REASON, NORMATIVITY, AND HUME’S TITLE PRINCIPLE

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Hume describes himself in his philosophical writings as relying on something that he calls “reason,” even though he reaches striking conclusions about its limitations—arguing, for example, that it cannot “found” the supposition of the uniformity of nature or the belief in an external world of bodies, and that it cannot alone be the source of motivation to act or of moral distinctions. Thus far, there is no paradox: one can continue to use something for many purposes without supposing that it can be used for every purpose. More starkly and worryingly, however, he seems, on the one hand, not only to employ reason but to acknowledge from the very outset its normative role as a “tribunal” (T, Intro, I/xiii), and yet on the other he claims to discover not only limits to what it can do but also its liability to “doubt,” “contradictions and imperfections,” and “objections” that it seemingly cannot “defend against,” “dispel,” or “remove”:

[Passage A] This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady which can never be radically cur’d, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chace it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it. ’Tis impossible, upon any system, to defend either our understanding or senses; and we but expose them further when we endeavour
to justify them in that manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always encreases the further we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. (T, 1.4.2.57/ 218)

[Passage B] The intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another…. [R]eason is incapable of dispelling these clouds …. (T, 1.4.7.8-9/ 268-9)

[Passage C] [Pyrrhonian] objections … can have no other tendency than to shew the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they are not able, by their most diligent enquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundation of these operations, or to remove the objections, which may be raised against them. (EU, 12.23/ 128; see also E, 12.15n/ 124)

The question of the normative role of reason in Hume’s philosophy comes to a head in the concluding section of Book 1 of A Treatise of Human Nature, where he formulates and appears to adopt a principle requiring “assent to” reason in some instances but not in others:

[Title Principle] Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate on us. (T, 1.4.7.11/ 270)
Several distinct but closely related questions have been posed in recent years about this “Title Principle,” as I have called it (Garrett 1997). First, what does Hume mean by ‘reason’ in it? Second, what exactly is the scope of its mandate? Third, what kind of normativity is expressed by the ‘ought’ contained in it? Fourth, can it allow him properly to overcome—if only to some extent—the doubt, contradictions and imperfections, and objections concerning reason that he mentions? These are the central questions I will seek to answer. I will conclude with brief reflections on the significance for contemporary epistemology of Hume’s treatment of the normativity of reason in relation to the Title Principle.

1. The Meaning of ‘Reason’

The term ‘reason’ has been used in many different senses—and this is so even apart from the several count-noun senses that allow such locutions as ‘the reason why’ and ‘some reasons for and against’. In an inclusive normative sense that is particularly close to the count-noun use and particularly common in contemporary philosophy, it signifies a general responsiveness to good reasons of any kind, whether for belief or action. The term can also be used, however, in a still quite extensive but more specifically epistemic sense, to designate the faculty, power or capacity of knowing or apprehending truths, regardless of the particular means employed. James Beattie (1770) a contemporary critic of Hume, lists this as one of several senses of the term ‘reason’ used by philosophers, and Peter Millican (Garrett and Millican 2011; Millican 2012) has recently noted its use by such eighteenth century British philosophers as Francis Hutcheson and Richard Price. In addition, there is a narrower epistemic sense in which the term designates a faculty,
power, or capacity of knowing with certainty; in this sense, arguably employed by Descartes among others, the term may be thought to encompass at most the intuition of self-evident truths plus demonstrations from them.

