is governed, be wholly unknown to us; yet our thoughts and conceptions have still, we find, gone on in the same train with the other works of nature. Custom is that principle, by which this correspondence has been effected; so necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct, in every circumstance and occurrence of human life. Had not the presence of an object instantly excited the idea of those objects, commonly conjoined with it, all our knowledge must have been limited to the narrow sphere of our memory and senses; and we should never have been able to adjust means to ends, or employ our natural powers,

I shall add, for a further confirmation of the foregoing theory, that, as this operation of the mind, by which we infer like effects from like causes, and *vice versa*, is so essential to the subsistence of all human creatures, it is not probable, that it could be trusted to the fallacious deductions of our reason, which is slow in its operations; appears not, in any degree, during the first years of infancy; and at best is, in every age and period in human life, extremely liable to error and mistake. It is more conformable to the ordinary wisdom of nature to secure so necessary an act of the mind, by some instinct or mechanical tendency, which may be infallible in its operations, may discover itself at the first appearance of life and thought, and may be independent of all the laboured deductions of the understanding. (EHU 5.21-22; SBN 54-5)

These two concluding paragraphs of Section 5 strikes one as an extolling of custom's truth-conduciveness: Hume notes that custom reliably tracks the course of nature in EHU 5.21, and praises its being 'infallible in its operations' in EHU 5.22. This is a *consequent* rather than *prima facie* justification of custom: Hume normatively endorses custom because it has been found by investigation to be truth-conducive. In short, the 'instinct or mechanical tendency' of custom has been consequently found to be an extremely reliable operation;

it therefore enjoys consequent justification, and is a suitable normative grounding for our inductive inferences. Hume's positive argument seems to have a clearly normative conclusion: our legitimate reliance on custom (which is legitimate precisely because of custom's being consequently justified) justifies our inductive inferences.

One might accuse such an account of being circular: Hume is ultimately justifying inductive inferences by means of an inductive investigation regarding the reliability of our faculties, and so is begging the question against the sceptic. But the whole point of Hume's treatment of antecedent scepticism in EHU 12.3 is to show that we cannot but trust our faculties (including the suboperation of custom concerned with inductive inferences) if we are to hope for epistemic progress. This might not convince the incorrigible sceptic, but it is not Hume's job to do so: 'Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this *total* scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavour'd by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and render'd unavoidable' (THN 1.4.1.7); nature, which is 'too strong for principle' (EHU 12.23) will bring such a creature crashing back down to join the rest of us in common life.

c. Miscellaneous Loose Ends

In this subsection, I will tie up some loose ends. First, I discuss Winkler's (1999) textual evidence that Hume remains an inductive sceptic in Section 12; second, I discuss where Hume falls on the internalism/externalism spectrum; third, I discuss the consequences my interpretation has on Hume's negative argument.

i. Hume's Endorsement of Strong Inductive Scepticism in Section 12

First, it might be thought that Hume remains sceptical about inductive inferences even from the viewpoint of mitigated scepticism. Winkler (1999, p. 196-7) draws this conclusion from the following passage:

But they [those who have a propensity to philosophy] will never be tempted to go beyond common life, so long as they consider the imperfection of those faculties which they employ, their narrow reach, and their inaccurate operations. 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).

I do not think that Hume is here expressing scepticism about inductive inferences; rather, he is merely alluding to the fact that we cannot go beyond original principles in our philosophising regarding the causes of our inductive beliefs, pointing to his own inability to give the ultimate psychological cause for our inductive reasoning in his positive argument:

... this propensity [that produces inductive inferences] is the effect of *Custom*. By employing that word, we pretend not to have given the ultimate reason of such a propensity... Perhaps, we can push our enquiries no farther, or pretend to give the cause of this cause; but must rest contented with it as the ultimate principle, which we can assign, of all our conclusions from experience. It is sufficient satisfaction, that we can go so far; without repining at the narrowness of our faculties, because they will carry us no farther. (EHU 5.5; SBN 43).

