

Hume's Constructive Pyrrhonian Skepticism With Regard to Reason

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Interpreters of Hume disagree regarding whether he was a skeptic; those who believe he was a skeptic disagree regarding whether the skepticism he adopts is Pyrrhonian, Academic, radical or mitigated. Those who agree that his is Pyrrhonian often disagree regarding the structure of Pyrrhonian skepticism. Interpreters of Hume disagree regarding whether he defends or undermines the use of reason. And they disagree regarding whether the foundations of his psychology and epistemology are individualistic or communitarian; naturalistic or normative.

Here I take a position in each of these debates. I argue that Hume is a Pyrrhonian skeptic, and I defend an account of the structure of Pyrrhonism, emphasizing its constructive side and the special role of custom in Pyrrhonism. I show that Hume's constructive project leads to a defense of reason, but a defense that grounds its authority in the power of custom to constitute normativity, and show that Hume's analysis of custom is grounded both in classical Pyrrhonism and in 18th century debates in English legal theory. While I hope that it will be clear that this account can be used to explain much of the *Treatise*, including Hume's accounts of personal identity, causality, moral judgment and skepticism with regard to the senses, I focus on the analysis he offers in the *Treatise* of skepticism with regard to reason, as it provides the most challenging case for my reading, and at the same time a remarkably clear example of the strategy I ascribe to Hume.

* This essay is adapted from parts of a book I am now writing on the role of custom in Hume's *Treatise*. I thank Rahul Govind for directing my attention to the literature on custom in the history of English law. I had not been aware of this important context for Hume's thought before our conversations and before reading his book (Govind 2015), and now that I see that context, I also see that it is impossible to read Hume without it. We philosophers can learn a good deal by listening to our colleagues in history. Thanks to Emma Taussig, Halley Haruta and You Jeen Ha for valuable research assistance, and Bill de Vries, Hsueh Qu and Kazanori Sawata for extensive comments on earlier versions of the material presented here.

1. Pyrrhonian Skepticism

The Pyrrhonian tradition, following Sextus Empiricus, embodies a very particular philosophical strategy, one that we also find in the Madhyamaka philosophical tradition in India. The skeptic confronts a dogmatic dispute, involving two extreme positions, regarding whether a convention, a custom, or a mode of speech or thought is justified. Let us call one side the *reificationist* position and the other the *nihilist*. The reificationist argues that the practice in question is justified, because it is grounded appropriately in a convention-independent reality. The nihilist, on the other hand, argues that because that practice cannot be grounded in such extra-conventional facts, it is not justified.

So, for instance, we can imagine a debate between someone who believes that we are justified in saying that there is an external world and someone who believes that we are not. The reificationist in this case (maybe Reid), argues that since there is an external world, we are justified in talking about external objects, and our concepts and words are adequate to referring to them. The nihilist (maybe Berkeley) argues that all that we ever experience are our inner states, and that we have no direct access to anything external; therefore we are never justified in talking about external objects.

In any such case, the skeptic responds with *epochē*, usually translated as *suspension of judgment*. But there are various ways to understand such *epochē*.¹ One might suppose that *epochē* is an attempt to find a compromise, some middle ground between the two positions: maybe the external world exists in some attenuated sense. This is *not epochē* in the Pyrrhonian sense.

Alternatively, one might suggest that *epochē* consists in a kind of shrugging of the philosophical shoulders. There are, one might argue, good, but perhaps nondemonstrative arguments on each side of the issue, and therefore equally good and equally bad reasons for each extreme position; it is impossible to decide which to adopt. The skeptic, on this

¹ See (Garfield 1990) for a defense of the following reading, which I simply offer here without additional argument.

reading, simply refuses to endorse either, saying “maybe one, maybe the other.” This is a common interpretation of skepticism, and gains some aid and comfort from certain remarks of Sextus Empiricus. And Hume himself sometimes talks about skepticism in this way, as do many of his commentators, whether or not they regard him as a skeptic. But just as compromise is not the Pyrrhonian *agogē*, neither is shoulder-shrugging.²

Instead, the true Pyrrhonian adopts a more radical *epochē* than either of these. The Pyrrhonian rejects the entire debate between the reificationist and the nihilist as ill-conceived. For, the Pyrrhonian observes, however much the two dogmatic opponents might appear to disagree, they agree about the only interesting thing, the biconditional presupposition that undergirds the debate. In the case of the debate about the existence of the external world, that is the assertion that our discourse about, or conventions regarding, external objects are justified *iff* they are grounded in our knowledge of an independent external world. Call biconditionals of this sort *grounding biconditionals*. The Pyrrhonian *epochē* consists in the denial of the grounding biconditional, and a consequent inversion of the direction of explanation. Instead of grounding conventions in ontology, the skeptic places our conventions at bedrock, and argues that our ontology, morality, epistemology, etc., simply rest on conventions.³

² Here I take issue with (Garrett 1997) when he takes Hume to understand by skeptical arguments any arguments that “in some way concern or tend to produce doubt and uncertainty.” (208) Nonetheless, I agree with Garrett that in the end Hume’s skepticism “can, indeed, reconcile his aim for a positive system of the sciences based on human cognitive psychology with his use of skeptical arguments, and that he does so in a way that facilitates an improved, if also chastened, commitment to the historically developing products of human reason.” (208) I think that this reconciliation emerges from Hume’s consistent Pyrrhonism.

³ Compare Hallie’s discussion of a debate regarding the Eucharist in (Sextus Empiricus and Hallie 1964, 7-8.). As Mates (Sextus and Mates 1996) puts it “...Pyrrhonism is not a doctrine... Sextus calls it an *agogē*, a way of life, or perhaps better, a way of thinking and acting... The Pyrrhonian skeptic, instead of basing his thoughts and actions on firm beliefs about how things really are in a mind-independent external world, ‘goes by the appearances’.” (7) Much has been made about the importance of the appearances (*phainomena*) in Pyrrhonism, but it is equally important to understand the role of convention and custom as a guide to action, an issue to which we turn shortly. Also see (Baxter 2006, 200; Baxter 2008, 8-14) and (Popkin 1980) for a nice discussion of Hume’s Pyrrhonism. Sawada (personal communication) points out that this account opens up a regress, with a meta-skeptical position possible that suspends the debate between the skeptic and the dogmatists regarding the grounding biconditional. That is right, but that is not a vicious regress.