Finally, the term can be used in a logico-psychological sense, to designate the power or faculty of reasoning or inferring—terms that Hume uses interchangeably. It is in this sense, Beattie remarks, that the term “is used by those who are most accurate in distinguishing.” As including the creation of arguments as well as the making of inferences, it is also the sense explicitly adopted and elaborated by John Locke—almost certainly the greatest single influence on Hume’s philosophical terminology—in the chapter “On Reason” of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1975; original edition 1689) Like Locke, Hume distinguishes two species of reasoning: “demonstrative” and “probable.” For Hume, demonstrative reasoning (i) depends on intuitions of relations among ideas, (ii) yields certain conclusions the denial of which is inconceivable, and (iii) cannot establish the real existence of anything; it is most useful, he thinks, primarily in mathematics. Probable reasoning, in contrast, (i) depends on experience, (ii) yields conclusions the denial of which is conceivable, and (iii) concerns “matters of fact and real existence.” All reasoning that is not demonstrative is “probable” in this broad Lockean sense, even when the experience on which it is based is judged to be conclusive.

Despite allowing that reason can serve as a tribunal, Hume does not use the term ‘reason’ in the first and broadest normative sense. For although he frequently invokes reasons to act as well as reasons to believe, he reserves the separate terms ‘reasonable’ and ‘reasonableness’ to describe a general responsiveness to good reasons. Instead, he
argues that actions, whatever reasons we may have for them, cannot be “contrary or conformable to reason” on the grounds that “reason is the discovery of truth and falsehood,” while actions themselves are neither true nor false (T, 3.1.1.9/458). Nor, although commentators have sometimes suggested otherwise, does he ever use the term ‘reason’ in the narrow epistemic sense that would exclude probable reasoning from its scope. The few passages in which he may seem to do so (i) are clearly restricted by context to the discussion of demonstrative reasoning, (ii) concern only what reason specifically without benefit of experience can do, or (iii) exclude from the scope of reason not probable reasoning itself, but rather a key mental transition (namely, the “presumption of the uniformity of nature”) that occurs within probable reasoning but is produced by “custom or habit.”

In passages contrasting reason with the passions, Hume alludes to reason as “the same faculty, with that, which judges of truth and falsehood” (T, 2.3.3.8/417) and writes of “reason, in a strict sense, as meaning the judgment of truth and falsehood” (DP 1.5). It is therefore not without some plausibility to propose, as Millican does, that Hume uses ‘reason’ in the extensive epistemic sense, according to which it designates the overarching cognitive capacity to apprehend truths, whether by inference, intuition, memory, the senses, or some other means. Upon investigation, however, the passages just cited are less conclusive in this regard than they might appear.

Consider first the latter two passages, which characterize reason as the “judgment” of truth and falsehood. For Hume, memories and sense perceptions each carry their own immediate assent to their contents with them, without the need for any additional faculty to provide it. Something very similar is true of the immediate awareness of relations
among ideas that Hume (following Descartes and Locke) calls “intuitions” and regards as essential starting points and components of demonstrative reasoning: although he uses the term ‘assurance’ rather than ‘assent’ in this case, the assurance is again immediate and requires no additional faculty to provide it. It would be quite unnatural to speak of any of these kinds of immediate assent or assurance as exercises of “judgment” or species of “judging,” and in fact Hume never uses those terms to describe any of them. On the contrary, he explicitly distinguishes both memory and the senses from “judgment” (T, 1.3.9.3/ 108; T, 1.3.10.10/ 632; T, 3.3.4.13/ 612).