That this inability to go beyond original principles such as custom is what Hume is alluding to when he says that ‘we cannot give a satisfactory reason, why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall, or fire burn’ is confirmed by Hume’s pointing to the ‘narrowness of our faculties’ as the reason for our inability to give deeper explanations above and beyond original principles such as custom in EHU 5.5, which resonates with his referring to the ‘narrow reach’ of our faculties as the explanation for why cannot give a satisfactory reason for our inductive beliefs in EHU 12.25. Hume’s point in EHU 12.25 is simply this: given that we cannot even give the ultimate cause of ‘why we believe’ inductive inferences in our best philosophy (having to make do by pointing to the associative propensity that is custom), is it not rather pointless to speculate on the origin of worlds, or the situation of nature? This passage therefore does not express any scepticism about induction, contrary to Winkler’s reading. Rather, it expresses Hume’s mitigated scepticism (as makes sense, given that this passage occurs in an extended discussion of mitigated scepticism): in recognising the limits of our faculties, we should confine our philosophical enquiries to the topics best suited to the narrow reach of our faculties, rather than pretending to hypotheses beyond original principles.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ An anonymous referee raises the thought that Hume endorses Pyrrhonian scepticism in this passage, citing Hume’s claim that ‘nothing can be more serviceable, than to be once thoroughly convinced of the force of the PYRRHONIAN doubt’ (EHU 12.25). I think the context makes clear that Hume is here endorsing Pyrrhonian doubt only instrumentally, insofar as being once convinced of it will facilitate our becoming mitigated sceptics, as he notes in EHU 12.24; this is why he only endorses our *once* being convinced of such doubt.

To further press home the point, we can look at an analogous passage in Hume's *Dialogues*, where Hume makes exactly the same point, but with a non-inductive example:

When the coherence of the parts of a stone, or even that composition of parts, which renders it extended; when these familiar objects, I say, are so inexplicable, and contain circumstances so repugnant and contradictory; with what assurance can we decide concerning the origin of worlds, or trace their history from eternity to eternity? (DNR 131-2)

Here Hume is clearer that his worry is with the inability of philosophy to explain even the mundane, rather than expressing a skeptical worry; he is not doubting that a stone is extended or composed by parts, but merely stating our inability to give an adequate descriptive explanation for even such mundane facts. Similarly, in EHU 12.25, Hume is not doubting the justification of our inductive inferences, but rather is simply recognising our inability to give a deeper descriptive explanation than the associative propensity of custom as the causal basis for our formation of inductive beliefs (that is, a more satisfactory answer to the question of 'why we believe... that a stone will fall, or fire burn'). If even these familiar objects 'are so inexplicable', how can we delve deeply into matters beyond the reach of ordinary life with any assurance? In short, Hume does not express scepticism about induction in EHU 12.25, but merely states the limits of philosophy in accordance with mitigated scepticism, pointing to its inability to derive a deeper causal explanation than custom due to the 'narrow reach' of our faculties.

ii. *Internalist or Externalist?*

Second, a brief note on where Hume falls on the internalism/externalism spectrum. The account I attribute to Hume is unashamedly internalist, contrary to Loeb's (2002, 2006, 2008, 2011) externalist interpretation. Despite this, it still manages to avoid the objection of 'Justificatory Elitism'. The objection can be stated as follows: internal justification must be available to the agent, but many agents are remarkably unreflective; therefore, there is a worry that an internalist account cannot adequately justify the inductive beliefs of the common man, and such an account will be strongly sceptical for the intellectual *hoi polloi*.⁴⁶ I argue that the

⁴⁶ Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this objection, allowing me to significantly clarify and develop my thoughts on the matter.

account I attribute to Hume – although wholly internalist – avoids this objection, as it allows for the inductive beliefs of the common man to be justified both at the *prima facie* and consequent level.

First, the epistemic account I attribute to Hume is clearly internalist. Recall that our inductive beliefs are justified by our (implicit or explicit) reliance on custom. This reliance on custom is a state that is available to the agent; surely all agents know (at least implicitly) that they are relying on their capacity to form inductive beliefs when they trust their inductive inferences, even if they do not think of the relevant propensity as ‘custom’ specifically. The question is whether this reliance on custom is itself justified. We need to distinguish between two different levels of justification: *prima facie* and consequent.