This is the point of Sextus' fourfold prescription, *viz.*, that the skeptic lives by appearances, inclinations, the instructions of the arts and the conventions of her society. Sextus puts the point this way in *The Outlines of Pyrrhonism*:

... Now, we cannot be entirely inactive when it comes to the observances of everyday life. Therefore, while living undogmatically, we pay due regard to appearances. This observance of the requirements of daily life seems to be fourfold, with the following particular heads: the guidance of nature, the compulsion of the feelings, the tradition of laws and customs, and the instruction of the arts. And it is by virtue of the instruction of the arts that we are not inactive in those arts which we employ. (Sextus Empiricus and Hallie 1964, 40)

First, Sextus argues that much of what drives our cognitive and behavioral life is that which is dependent on feeling and which is involuntary. He then argues that these involuntary feelings issue in our taking things for granted, things we do not question, not because we have *reasons*—negative skeptical arguments undermine those—but because we have no choice in the matter. In Hume's hands, these feelings and affections will become the passions. Sextus also emphasizes the role of the social dimension of our lives as skeptics. He emphasizes that the laws, customs, the instructions of the arts and in general of the social practices and conventions that constitute our societies determine both how we behave and how we reason. This positive side of the Pyrrhonian tradition, we will see, plays as great a role in Hume's own skepticism as does the negative side.

Hume was introduced to Pyrrhonian skepticism through his reading of Montaigne, but primarily through the article on Pyrrho in in Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary*.⁴ Following Bayle, Hume's deployment of skepticism in tandem with the methods of

⁴ Laird concurs that Hume faithfully follows the Pyrrhonians as they come down to him through Bayle and offers a detailed explanation of Bayle's views and their reflection in Hume's work. (Laird 1932, 180-187) But I think that Fogelin (1985, 2-3) is wrong when he states that "the degree of Hume's skepticism is variable... His general posture is that of a moderate skeptic, recommending that we modestly restrict our inquiries to topics within our ken..." (2) Instead I will argue that he is a thoroughgoing Pyrrhonian. Baxter (1993) ably defends the thesis that Hume is a true Pyrrhonist, acknowledging that Hume himself disavows that label in virtue of a misrepresentation of the Pyrrhonian doctrine, and demonstrates convincingly how Hume's skepticism frames and makes good sense of his much-maligned account of our ideas of space and time, and that the account makes no sense whatsoever unless we read Hume as a Pyrrhonian.

science—which might seem *prima facie* at odds with one another—reflect Bayle’s remark that

Pyrrhonism is dangerous in relation to ... divine science, but it hardly seems so with regard to the natural sciences or to the state. It does not matter much if one says that the mind of man is too limited to discover anything concerning natural truths, concerning the causes producing heat, cold, the tides, and the like. It is enough for us that we employ ourselves in looking for probable hypotheses and collecting data. I am quite sure that there are very few good scientists of this century who are not convinced that nature is an impenetrable abyss and that its springs are known only to Him who made and directs them. (Bayle and Popkin 1965a, 194–95)

Hume adopts Bayle’s view that it is perfectly permissible for a Pyrrhonian skeptic to advance “probable hypotheses” and to collect data.⁵ Bayle then turns to the positive side of Pyrrhonism more specifically:

Society has no reason to be afraid of skepticism; for skeptics do not deny that one should conform to the customs of one’s country, practice moral duties, and act upon matters on the basis of probabilities without waiting for certainty. They could suspend judgment on the question of whether such and such an obligation is naturally and absolutely legitimate; but they did not suspend judgment on the question whether it ought to be fulfilled on such and such occasions. (*Ibid.*, p. 195)

Hume takes this positive side, encoded in Sextus’ fourfold prescription, very seriously as well. Indeed, his expansive understanding of *custom* comprises not only collective, social customs, but also the individual habits of mind and practice that a classical Pyrrhonian would have characterized as instinct or appetite.⁶ Hume, like the Pyrrhonians as

⁵ In this context, see (Garrett 1997, 83-93) excellent discussion of Hume’s willingness to advance inductive arguments in the *Treatise* and to advocate an empirical science of human despite his refutation of any rational or probable justification of induction. For connections between Hume’s Pyrrhonism and his atheism, see (Russell 2008, 49 ff.).

⁶ And Hume retains this understanding of skepticism and his allegiance to it throughout his career. In the *Enquiry*, introducing his “sceptical solution” to the doubts he raises about theoretical and empirical reasoning, he writes (using the term “academic,” but really referring to Pyrrhonian skepticism):

The academics always talk of doubt and suspense of judgment,... and of renouncing all speculations which lie not within the limits of common life and practice. Nothing, therefore, can be more contrary than such a philosophy to the supine indolence of the mind, its ash arrogance, its lofty pretensions, and its superstitious credulity.

(correctly) understood by Bayle, argues that custom grounds our lives, including our epistemic practices, verbal conventions and moral judgments, not that custom-independent certainty justifies our customs.

Epochē in the classical Pyrrhonian sense is therefore a suspension of the debate between dogmatic positions in favor of a radically different kind of discourse. Skepticism of this kind, as Sextus emphasizes when he says that “we cannot be entirely inactive” is not a purely negative project, but a positive project made possible by the clearing of a certain kind of metaphysical underbrush. The positive project is the limning of the domain of human custom, of human nature.

To be sure, there are passages in Sextus’ writings that suggest that he sees the Pyrrhonian position as a kind of *epistemic* nihilism, and that he endorses such a position. But it is hard to square that reading with Sextus’ discussion of the fourfold prescription or with the reflexivity of skepticism that he emphasizes (an emphasis we will see echoed in Hume in his discussion of skepticism with regard to reason). It makes much more sense to read those passages in which Sextus advocates a recusal from all belief, or denies that there is any knowledge, to see those as a rejection of *dogmatic* belief, or *dogmatic* knowledge, that is, of any doxastic attitude not tempered by the skeptical *agogē*. When Hume explicitly

Every passion is mortified by it except for the love of truth... It is surprising, therefore, that this philosophy, which, in almost every instance, must be harmless and innocent, should be the subject of so much groundless reproach and obloquy...