Hume recognizes, of course, that memory, sense perception, and intuition can, in virtue of the immediate assent or assurance they bestow on their contents, also provide inputs to processes of judging. He writes, for example, that animals (like humans) have need for “memory or sense” to “be the foundation of their judgment” concerning matters of fact (T, 1.3.16.6/ 177-8). These inputs can also be weighed against each other in making a final judgment. Indeed, there can even be judgments concerning whether one or more of these inputs is itself correct or accurate. Yet memory, the senses, and intuition cannot directly confirm or contradict one another, since they have different objects. Crucially, the only psychological process he ever describes by which judgments depending on, integrating, or evaluating these inputs can occur is precisely the process of reasoning or inference itself (for example, T/ 1.3.9.11/ 112; T, 1.3.10.9/ 122; T, 1.3.13.17-19/ 152-4)—that is, the application to these inputs of reason in the logico-psychological sense. Hume never characterizes any of these inputs to judgment-by-reasoning as themselves due to reason, however, nor to their sources as parts of reason.
Returning now to the first passage, concerning the “discovery” of truth and falsehood, it should be observed that Hume’s argument about reason and action requires only that reason be a discovery of properties—namely, truth and falsehood—that voluntary actions lack; despite his incidental use of the definite article, he need not be characterizing reason as any discovery of truth and falsehood. Even if he is doing so, however, he also declares that reasoning is always a “discovery of … relations” (T, 1.3.3.2/73), and he explicitly contrasts what is thus “discovered” by reasoning with what was instead already “immediately present to the memory and senses” (E, 7.27/59). To be sure, he does refer once to intuition as concerned specifically with those relations “discoverable at first sight” (T, 1.3.1.2/70) rather than by reasoning and several times to “objects discovering themselves to the senses.” When characterizing reason as “the discovery of truth and falsehood,” however, it is reasonable to suppose that Hume is thinking of the term ‘discovery’ as implying some further investigative activity on the part of the mind itself—an “action of uncovering,” in the common eighteenth century sense noted in the *Oxford English Dictionary*—such as judging through reasoning, rather than mere receptivity of the kind involved in the “immediate” awareness of memory, the senses (bodies “discovering themselves to us”), and intuition.

As Millican rightly observes, Hume often freely interchanges the terms ‘reason’ and ‘the understanding’, doing so seemingly just for the sake of elegant verbal variation—even though in general usage ‘the understanding’ often encompasses a wider scope of cognitive and conceptual activities than just reasoning. One example of this interchange is Passage A; another notable example (and one highlighted by Millican) is Hume’s
treatment of a footnote intended to distinguish two senses of the term ‘imagination’. A note originally placed in Book 2 of the *Treatise*, Hume states:

To prevent all ambiguity, I must observe that where I oppose the imagination to the memory, I mean in general the faculty that presents our fainter ideas. In all other places, and particularly when it is oppos’d to the understanding, I understand the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings. (T, 2.2.7n/ 371n)

He arranged for the removal of this version of the footnote from copies of the *Treatise*, however, in order to add an enlarged and modified version of it to Book 1, which reads in part:

When I oppose the imagination to the memory, I mean the faculty, by which we form our fainter ideas. When I oppose it to reason, I mean the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings. (T, 1.3.9.19n/ 118)

Yet far from showing that ‘reason’ and ‘understanding’ both have an extensive scope for Hume, this substitution suggests rather that both terms are alike limited to “our demonstrative and probable reasonings”—for all other cognitive and conceptual functions having to do with “fainter” (i.e., non-memory) ideas are left with the imagination, even in the second and narrower sense of ‘imagination’ that he here distinguishes. The replacement of ‘the understanding’ by ‘reason’ also suggests that, if Hume prefers one of the two terms as being more accurate in this context, it is ‘reason’.
Such a preference would make sense for him, since he often implicitly treats the scope of ‘the understanding’ as consisting in reasoning plus intuition, as when he writes:

As the operations of human understanding divide themselves into two kinds, the comparing of ideas, and the inferring of matter of fact; were virtue discover’d by the understanding; it must be an object of one of these operations, nor is there any third operation of the understanding, which can discover it. (T, 3.1.1.18/ 463)

The “comparing of ideas” is always by intuition or demonstrative reasoning, in his view, while the “inferring of matter of fact” is always by probable reasoning. Assuming that whatever can be immediately intuited could also, at least in principle, be demonstrated, the scope of what reason can do is the same as the scope of what the understanding can do, despite the latter’s inclusion of intuition; and it is in remarks about what these faculties can do that Hume tends to interchange the two terms.³