At the *prima facie* level, our reliance on custom is justified by default. This is a common internalist move to avoid regress concerns (the other common move being coherentism). As a response to scepticism, Hume’s strategy of according the faculties *prima facie* justification (according them consequent justification if no defeaters are found) resounds with modern internalist positions, such as Wright’s (2002) ‘conservative’ and Pryor’s (2000, 2004) ‘dogmatist’ positions.⁴⁷ Conservatism holds that a certain class of beliefs requires prior justification against sceptical hypotheses, but this (*prima facie*) justification is attained by default; dogmatism disagrees in that it holds that these beliefs do not require justification of any kind, because they are immediately and non-derivatively (*prima facie*) justified in themselves. In similar vein, Hume thinks that the faculties can be accorded *prima facie* authority without having to engage with the antecedent sceptic. There are, of course, large differences between the account I attribute to Hume and these modern frameworks;⁴⁸ for example, Pryor concerns himself with perceptual beliefs, whereas Hume addresses the faculties.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the similarities are striking, although I am hesitant about shoehorning Hume’s position to fit modern epistemological positions. Importantly, note that this default justification is available to everyone (after all, it is *default*), and therefore, at

⁴⁷ Pryor (2004) uses the label ‘conservative’ in characterising Wright’s (2002) position, and uses the label ‘dogmatist’ for his own position in his 2000 and 2004 papers.

⁴⁸ Although interestingly, Pryor thinks that perceptual beliefs are justified in virtue of their ‘phenomenal force’ (2000, p. 547). This of course resounds with Hume’s notion of ‘force and vivacity’, and perhaps has parallels with Hume’s treatment of scepticism in the *Treatise*, particularly his ‘Title Principle’ (thusly named by Garrett 1997): ‘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 upon us’ (THN 1.4.7.11, emphasis added).

⁴⁹ Alternatively, one could read Hume as according default justification to *the belief* that our faculties are reliable, and take this belief to be foundational; this belief justifies all other naturally occurring beliefs produced by our faculties. However, this belief is not foundational in a strong sense, because it is ultimately revisable.

the *prima facie* level of justification, everyone's inductive beliefs are internally justified, given that everyone's reliance on custom is justified by default.

There is a second level of justification, that is, consequent justification. At this level of justification, only those who investigate the reliability of custom will be justified in relying on custom. This is not a black-and-white matter. Presumably almost everyone (except maybe infants and animals) performs *some* higher-order reasoning regarding the reliability of our faculties. We recognise that our memory can fail us, that the faculty in charge of inductive beliefs tends to get things right (although we might not think of this faculty as custom), and so forth. Insofar as almost all agents perform this minimal level of reflection, these agents' reliance on custom enjoys some level of consequent justification. Compare this with the moral case, wherein Hume notes that even the common recognise that virtuous characteristics are those that are useful and agreeable to the self or others, and praise virtues as virtues on this basis:

But however the case may have fared with philosophy; in common life, these principles are still implicitly maintained, nor is any other topic of praise and blame ever recurred to, when we employ any panegyric or satire, any applause or censure of human action and behaviour. If we observe men, in every intercourse of business or pleasure, in every discourse and conversation; we shall find them no where, except in the schools, at any loss upon the subject. (EPM 9.1; SBN 268)

Similarly, in the epistemic case, the common recognise that epistemically justified dispositions are truth-conducive ones, and rely on custom on this basis. Therefore, even at the level of consequent justification, the beliefs of the common enjoy some level of justification.

However, more reflective agents who carry out more sophisticated investigations regarding the reliability of their faculties will have their reliance on custom enjoy more consequent justification compared to less reflective agents, but this surely seems like the right result; surely more reflective agents *should* be more epistemically justified. Therefore, the account I attribute to Hume is both internalist and manages to justify the beliefs of the common man: everyone's inductive beliefs enjoy *prima facie* justification, and almost everyone's inductive beliefs enjoy at least some measure of consequent justification. Yet this account also manages to

accommodate the intuition that the beliefs of more reflective agents are more justified, arguably unlike some forms of externalism.⁵⁰