Nor need we fear that this philosophy, while it endeavours to limit our enquiries to common life, should ever undermine the reasonings of common life, and carry its doubts so far as to destroy all action, as well as speculation. Nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever. (V:I, p. 41)

While we must be careful about using the *Enquiry* to justify interpretations of the *Treatise*, here Hume provides us with clear evidence of his own understanding of skepticism, and of an understanding that is evidently at work in the *Treatise*. (See also the discussion of skepticism in *Enquiry* IX, which recapitulates that of *Treatise* I:IV:III, providing further confirmation of the continuity of Hume’s thought in this regard.) It is also worth noting the careful distinction Hume draws between his own Pyrrhonian skepticism and the modern skepticism of Descartes, which he takes to be incurable if taken seriously. (*Enquiry* IX:I, p. 150)

rejects skepticism, he rejects this nihilistic version; his own approach hews very close to Sextus' actual program.⁷

2. The Dual Role of Custom

The positive side of the skeptical project requires a reconstruction of our practices as resting not on access to reality, but on *custom*. Hume uses the term *custom* to designate what we would now regard as *two* phenomena, but which to Hume's eyes appears to be a single phenomenon appearing in two distinct domains. First, there is social custom—the way *we* do things, including conventions regarding language, individuation, explanation, praise and blame, etc. Second, there is individual custom, or habit—the way *I* do things. But before we explore the details of Hume's understanding and deployment of this idea of custom, we must explore the context of this term as it would have been used in Hume's time.

As Govind (2015) argues, Hume's legal and historical studies would have acquainted him with the debates concerning the status of customary law in the 18th century, in which both the scope of customary law—as opposed to common law—and the role of custom as a foundation of the normative force of law were at stake. Custom, in this discourse, was considered a principal source of nomicity and normativity. It is therefore essential to read Hume's use of the word *custom*, so frequent in the *Treatise*, and his appeals to regularity in the context both of natural law and ethics in the context of this legal history.

Pocock (2016, 12-13) explains that English law recognized a clear distinction between “unwritten custom, usage, or tradition” and “written commands... or statutes” and that “English lawyers sometimes attempted to distinguish upon this basis between unwritten law or *lex non scripta*, which might be written down, but which claimed no authority but that of custom and tradition, and written law, *lex scripta*, or statute, whose authority was

⁷ See (Strawson 1985, 10–21) and (Kripke 1982) for insightful account not only of this method, but also of the connections between Hume and Wittgenstein, and Strawson in particular for an acute analysis of the connection between Hume's skepticism and his naturalism. And read Qu (2015) for the most searching examination of the relation of Hume's naturalism and skepticism to his epistemology.

that of the author of the writing.” Fortesque, who Hume would also have read, argues that in the domain of custom it was standard practice in Hume’s time to take long usage itself as legitimating. Hume’s younger contemporary, Edmund Burke, following Fortesque, affirmed that “Because a custom or a particular institution had a ‘prescriptive’ claim—i.e. was already established—there was a ‘presumption’ in its favor.” (quoted at 15)

British moral theorists, Hume among them, understood customary law—the law that emerged from local patterns of behavior and traditions—as the source of legitimation of positive law. On this view, regular patterns of conduct establish the expectations of one another that come first to be enforceable by local magistrates who recognize traditional claims, and then come to be codified in written law. The source of normativity, on this account, is the legitimate expectation of the continuation of traditional forms of conduct as well as traditional rights and obligations. And so, despite the growing importance of written common law in English jurisprudence, in Hume’s time, customary law was universally recognized as binding, and as binding *because it was customary*.⁸ Carter’s *Lex Customaria*, a text Hume would have studied, states:

For a Custom taketh beginning and groweth to perfection in this manner, When a reasonable Act once done is found to be good, and beneficial to the People, and agreeable to their nature and disposition, then do they use it and practise it again and again, and so by often iteration and multiplication of the Act, it becomes a Custom; and being continued without interruption time out of mind, it obtaineth the force of a Law. (quoted in Thompson 1991, 97)

⁸ Pocock (*op. cit.*) comments that the influential English jurist and Chief Justice Edward Coke (15th Century) repeated Fortesque’s argument to King James I. (17) And he quotes John Pym (17th century arguing that the very legitimacy of Crown or common law rests on a foundation of custom:

There are plain footsteps of those laws in the government of the Saxons; they were of that vigour and force as to overlive the Conquest, nay to give bounds and limits to the Conqueror, whose victory gave him first hop. Bu the assurance and possession of the Crown he obtained by composition, in which he bound himself to observe these and the other ancient liberties of the kingdom, which afterwards he likewise confirmed by oath at his coronation, From him the said obligation descended to his successors. It is true they have often been broken, they have often been confirmed by charters of kings, by acts of parliaments, but the petitions of the subjects upon which those charters and acts were founded were ever petitions of right, demanding their ancient and due liberties, not suing for any new law. (quoted at 359)

And Pocock also notes that Hume endorsed this fundamental role of custom in preserving society and in grounding law. (495) For Hume and his contemporaries, custom in this sense—although local, unwritten and informal—is *legitimizing*.⁹ A reader of the *History of England* will note that this sense of the centrality of custom—as a pattern of uncodified habits that generate expectations and that both govern our actual behavior and ground normative claims—never leaves his thought. At the beginning of volume 5 he writes, "Habits, more than reason, we find in everything to be the governing principle of mankind." (*History* v. 5, page 4.)

This conviction that custom lies at the base of our psychology, or social practices, and the norms that govern our reasoning, our moral judgments and even, as we shall see, our faith in the reality of the world around us animates the positive side of Hume's skepticism in the *Treatise*. And Hume would never have had to *argue* for this understanding of the normative force of custom. It would have been obvious to any of his contemporary readers, even if it is no longer so obvious to us. That is, it would have been something *we take for granted in all of our reasonings*. This construction of custom gives rich explanatory content to the positive side of his Pyrrhonism.