While the case that Hume uses the term ‘reason’ in an extensive epistemic sense is thus less powerful than it might appear, there are at least five reasons to conclude that he uses it specifically in the logico-psychological sense—the sense recognized by Beattie as that employed by those “most accurate in distinguishing.” First, and most importantly, we have already seen that Hume consistently distinguishes demonstrative and probable reasoning as the two jointly exhaustive kinds of reasoning, and he argues in several crucial instances that reason cannot produce something simply on the grounds that neither of these two species of reasoning can produce it. This is his primary strategy for arguing that inferences from experience (what we would now call inductive inferences) are not “determin’d by reason” (T, 1.3.6); it is one of his two strategies for arguing that
“reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will” (T, 2.3.3); and it is one of his three strategies for establishing that moral distinctions are not “deriv’d from reason” (T, 3.1.1). In this third case, in fact, he explicitly identifies what can be “discover’d by the understanding” with what can be “inferred by reason” (T, 3.1.1.26/ 468; emphasis added).

Second, Hume evidently treats ‘reason’ and ‘reasoning faculty’ as equivalent terms. For example, the sections of the *Treatise* and of *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* entitled “Of the reason of animals” (T, 1.3.16 and E, 9) are both devoted entirely to the topic of animal reasoning or inference, and the *Treatise* section is introduced as “examin[ing] the reasoning faculty of brutes” (T, 1.3.15.12/ 176).

Third, not only does Hume never explicitly include the senses, memory, or even intuition within the scope of ‘reason’, he regularly contrasts reason with the senses—as for example, when he examines whether an opinion is due to “the *sense*, *reason*, or the *imagination*” (T, 1.4.2.1/ 187; italics in original) or alludes to qualities of which we are informed by “neither sense nor reason” (E, 4.16/ 29). Indeed, Passage A itself explicitly distinguishes a “sceptical doubt with respect to reason” (the topic of T, 1.4.1, “Of skepticism with regard to reason”) from one “with respect to the *senses*” (the topic of T, 1.4.2, “Of skepticism with regard to the *senses*”). Hume is equally consistent in contrasting “the understanding” to the senses (for example, E, 7.1/ 48) and to both the senses and memory (T, 1.4.7.3/ 264; quoted again by Hume at LG, 4). Immediately after distinguishing the skeptical doubt about reason from that about the senses, Passage A continues: “‘Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or *senses*.”
Fourth, the logico-psychological sense of ‘reason’ lends itself more readily and naturally than does the epistemic sense to Hume’s posing of the question of the “veracity” of reason (T, 1.4.2.1/ 187) and of whether it “ought to be assented to.” Millican proposes that Hume can intelligibly raise such questions even when ‘reason’ is understood as a term for “the capacity for apprehending truths,” in much the same way that it is intelligible to ask whether a physician’s (proffered) cures do in fact really cure. Nevertheless, a “cure” that does not in fact cure deserves ultimately to lose the designation ‘cure’, whereas Hume shows no inclination to consider withdrawing the title ‘reason’ from the reasoning faculty regardless of the conclusions that might or might not be reached about its apprehension of truth.

Finally, as we shall see in the next section, each of the discoveries that Hume cites as motivating the Title Principle specifically concerns the faculty of “reasoning.” In contrast, what he identifies as the most disturbing aspects of the “sceptical doubt … with respect to … the senses” to which he alludes in Passage A—namely, the essential role of confusions and conflations in generating the belief in an external world—are not even mentioned in the immediate lead-up to the Title Principle.