iii. *Consequences for Hume's Negative Argument*

To recap the main arguments of this paper, we have seen that Hume's tone in the positive phase of his treatment of induction is normative, and positively so; furthermore, we have reason to believe that the direction of normative explanation runs from custom to beliefs rather than vice versa by an analogy with Hume's moral account, according to which moral character grounds the normative status of the actions it produces. Occurrent beliefs are not durable enough to have an effect on our sentiments, and like actions cannot be the basis on which we are normatively evaluated; this role must be played by the underlying disposition that produces these beliefs. Custom is this disposition; it enjoys consequent justification in virtue of being judged fit by our faculties, which are themselves accorded *prima facie* justification. Therefore our inductive beliefs are justified because they issue from custom, in the same way that virtuous actions are justified because they issue from virtues. This gives us a strong reason to read Hume's positive argument as arguing that a legitimate reliance on custom justifies our inductive beliefs.

What implications does this interpretation have for the negative argument? As argued before, both phases of Hume's treatment of induction should be read as addressing the same issues; if we read Hume as justifying inductive beliefs by a legitimate reliance on custom in his positive argument, we should correspondingly read Hume as denying that inductive beliefs are justified by a legitimate reliance on reason in his negative argument. Hume finds that certain operations of reason have been found to possess consequent justification (such as intuition, successful demonstration, probable arguments, and sensation⁵¹), and examines whether a reliance on them is able to justify inductive beliefs. Hume's limiting himself to operations of reason that possess consequent justification explains Millican's (1998, 2002) observation that Hume only examines *good* arguments for the Uniformity Principle – Hume does not bother examining unsuccessful putative

⁵⁰ Indeed, Williams (2004) objects that Loeb's (2002) 'steadiness and stability' externalist account has the counterintuitive consequence that more reflective agents are *less* justified than less reflective agents.

⁵¹ Millican (1998, 2002b) takes sensation to be an operation of reason, and also takes Hume to address it along with intuition and arguments in Section 4, but the latter claim in particular is admittedly controversial. I will say more on this shortly.

demonstrations, for example, because such an operation lacks consequent justification. Alas, he finds that a reliance on the justified operations of reason cannot justify inductive inferences, for a variety of reasons (the conceivability of disuniformity, circularity), and so his negative phase has a sceptical conclusion: a reliance on reason is unable to justify our inductive inferences.⁵² This sets the stage for his positive argument, wherein he argues that our inductive inferences are justified by a legitimate reliance on custom, and this reliance is legitimate because custom has been found to be a reliable belief-forming mechanism and therefore possesses consequent justification.

5. Further Implications

We have seen that there is significant evidence suggesting that Hume's positive argument in the *Enquiry* is a normative one, and this gives us a reason to read his negative argument in the *Enquiry* as correspondingly normative. In contrast, the *Treatise* version of the positive argument has no such normative overtone. As the descriptive reading of Hume's positive argument in the *Treatise* is quite uncontroversial, I will not spend long arguing for this point, but I will note that Hume clearly characterises it as descriptive in nature when discussing the causal maxim:

The next question, then, shou'd naturally be, *How experience gives rise to such a principle [that whatever begins to exist, must have a cause of existence]*? But as I find it will be more convenient to sink this question in the following, *Why we conclude, that such particular causes must necessarily have such particular effects, and why we form an inference from one to another?* We shall make that the subject of our future enquiry. (THN 1.3.3.9; SBN 82)

⁵² The focus of my paper is not on the negative argument, but there is a crucial point to be noted. Discussion of whether Hume's negative argument is causal or normative often centres on whether Hume dismisses probable argument as a suitable foundation for the Uniformity Principle because of a causal circularity (since the same principle cannot cause itself) or because of a normative circularity (because the same principle cannot justify itself). However, I think the importance of this skirmish is often overstated, because the normativist position is consistent with the causal reading of circularity: denying that probable reasoning *causes* inductive inferences (because of a causal circularity) also denies inductive inferences a certain form of justification, given the denial of epistemic parasitism. And indeed, I think that the causal reading of circularity is the correct one: given that Hume seems to embrace some degree of normative circularity in Section 12, it would be peculiar for him to think normative circularity a decisive reason against probable arguments justifying the Uniformity Principle. Thus, I read the circularity involved as being a causal one, but yet read Hume's overall conclusion in Section 4 to be normative (given the denial of epistemic parasitism). Note also that in concluding that inductive inferences are not founded on reason, Hume is not claiming that we do not *discover* the justification for inductive inferences through reasoning; rather, he is claiming that it is not reason that is the *source* of such justification. Custom is the source of the justification for inductive inferences in virtue of causing them and being consequently justified; reasoning merely discovers the consequent justification of custom and the fact that it causes inductive inferences.