But Hume uses *custom* not only to denote social regularities, but also to denote individual psychological regularities, or our *customary way of behaving*. So, for Hume, the fact that *I customarily* call to mind the color red when I think of apples, is as much a matter of custom as the fact that *we customarily* set the table with the fork on the left and the knife on the right. Custom is regularity in behavior and the regularity in individual human behavior is tied to social regularity (as one would expect given the legal background of this term), is norm-constituting in virtue of the expectations it engenders, and lies at the basis of the explanatory power of nomic generalizations. This is why when we look to Hume on

⁹ Thompson (*op. cit.*) reminds us that in British legal theory through the 18th century:

... Law was derived from the customs, or habitual usages, of the country; usages which might be reduced to rule and precedents, which in some circumstances were codified and might be enforceable at law. This was the case, above all, with *lex loci*, the local customs of the manor. These customs, whose record was sometimes only preserved in the memories of the aged, had legal effect, unless directly voided by statute law. (4)

explanation, brute regularities, whether in individual or collective behavior, are often as deep as he takes us.¹⁰ Wittgenstein was to concur that in the citation of custom, in just this sense, “our spade is turned.” (Wittgenstein 1953)

Hume returns to this idea in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*: Speaking of our natural tendencies to belief that constitute the positive side of the skeptical program, Hume writes,

This principle is Custom or Habit. For wherever the repetition of any act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation, ... we always say that this propensity is the effect of *Custom*. By employing that word, we pretend not to have given the ultimate reason of such a propensity. We only point out a principle of human nature... (V:I, p. 36)

A bit later, Hume asserts,

Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom, we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact beyond what is immediately present to the memory or senses. We should never know how to adjust means to ends, or to employ our natural powers in the production of an effect. There would be an end at once to all action, as well as of the chief part of speculation. (V:I, pp. 44-45)

In these passages in the *Enquiry*, we see Hume connecting his account of custom directly not only to his Pyrrhonian method generally, but also his views about causality and action, connections that are already in place in the *Treatise*.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that this same broad use of a single term to indicate both collective and individual regularities in behavior and thought is found in the use of the Sanskrit *samvṛti* (convention) and *vyavahāra* (ordinary, or everyday behavior), and enters Madhyamaka in a way prescient of Hume. See (Whelan 1985).

3. Skepticism with Regard to Reason

We now turn to Hume's constructive development of a skeptical understanding of reason.^{11,12}

3.1. The Subversion of Reason

Hume begins his skeptical argument with an argument for the conclusion that reason itself has no independent warrant as an instrument for gaining knowledge. It is a recognizable descendent of Sextus' discussion of the problem of the criterion in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, but is inflected by Hume's understanding of the operations of probabilistic reasoning.

In all demonstrative sciences the rules are certain and infallible; but when we apply them, our fallible and uncertain faculties are very apt to depart from them, and fall into error. We must, therefore, in every

¹¹ Baier correctly rejects Fogelin's (1985) assertion that Hume is only a "theoretical" and not a "prescriptive" skeptic (in Fogelin's terms). Fogelin argues that Hume rejects the warrant of causal inferences on skeptical grounds, yet continues to make them. Baier (1991, 57-58) replaces Fogelin's distinction with that between a "true" and a "fantastic" skeptic, reflecting Hume's terminology more closely. Baier argues that "true" skepticism is the reflexive meta-skepticism that calls its own conclusions into question, and that "fantastic" skepticism comprises the "smiling" skepticism of the Pyrrhonists and the "despairing" skepticism of the Academics.

This is not the place to rehearse all of the debates regarding the interpretation of ancient skepticism. Suffice it to say here that while I agree with Baier that Fogelin is wrong to say that Hume fails to adhere to his own prescriptions—simply because Fogelin fails to understand the content of those prescriptions—I disagree with Baier as well in this regard, both concerning her interpretation of ancient skepticism and concerning where she locates Hume on the skeptical spectrum.

Baier, I think, fails to appreciate the degree to which Hume's "true" skepticism aligns him with the Pyrrhonians. And indeed, I think that Baier comes around to this view a few pages later (1991, 59 ff.) when she notes correctly that "Hume is giving us an account of custom, and the 'accustom'd unions' it forms in our imaginations, can have 'equal weight and authority,'" (*Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*, p. 41, emphasis Baier's)

¹² My claim that Hume is a skeptic might appear to run afoul of his own denial of that label, when he asserts that nobody ever endorsed that position: "Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this total scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist," [I:IV:I 183] But that assertion must be taken in context. Hume here avers that he does not assent to the argument he has just offered (to which we will turn in a moment). But that refusal to assent, as we shall see, is itself skeptical, and is entirely consistent with the Pyrrhonian attitude towards argument, an attitude Hume confirms when a few paragraphs later he asserts that his "intention then in displaying so carefully the arguments of that fantastic sect, is only to make the reader sensible of the truth of my hypothesis, that all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures." (*Ibid.*) A more succinct statement of Sextus' position in his exposition of the fourfold prescription for the skeptical life could not be found. That is, Hume's apparent disavowal of skepticism is instead an explicit embrace of the Pyrrhonian method.

reasoning form a new judgment or belief; as a check or controul on our first judgment or belief; and must enlarge our view to comprehend a kind of history of all the instances, wherein our understanding has deceiv'd us, compar'd with those, wherein its testimony was just and true. Our reason must be consider'd as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect; but such-a-one as by the irruption of other causes, and by the inconstancy of our mental powers, may frequently be prevented. By this means all knowledge degenerates into probability; and this probability is greater or less, according to our experience of the veracity or deceitfulness of our understanding, and according to the simplicity or intricacy of the question. [I:IV:I 180]

It is easy to misunderstand this argument. Hume's principal aim is not to show that we can never have confidence in our reasoning (this is the kind of skepticism he denies, and which he correctly points out that nobody ever defends); rather it is to determine *why* we have confidence in our reasoning, and to show that the grounds for our confidence are not themselves given by reason. Hume's analysis will show that reason is insufficient to confer warrant on our judgments; solitary thought cannot lead to confidence or certainty.

It is very important in this context (as Ainslie (2015, 21 ff.) correctly emphasizes, but as Stove (1973) and Fogelin (1985) seem to miss) that when Hume uses terms *knowledge*, *belief*, *probability* and *evidence*, they are used in very specific senses, reflecting not only 18th century philosophical usage that differs from our own, but also Hume's own idiosyncratic philosophical lexicon. Hume usually reserves the term *knowledge* for that of which we can be absolutely certain—relations of ideas—such as that conviction that Hume's targets alleged that we get from mathematical proof or philosophical analysis, what Kant would think of as *a priori* knowledge. A *belief*, on the other hand, is a particularly lively idea, an idea that animates and gives rise to action, a conviction. We may believe something because we know it, but beliefs are caused in a variety of ways, and part of the project of the *Treatise* is to understand the mechanisms of belief formation.