The question of ‘why we form an inference’ from causes to effects is surely a causal one, particularly in light of the fact that Hume thinks this issue to be related to the *causal* question of how ‘experience *gives rise* to such a principle’ as the causal maxim.⁵³ Hume’s positive argument in the *Treatise* (whereby he answers this question) correspondingly seems to be descriptive. In short, while the *Enquiry* version is quite plausibly normative in nature, the *Treatise* version is clearly descriptive. This gives us a *prima facie* reason to distinguish Hume’s arguments (positive and negative) in the *Treatise* from those in the *Enquiry*.⁵⁴

And indeed, such a distinction is substantiated by the variances between both versions of the negative phases. Examine the difference in structure between the two versions. In the *Treatise* Hume straightaway rules out the Uniformity Principle being founded on argument, whereas in the *Enquiry* Hume first takes the time to rule out its being founded on intuition, and more controversially, sensation:

The connexion between these propositions [*I have found that such an object has always been attended with such an effect and I foresee, that other objects, which are, in appearance, similar, will be attended with similar effects*] is not intuitive. (EHU 4.16; SBN 34)

No object ever discovers, by the qualities which appear to the senses, either the causes, which produce it, or the effects, which will arise from it. ... (EHU 4.6; SBN 27)

It is allowed on all hands, that there is no known connexion between the sensible qualities and the secret powers... (EHU 4.16; SBN 33)

If Hume does indeed rule out sensation and intuition in the *Enquiry* version of his argument, this might be seen to impact the question of whether we should read his argument descriptively or normatively. As Millican (1998, 2002) argues, if the descriptivist is right that Hume’s intention is to rule out the presupposition of the Uniformity Principle being caused by the understanding (which Garrett contends is the faculty of ratiocination and intuition), then it makes little sense to rule out its being founded on the senses.⁵⁵ He argues that Hume

⁵³ Of course, Hume famously never delivers on this promise, failing to return to this question (of how experience gives rise to the causal maxim) in his positive argument.

⁵⁴ Of course, my primary grounds for thinking Hume’s positive and negative phases to address the same issues derives from the *Enquiry* (EHU 5.2) and so one might argue that the same is not true of the *Treatise*. I find this possibility unlikely; besides, there are independent reasons for thinking Hume’s negative argument in the *Treatise* to be descriptive, as I go on to argue.

⁵⁵ It is debatable whether Hume is ruling out intuition and sensation as foundations for the Uniformity Principle, or merely ruling them out as direct foundations for inferences about the unobserved (without having to presuppose the Uniformity Principle). It is difficult to see how any inference from observed to unobserved is going to avoid a presupposition (whether explicit or implicit) of something like

means to rule out *sources of justification* for the Uniformity Principle in dismissing sensation as well as intuition and demonstrative and probable arguments as foundations for it, as sensation can potentially provide epistemic justification for the Uniformity Principle insofar as it can discern truth and falsehood; given that ‘[r]eason is the discovery of truth or falsehood’ (THN 3.1.1.9), Hume’s ruling out sensation as a potential source of justification directly contributes to his rejection of reason as the source of justification for inductive beliefs.⁵⁶ Of course, they can also be read as playing a merely causal role, but the normative reading is substantiated by what Hume says in *A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh*, which he wrote in roughly the same period that he worked on the *Enquiry*:

It is common for Philosophers to distinguish the Kinds of Evidence into *intuitive, demonstrative, sensible, and moral*. (L 22)

This corresponds neatly to the four things Hume rules out as foundations for the Uniformity Principle: intuition, sensation, and arguments demonstrative and probable (i.e. moral).⁵⁷ Hume is accordingly most naturally read as dismissing all kinds of *evidence* for the Uniformity Principle in the *Enquiry*, and this argument is correspondingly best read as a normative one.⁵⁸

These differences are indeed subtle, but given the closeness of the two interpretations (as I emphasised in Section 1), such small differences might prove to be telling.⁵⁹ But even if we take the above as evidence that

the Uniformity Principle. However, even if Hume only means to rule out intuition and sensation as foundations for inferences about the unobserved, this does not unduly affect the above view: in this case, I would read Hume as ruling out any potential justification for inferences regarding the unobserved, only going through the Uniformity Principle where necessary (such as with demonstrative and probable arguments). Thanks to Don Garrett for helpful discussion on this matter.