The most important of these terms to consider, though, is *probability*. It is tempting to think that *probability* in Hume's thought is something like the object of the modern probability calculus. But this would be anachronistic. It is pretty clear that Hume could not have had in mind a sense of this term in which probability is quantifiable, and represented by

parameters over which calculation is possible. For one thing, the very example that Hume chooses to place at the center of this discussion is that of mathematical knowledge. Were he to have something like the probability calculus in mind, it would have been open to him to draw a nice distinction between our apparent knowledge of the probability, say, of rolling doubles in a game of backgammon and our lack of knowledge that we will or will not roll doubles on the next throw. He does not do so. For another, as an observer or science, of commerce, and as a backgammon player, Hume would have had an interest in odds; he was interested in deviation from the norm, in insurance and interest, and in games of chance. If he had been aware of the probability calculus as a means of gaining knowledge of quantities, he probably would have discussed it. He did not, and this suggests that the idea of the quantification of parameters of uncertainty never occurred to him. So, any reading of Hume's account of the relation between knowledge and probability that ascribes to him our current understanding of probability is likely to be erroneous, and indeed his argument so understood requires substantial reinterpretation if it is not to be read as crudely fallacious.

Instead, to say that something is probable in Hume's sense is to say that while it is not *known* (in the sense just adumbrated), it is something in which we have some degree of defeasible confidence. But the term denotes more than this in Hume's lexicon. The word *probable* is cognate with *probative*, and connotes an argument that can be used to establish a point, even if non-demonstratively. So, in a court of law—the context from which Hume's understanding of custom derives—adversaries might each advance probable arguments; arguments that aim at (nondemonstratively) proving the correctness of their respective cases. A judge must weigh probable arguments, consider their relative merits, and render a decision. But in doing so, she is not computing probabilities. And her decision does not amount to *knowledge* of the correct outcome of the case; it is a judgment of probability, in this sense; a judgment regarding which arguments are most probative; of which have the greatest probative force or weight. It is this process that Hume has in mind when he talks about probability and its relationship to knowledge.

If we bear this in mind, we will see both that Hume's arguments in this section are better than they are often taken to be and that they are homologous with the skeptical arguments he offers elsewhere in the book, adding additional probability to this interpretation.

Moreover, Hume takes past experience and the beliefs that it induces to function *causally*, not as premises for the deduction of, but rather as the causes of confidence in, our conclusions. Since he takes reasoning about matters of fact to be a fundamentally causal process, any confidence we have in such reasoning must devolve into confidence in the reliability of the causal process, not in the validity of arguments. The output of probable reasoning is *evidence*, that is, just the property of being *evident to us*, that is, beliefs of which we are subjectively certain.

Hume begins by setting aside the question of whether mathematical or logical rules are infallible, and hence whether even perfect deductive mathematical reasoning can yield knowledge; the infallibility of the rules of reason would be insufficient for their generating knowledge, for we—the users of those rules—would need to know that *we* are infallible in employing them. Since we know by experience that our cognitive faculties are fallible, we can have no reason to believe that. Moreover, given our general fallibility, we can have only a probable confidence even in our grasp of the rules of logic and mathematics themselves, so that even if we grant their apodictic character, we cannot be completely confident that we grasp them correctly. Therefore, even if deduction carried out properly is guaranteed to deliver truth, it could never be a foundation for genuine knowledge.¹³ It follows that the most confident epistemic attitude it is rational to assume is a sense of the probability that we are right when we reason; that even our best reason only gives us good reason, or causes us, to be confident; it cannot independently warrant confidence. Hume then turns to a case to make the point:

There is no Algebraist nor Mathematician so expert in his science, as to place entire confidence in any truth immediately upon his discovery of it, or regard it as any thing, but a mere probability. Every time he runs over his proofs, his confidence encreases; but still more by the approbation of his friends; and is rais'd to its utmost perfection by the universal assent and applauses of the learned

¹³ And this, as Allison (2008, 214) suggests, is a reply to Malebranche, who, like Descartes, takes our knowledge of arithmetic truths to be guaranteed by simple direct perception. Hume can grant that we might detect truths in this way, but points out that knowledge requires that we can also endorse that perception, which requires confidence in our faculties and reliance on memory. Marusic (2016), however, provides good reason for thinking that Hume may have Locke in his sights. Locke is keen, she argues, to demonstrate the clear distinction between knowledge and probability; Hume is concerned to undermine precisely that distinction here.

world. Now 'tis evident, that this gradual encrease of assurance is nothing but the addition of new probabilities, and is deriv'd from the constant union of causes and effects, according to past experience and observation. [I:IV:I 180-181]

Here Hume explains why reason itself cannot be the cause of our confidence in reason and also tells what the actual cause of that confidence is—custom. First, he notes, no expert mathematician would ever trust his own reasoning the first time he proves an important result. Any mathematician of any experience knows that he might have made a mistake, and so he checks his proofs. The very fact that he does so and that his confidence increases each time he checks shows that at each stage his confidence is merely a matter of probability not of certainty. And this means, as we just saw, that our confidence in the correctness of even demonstrative reasoning can only be an effect of our previous experience with such reasoning (just as legal arguments acquire weight from precedent, and just as custom acquires normative force from long usage), and so that the degree of evidence of the conclusion depends on prior cognitive causes and the customary associations they establish, not on valid argument itself. That is enough to show that reason itself is not sufficient for justification; for if reason were, no additional check would be necessary. But it also shows that reason is not the *cause* of confidence, which is the real issue here; instead, repeated checks are.