⁵⁶ In correspondence, Garrett indicates that he now reads Hume’s treatment of sensation as merely forming the set-up for Hume’s later argument: in ruling out sensation, Hume is specifying the shape of the gap between observed to unobserved, setting himself up for his main argument that the understanding cannot bridge this gap. This reading agrees with the normativist one regarding the structure of Hume’s argument, but differs mainly in its *emphasis*: while both interpretations agree that Hume is ruling out sensation as a potential foundation for inductive inference (although both take ‘foundation’ to mean different things), the descriptivist line sees this as merely preparing the way for (but, strictly speaking, independent of) Hume’s main argument; the normativist line, meanwhile, sees this as *part* of Hume’s main argument, actively contributing to his conclusion that inductive inferences are not founded on reason. This similarity merely highlights the point I make in this paper that the normativist and descriptivist lines are in fact very close, and differ more in their reading of Hume’s emphasis rather than his content.

⁵⁷ Note that Hume does not use ‘moral’ in its contemporary sense of ‘ethical’. In this context, Hume means by moral kinds of evidence inductive evidence.

⁵⁸ Of course, Hume’s taking these four sources of knowledge as normative in the *Letter* does not guarantee that he treats them as normative in the *Enquiry*. But, given that they are plausibly read either way, his views in the *Letter* give a presupposition in favour of the normative reading.

⁵⁹ It is also interesting to note the primary textual sources of proponents of either side in this debate. Owen (1999) and Loeb (2002), who propound the descriptivist line, appeal solely to the *Treatise* in evaluating Hume’s argument on induction. Meanwhile Millican (1998), who powerfully argues for the normative interpretation, draws primarily on the *Enquiry*; indeed, his 2002b paper draws

Hume's conclusion changes from descriptive to normative from the *Treatise* to the *Enquiry*, what would explain this switch? Loeb (2011) argues that Hume's emphasis in the *Treatise* is primarily descriptive, with the explicit aim of developing an associationist psychology; however, Hume is led to make normative distinctions when he finds that beliefs that he takes to be justified (such as inductive inferences) are formed in similar ways to beliefs that he takes to be unjustified (such as beliefs formed by education), and he tries to give some explanation for why one should be justified and not the other. Hume's normative ambitions in the *Treatise* are therefore limited, only developing derivatively and unsystematically from his descriptive project. Perhaps in the intervening time between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, Hume came to see the importance of the various normative upshots of his work in the *Treatise* and decided to develop them more fully in the *Enquiry*. Indeed, the *Enquiry* as a whole seems to have a more normative bent: I have argued that Sections 4 and 5 are significantly more normative than their *Treatise* counterparts, and Sections 10 (Of Miracles)⁶⁰ and 12 (Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy)⁶¹ are obviously normative as well. In contrast, Hume's descriptive ambitions seem much more limited in the *Enquiry*. It seems likely that Hume's emphasis in the *Treatise* is therefore primarily descriptive,

exclusively from the *Enquiry* (although this is partly a function of its being in his collection on the first *Enquiry*; regardless, Millican is a strong proponent of favouring the *Enquiry* over the *Treatise* with respect to topics such as induction and causation). Similarly, Winkler (1999), who also defends the normativist position, draws primarily on the *Enquiry*; like Millican, Winkler (p. 200) thinks that 'the *Enquiry* develops Hume's mature defence of philosophy'. Interestingly, Loeb changes sides in his 2006 paper, and here he finds himself drawing from the *Enquiry* as well as the *Treatise* in defending the normativist line. As the exception that proves the rule, Garrett (1997, 1998) admittedly draws from both texts in propounding his descriptivist position, although he arguably leans more on the *Treatise*. All in all, there is a definite trend among descriptivists to draw from the *Treatise*, while normativists tend to look to the *Enquiry*. This is not to say that considerations for descriptivist interpretations stem solely from the *Treatise* or vice versa; many of the subtle and interesting arguments made by both parties (which I cannot fully explore within the constraints of this paper) are neutral between the texts. But it might not be too far-fetched to say that, reading the *Treatise* version, one receives the impression of a purely descriptive argument, while reading the *Enquiry* version, one intuits a normative argument; one's favoured textual source might well influence one's position in this debate, at least on some level.

⁶⁰ Although Hume did most probably remove a discussion on miracles from the *Treatise*, and it is impossible to say how normative this would have been (most likely at least somewhat). As Millican (2002a) notes, Hume says of the *Treatise* in a letter to Lord Kames that 'I am at present castrating my work, that is, cutting off its nobler parts, that is, endeavoring it shall give as little offence as possible, before which, I could not pretend to put it in the Doctor's [Joseph Butler's] hands' (HL i 25); these 'nobler parts' most likely included 'some *Reasonings concerning Miracles*' mentioned earlier in the same letter (HL i 24). Nevertheless, it is plausible that the *Treatise* version would have been less normative than the one that finally appeared in the first *Enquiry*, given the general tenor of the *Treatise*; something as overwhelmingly normative as Section 10 would have been slightly incongruous with the psychology-dominated *Treatise*.

⁶¹ Another potential discrepancy between the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* versions of the argument is that, in the *Treatise*, Hume does not discuss antecedent and consequent, excessive and mitigated scepticism as he does in Section 12 of the *Enquiry*. If I am right that these issues provide the general normative framework in which Hume's discussion of induction takes place in the *Enquiry*, then this difference between the two works will correspond to a difference in the normative framework in which the argument on induction takes place, and so even if the *Treatise* argument is normative, it will nevertheless be significantly different from the *Enquiry* version. And indeed, Hume seems to reject the 'Title Principle' in Section 5 (which Garrett 1997 argues forms the cornerstone of Hume's normative epistemology in the *Treatise*), when he says that 'There is, however, one species of philosophy, which... strikes in with no disorderly passion of the human mind, nor can mingle itself with any natural affection or propensity; and that is the ACADEMIC or SCEPTICAL philosophy (EHU 5.1). Hume endorses exactly this philosophy in Section 12; given its inability to 'mingle with any natural affection or propensity', this suggests a disavowal of the Title Principle, which further suggests that Hume's normative framework changes drastically from the *Treatise* to the *Enquiry*.

with infrequent normative add-ons; meanwhile, his emphasis in the *Enquiry* is primarily normative, with his descriptive theory playing a background role.⁶² Perhaps Hume thought that he had said enough on psychology in the *Treatise*, and decided to pursue a more normative project in the *Enquiry* instead.

At any rate, a full defence of the claim that Hume's argument on induction changes from the *Treatise* to the *Enquiry* lies beyond the scope of my paper. I shall rest content with making a *prima facie* case for it here, and will strongly endorse only my more modest conclusion that Hume's positive and negative arguments in the *Enquiry* are normative in nature. Given Hume's normative overtone in the positive argument, we have good reason to take his positive argument as having a normative conclusion. And given that Hume's positive and negative arguments should be read as addressing the same issues (since custom is a principle 'of equal weight and authority' to reason), this gives us reason to think that Hume's negative argument correspondingly has a normative conclusion as well. I therefore conclude that there is strong reason to read both Hume's positive and negative arguments as normative in nature.⁶³

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⁶² Indeed, Millican (2012) agrees that Hume's overall emphasis changes between the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*.

⁶³ This paper has benefited immensely from the contributions of a number of people. Thanks must be given to Don Garrett, for extensive comments on a large number of drafts of this paper, particularly for the ones given and discussed in the midst of Hurricane Sandy. Thanks also to Peter Millican for very helpful discussions, both on this paper in particular, and on Hume on induction in general over the last seven years. Thanks also to Beatrice Longuenesse for helpful comments on an early draft of this paper. A debt of gratitude is also owed to an anonymous referee for this journal, who delivered extensive and incredibly useful comments within 11 days of my submission to *Nous*.

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