That confidence is increased again when the rough draft is sent to colleagues who concur, and still more when the reviewers accept the piece for publication and it receives no refutations. Again, the cause in each case of the mathematician's increased confidence is not the addition of more reasoning, but rather *custom*, in both senses: the agreement of others constitutes a customary view of the proof, and the effect of that agreement on the mathematician is the increase of confidence, a matter of psychological custom. As a consequence, what causes *belief* in or the *evidence* of the conclusion is not *knowledge*, but the addition of more of what we trust in a merely probable sense. Hume then generalizes the case from the abstract realm of mathematics to the marketplace, indicating again that our confidence in reasoning is itself dependent upon custom in these senses:

In accompts of any length or importance, Merchants seldom trust to the infallible certainty of numbers for their security; but by the

artificial structure of the accompts, produce a probability beyond what is deriv'd from the skill and experience of the accomptant. For that is plainly of itself some degree of probability... But knowledge and probability are of such contrary and disagreeing natures, that they cannot run insensibly into each other, and that because they will not divide, but must be either entirely present, or entirely absent. Besides, if any single addition were certain, every one wou'd be so, and consequently the whole or total sum... I had almost said that this was certain; but I reflect that it must be reduced *itself*, as well as every other reasoning, and from knowledge degenerate into probability. [I:IV:I 181]

The first step here is the generalization: it is not only mathematicians whose confidence is both justified and caused by custom, but each of us in our daily lives. Second, Hume points out, this fact simply rules out any analysis of epistemic confidence as certainty grounded in rational justification. And finally, Hume lays his Pyrrhonian cards on the table, applying his own skeptical principle to his own argument in the reflexivity Sextus compares to the action of a purgative that must expel itself with the matter it is taken to purge, a reflexivity that distinguishes the Pyrrhonian from the more conservative Academic skepticism.¹⁴ Hume is not even confident that his own lack of confidence in reason is justified. He now turns to the problem of coming to understand the way in which custom in fact leads to confidence. Here we will see the union of Hume's naturalism and skepticism in his quest for an understanding of the mechanisms of cognition.

Since therefore all knowledge resolves itself into probability, and becomes at last of the same nature with that evidence, which we employ in common life, we must now examine this latter species of reasoning, and see on what foundation it stands. [I:IV:I 181]

¹⁴ Candrakīrti uses the same metaphor for his own skeptical arguments in *Prasannapadā* (*Lucid Exposition*), echoing Nāgārjuna's emphasis in *Mūlamadhamakakārikā* (*Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*) that the emptiness of emptiness is what allows us to recover conventional truth. Candrakīrti's point is that the skeptical arguments do not establish an alternative view regarding the fundamental nature of reality to that against which they are mounted, but rather that they set aside the entire program of establishing a fundamental nature of reality, simply leaving us to rest content with our conventions for engaging with reality as we experience it. See (Nagarjuna 1995; Garfield 2015).

Note that Hume does *not* assert here that the consequence of the arguments he has offered is that we have no knowledge at all, but rather that “knowledge resolves itself into probability.” His skepticism with regard to reason is then not an attack on the possibility of knowledge in its ordinary sense, but a naturalistic demystification of knowledge and an exploration of what the knowledge “we employ in common life” really is, and that involves a search for the nature of epistemic warrant as we find it in our actual, customary practices. The first premise of the argument that leads to Hume’s view about this matter is that we are more confident of our views the more experience we have in a domain:

‘Tis certain a man of solid sense and long experience ought to have, and usually has, a greater assurance in his opinions, than one that is foolish and ignorant, and that our sentiments have different degrees of authority, even with ourselves, in proportion to the degrees of our reason and experience. [I:IV:I 182]

Nonetheless, the more experience we have, the more errors we will have committed, and the more seriously we will take the possibility of error:

In the man of the best sense and longest experience, this authority is never entire; Since even such-a-one must be conscious of many errors in the past, and must still dread the like for the future. [I:IV:I 182]

Now things get complicated. This is the point where it is tempting to contemporary readers to take Hume to be presenting a fallacious argument employing the probability calculus. But he is instead calling our attention to the accumulation of causes of uncertainty in our estimation of the degree of confidence we ought to have in our own reasoning, as a defense attorney would build a legal case against that offered by the prosecution. Our “man of solid sense and long experience,” aware of his own fallibility, decides to adjust his level of confidence in his own judgment by reducing it in proportion to his error rate on such matters. He does so, but then realizes that to make that adjustment correctly would require him to know his own error rate. He is fallible about that, too, and so he needs to adjust that confidence before he can adjust the first...

Here then arises a new species of probability to correct and regulate the first, and fix its just standard and proportion. ...[H]aving adjusted these two together, we are oblig'd by our reason to add a new doubt deriv'd from the possibility of error in the estimation we make of the truth and fidelity of our faculties. [I:IV:I 182]

So we not only know that we are fallible, but we know that we don't know how fallible we actually are, and each attempt to make the requisite adjustment presupposes knowledge of our error rate at that level that is equally inaccessible:

But this decision, tho' it shou'd be favourable to our preceding judgment, being founded only on probability, must weaken still further our first evidence, and must itself be weaken'd by a fourth doubt of the same kind, and so on *in infinitum*; till at last there remain nothing of the original probability, however great we may suppose it to have been, and however small the diminution by every new uncertainty. [I:IV:I 182]

Hume is not arguing that we must say that the probability we assign to the original belief reduces to 0. That would be fallacious, and also would be an argument not available to Hume. As we have noted, by *probability* Hume means *confidence*, our willingness to assert and *probative force*. Our merchant starts out confident in his books. He then realizes that his accountant may have made an error, and so decides to revise down his confidence by some amount; but he then realizes that he can't be confident of that amount, and so on *ad infinitum*. The result is that he can't even know how confident he can be of his accounts, let alone whether they are accurate. So at this point, *if reasoning alone is what warrants belief*, he simply has no warrant for assertion at all, since warrant at least requires us to know how confident we are regarding that which we assert. And so, Hume concludes, if we *only consider the objects* of our reasoning, there can be no basis for belief at all: Reason itself subverts any reason for any assertion:

I have less confidence in my opinions, than when I only consider the objects concerning which I reason; And when I proceed still farther, to turn the scrutiny against every successive estimation I make of my faculties, all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence.¹⁵ [I:IV:I 183]

¹⁵ The echo of Bayle here is unmistakable. Bayle writes that Pyrrhonism leads to "the total extinction not only of faith, but of reason." (Bayle and Popkin 1702/1965b, 207)

Note carefully the conclusion of this argument. Hume argues not that he does or should “have less confidence in [his] opinions” *tout court*. Instead he argues that *if reason is the foundation for warrant, or is taken to be the cause* of that confidence, then we could have no warrant, and nothing could account for that confidence. This is not an argument against the probative use of reason, but against the probative use of *reason alone*, and against the idea that the probative force of reason can be found within reason.

3.2. The Skeptical Rehabilitation of Reason

The positive Pyrrhonian turn is yet to come.:

Shou’d it here be ask’d me, whether I sincerely assent to this argument, which I seem to take such pains to inculcate, and whether I be really one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in *any* thing possest of *any* measures of truth and falsehood; I shou’d reply, that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I, nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion. Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin’d us to judge as well as to breathe and feel; Nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies, when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sunshine. 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. [I:IV:I 183]

This is one of the most important passages for understanding not only this argument, but Hume’s project in Book I of the *Treatise* as a whole. Hume first affirms that he does not deny, on the basis of this argument, that we are ever committed to our judgments. Nobody ever sincerely refuses to assent or to deny. The important question is, then, “why are we committed them?” Hume’s answer is that it is not because there are good *reasons* for believing, reasons that we somehow overlooked in the previous argument, but rather because nature *causes* us to do so. Belief isn’t something at which we arrive for *reasons*, Hume argues, but something that is *caused* in us, albeit often by arguments, as, perhaps, his

argument might cause us to believe that beliefs are caused, not justified (but not only by arguments—a point Wittgenstein makes with particular force in his Humean analysis of knowledge in *On Certainty*).

Once again, it is not only customs in the sense of social conventions such as checking each other's work, or relying on testimony that causes beliefs, but also in the sense of a "customary connexion" between a typical cause of a belief and that belief. This is not a reason to suspend belief, but rather to acknowledge that our belief-forming mechanisms are simply natural.¹⁶ Nor is it a descriptive retreat from the project of explaining and grounding norms of assertion. For on Hume's understanding, custom is not a substitute for warrant, but a source of warrant. Hume sums this up in language that is entirely Pyrrhonian in character:

My intention then in displaying so carefully the arguments of that fantastic sect, is only to make the reader sensible of the truth of my hypothesis, *that all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; And that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures.* [I:IV:I 183]

Hume drives this point home forcefully with the following observation about the power of skeptical arguments themselves. If belief *were* a rational matter, rather than the effect of

¹⁶ Baier puts the point this way: "[Hume defends] natural sentiment not as a mere distraction, but as the *replacer* of reason. Reason must be worked through, taken to the end of its tether, before sentiment can take over the guiding role." But this is not quite right, although it is close. It is more precise to say that Hume is arguing that sentiment (a shorthand for habit, instinct, custom) is and always has been the guide to belief formation, and to the extent that we reason, that is simply to engage in one more custom.

A few lines later, Baier writes, "Here at the transitional point between Book One's *reductio ad absurdum* of Cartesian intellect and the rest of the *Treatise's* development of its more passionate and sociable successor, Hume gives us a short... preview of the dialectic of the passions which is to be more fully developed in Books Two and Three." (*Ibid.*, p. 21) Again, this is close, but not precise enough. As I have been arguing, this discussion is not a *preparation* for, but rather *presupposes* the discussion of the passions in book II. It simply makes no sense on its own, or is at best a promissory note. Hume has chosen a path of exposition that begins in Book I and moves to Book II, but the conceptual structure of the *Treatise* is the reverse. Just as one might show someone through a house first on the main floor and only take them to the basement later, to inspect the foundations, although those foundations hold up the house, Hume is taking us through the epistemology that rests on the doctrine of the passions before taking us to the foundation that grounds them.

discursive and perceptual causes, then, given the manifest cogency of arguments such as the one just offered, we would believe nothing at all. The fact that we manifestly do have beliefs therefore shows that it is not:¹⁷

If belief... were a simple act of thought, without any peculiar manner of conception, or the addition of a force and vivacity, it must infallibly destroy itself, and in every case terminate in a total suspence of judgment. But as experience will sufficiently convince anyone,... tho' he can find no error in the foregoing arguments, yet he still continues to believe, to think, and reason as usual, he may safely conclude, that his reasoning and belief is some sensation or peculiar manner of conception, which 'tis impossible for mere ideas and reflections to destroy. [IV:I:I 184]

Belief cannot simply be a product of reason; if it were, we would believe nothing. This observation leads to a final puzzle about the impotency of skeptical arguments. After all,

¹⁷ This is probably where I disagree most directly with Qu's (2015)'s account of Hume's epistemology—although I agree with him in most matters. Qu argues that Hume's positive epistemology is in a sense *opposed* to his skepticism, and mitigates it. I see the positive epistemology as constituting a descriptive account of custom *within* the scope of his Pyrrhonian skepticism, as part of the “fourfold prescription.” So, I agree with Qu that Hume's project is to ground epistemic norms on the basis of naturalistic descriptions of our epistemic practice (and I endorse his lucid exposition and defense of that Humean project). But I disagree that those norms are meant to have a status that transcends custom. In the end, their normativity derives from the power of custom to regulate our lives. (Once again, recalling the legal roots of Hume's use of this term is apposite.) And this is true as much in the moral as in the epistemic domain, as we shall see. (This may be another point on which Qu and I part company.)

For similar reasons I disagree with Loeb's (2011) critique of what he calls the “traditional interpretation” or Hume's epistemology, which he attributes to Kemp Smith (1941). Loeb argues that Hume—far from undermining the rational credentials of induction (for instance), expresses “approval of inductive inference” and “persists in attributing causal inference to ‘reason’, which he reconstructs as a component of the faculty of association carrying epistemic pride of place.” (Kemp Smith 1941, 115) While the distance between my reading and Loeb's is not great, I do think that it is important to see that Hume does not return *rational* credentials to inductive reasoning in approving it, but rather sees it as grounded in *custom*. The naturalism and skepticism are firmly in place, and trump any rationalist defense of *any* kind of reasoning. In this, Kemp Smith was correct.

A bit later (2011, 117), Loeb writes that “In attributing inductive inference to custom, Hume sees himself putting it on a firm epistemic footing... [This brings to light] externalist strands in Hume's thinking that begin to explain how he could assign inductive inference a positive epistemic status: *because* it results from custom.” Depending on how one reads this, it is either absolutely correct, or dead wrong. If Loeb means that custom gives *rational* warrant to inductive reasoning, that is incorrect; but if he means that the only warrant any practice can have is customary, then that is exactly right. But that is a skeptical conclusion, not an anti-skeptical conclusion.

Hume himself is offering arguments, and seems committed to the power of the rational argument to compel assent. His skeptical arguments in this section, like the arguments of Sextus Empiricus that inspire them, have as an apparent conclusion the fact that none of our beliefs are rationally warranted. Why, he asks, do we not draw just this conclusion, if not rationally, then at least as the effect of these arguments?

But here, perhaps, it may be demanded, how it happens, even upon my hypothesis, that these arguments above-explain'd produce not a total suspense of judgment, and after what manner the mind ever retains a degree of assurance in any subject? ... 'Tis therefore demanded, *how it happens, that even after all we retain a degree of belief, which is sufficient for our purposes, either in philosophy or common life.* [IV:I:I 184-185]

Hume's answer does not betray his skepticism, nor does it abandon his naturalism:

Reason first appears in possession of the throne, prescribing laws, and imposing maxims, with an absolute sway and authority. Her enemy, therefore, is oblig'd to take shelter under her protection, and by making use of rational arguments to prove the fallaciousness and imbecility of reason, produces, in a manner, a patent under her hand and seal. This patent has at first an authority, proportion'd to the present and immediate authority of reason, from which it is deriv'd. But as it is suppos'd to be contradictory to reason, it gradually diminishes the force of that governing power, and its own at the same time; till both vanish away into nothing.... The sceptical and dogmatic reasons are of the same kind, tho' contrary in their operation and tendency; So that where the latter is strong, it has an enemy of equal force in the former to encounter; And as their forces were at first equal, they still continue so.... 'Tis happy, therefore, that nature breaks the force of all sceptical arguments in time, and keeps them from having any considerable influence on the understanding. Were we to trust entirely to their self-destruction, that can never take place, 'till they have first subverted all conviction, and have totally destroy'd human reason. [I:IV:I 186-187]

Hume here presents a psychological explanation of the impotence of skeptical arguments even over those who endorse them. We begin, as we began this discussion, with full faith in reason as the origin and validator of our beliefs. Nonetheless, rational arguments themselves prove that reason is incapable of this task. The effect of those arguments is to weaken our faith in reason, but since it is our very faith in reason that leads us in the first

place to endorse those arguments, that diminution in confidence in reason weakens the force of skeptical arguments themselves. There is thus an equilibrium of forces at play in the mind. Rational arguments cause us to disbelieve reason; the disbelief in the probative force of rational arguments causes us to withdraw assent from those arguments. There is probability in each side, leading to a kind of hung jury. Skeptical arguments may then be convincing, but they can never be powerful enough to overcome the other factors that fix belief, including prominently the customary force of argument as a *cause* of belief. Hume thus, like any good Pyrrhonian, turns his skeptical arguments on those arguments themselves, trusting them to act as a dialectical purgative.¹⁸

We thus see that the positive side of Hume's Pyrrhonism follows Sextus' fourfold prescription, and so recommends adherence to the arts (including the arts of reason and persuasion), our instincts (including our dialectical and logical instincts), our senses, and, most importantly for Hume, custom; we are justified in our researches and in our actions because of custom, and for no other reason; nothing external to custom could be justificatory. That is not to *abandon* the normativity of our epistemic and moral lives; it is to *explain* it.

3.3. Methodological Morals

Let us see how Hume aims at *epochē* in this discussion. We can imagine two dogmatic attitudes towards the relation between our conventions regarding the acceptance of reasons and arguments as justificatory: On the one hand, one might argue that these conventions are justified because reason can be shown to be a validator of our beliefs. On the other hand, one might argue—as Hume is at pains to deny that he does—that since

¹⁸ Fogelin (2009) asserts that

In his section concerning skepticism with regard to reason, Hume shows no sign of recognizing the precarious character of his own position relative to his own skeptical argument. Hume seems to see himself as standing above the fray while the skeptic and the dogmatist engage in mortal combat that inevitably leads to their mutual destruction. It doesn't seem to cross his mind that he himself could be swept up in the combat with a similar outcome. (54)

As we have seen, this is simply wrong.

reason has no such power, all of our conventions regarding belief fixation are unjustified and are to be rejected.

Each of these dogmatic extremes presupposes that our epistemic conventions require justification, and that they are justified if, and only if, good arguments can be provided for them. Hume, like Sextus, rejects both extremes not in favor of compromise, but in favor of an inversion achieved by rejecting that shared biconditional. That is, Hume argues that our epistemic customs require no justification at all: they are part of our nature. And it is our customs—the brute facts about how we think and how we interact as members of epistemic communities—that explain why arguments work in the first place, although that explanation reveals that they do not work in the way that the dogmatist might have thought that they must.¹⁹

And this in turn recalls the central role of custom in Hume's enterprise. When Hume provides an account of human nature, and when he provides a skeptical analysis of a human practice—in this case the practice of discursive justification—he locates custom, comprising both the natural laws of human psychology and our common conventions, as the explanatory bedrock. In doing so, he is consistent with the classical skeptical tradition, but advances that tradition in line with a modern conception of explanation and natural science and a social understanding of human nature. And, just as Hume took custom to ground the normative force of law—not to undermine it—he takes custom to ground the norms that govern epistemic practice—not to undermine them.

Many have seen Hume's discussion of reason in this section and elsewhere in the *Treatise* as an attack on the authority of reason, *per se*. That would be an error. As Baier reminds us, "Hume's project all along has not been so much to dethrone reason as to enlarge our conception of it, to make it social and passionate." (Baier 1991, 278) And as she remarks a few pages later, "Reason in solitude becomes not just abstruse but monstrous. Reason's appropriate nourishment is civilized debate within 'the republic of letters', along with

¹⁹ As Baier notes, "We need each other's help in judging the fidelity or 'truth' of representations, and we have that help. Persons among persons are the liveliest objects of our mental attention, in part because we depend in so many ways upon those persons." (1991, 47) And, as Baier also notes, this social dimension of epistemology is mirrored in Hume's ethics.

thoughtful response even outside that republic.... Hume's 'deference' to his readers is required of him by his own reconstruction of reason as social, concerned and responsive." (*Ibid.*, p. 284) We read Hume best when we read him as a communitarian skeptic, that is, as a good Pyrrhonian.

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