2. Reason and the Scope of the Title Principle

In its reference to reason, the Title Principle thus approves assent to some but not all outcomes specifically of the faculty of reasoning or inference. In order to understand precisely what beliefs the principle mandates, however, it is necessary first to understand something of the dialectic by which it arises.
It is a central part of Hume’s project to investigate, by means of “the experimental method,” the nature and operations of the reasoning faculty. He claims to discover, for example, that all instances of demonstrative reasoning (like the intuitions from which they begin) depend on at least one of four particular relations (resemblance, contrariety, degrees in any quality, and proportions in quantity of number) that cannot be altered without altering the intrinsic character of the ideas so related. He claims to discover that all probable reasoning, in contrast, (i) constitutes a kind of “discovery” of causal relations; (ii) requires experience of past “constant conjunctions,” in which objects of one kind have always or usually preceded objects of another; (iii) proceeds from an impression or memory of something of one of these two kinds; and (iv) results in a “lively” idea that is the belief in the existence (past, present, or future) of something of the second kind. He further claims to discover (v) that the inference to this belief depends on a “presumption” of the uniformity of nature; (vi) that the making of this instrumental presumption is accomplished not by any mediating reasoning to a conclusion about the uniformity of nature but rather by the psychological mechanism of “custom or habit”; and (vii) that the “belief or assent” (terms he uses interchangeably) that results from probable reasoning consists in a quantity of felt “force and vivacity” that “enlivens” the idea as a result of the force and vivacity of the original impression or memory. The particular degree of force and vivacity (i.e., “liveliness”) varies with the degree of constancy of the experienced conjunction, the degree of similarity of the present impression or memory to the elements of that conjunction, and other factors as well. The highest level of force and vivacity, resulting from a pervasive and completely uniform constant conjunction, he calls “proof”; lower levels he calls “probability” in a sense narrower (and more in
accordance with everyday usage) than the broad sense employed in his adopted Lockean term ‘probable reasoning’.

In the final section of the *Enquiry*, Hume explicitly distinguishes two species of skepticism. “Antecedent scepticism,” identified with Descartes, requires that one doubt both one’s own previous opinions and the veracity of one’s own faculties until one has been positively assured of their veracity by “a chain of reasoning, deduced from some original principle, which cannot possibly be fallacious or deceitful” (E, 12.3-5/ 116-7). This kind of skepticism, Hume argues, (i) is psychologically unattainable and (ii) would be incurable if it could be attained, since its requirement cannot be met. That its requirement cannot be met is not cause for alarm, however, since the requirement itself is not “reasonable.” “Consequent scepticism,” in contrast, occurs after enquiry and only as the result of specific discoveries about the infirmities of human cognitive faculties. Hume’s own skepticism is consequent, and he proceeds to support it by considering a number of further specific discoveries.

Like the concluding section of the *Enquiry*, the concluding section of *Treatise* Book 1 (T, 1.4.7, “Conclusion of this book”) examines a number of specific discoveries about the workings of human cognitive faculties that are capable of inducing doubt about their veracity. The discoveries cited in the two works are partly overlapping. The discoveries cited in the *Enquiry* are the primary “objections” to which Passage C refers and are classified by subject matter: those concerning the senses, those concerning demonstrative (“abstract”) reasoning, and those concerning probable reasoning. In contrast, each of the five discoveries cited in the *Treatise* is treated as primarily, if not always exclusively, implicating “reasoning” in some way. Four of these discoveries were made earlier in the
the fifth and final discovery, while dependent on an earlier one, is new. Because they lead directly to the formulation of the Title Principle, I will focus on the discoveries cited in the Treatise.

The first doubt-inducing discovery cited in the Treatise is that assent to the conclusions of probable reasonings consists in force and vivacity, produced by “experience” and “habit” through a process the veracity of which cannot be established by any non-question-begging reasoning. This incapacity results from the fact that all probable reasoning, via the operation of habit, presupposes the uniformity of nature, which is itself something that could not be established without probable reasoning; hence, Hume writes, “after the most accurate and exact of my reasonings, I can give no reason why I shou’d assent to it” (T, 1.4.7.3/265, alluding to T, 1.3.5-7). This “quality, by which the mind enlivens some ideas beyond others” is “seemingly … so trivial,” he continues, and yet the understanding is “founded on” it. Indeed, Hume adds, the assent we give to the existence of external objects of sense perception and even the assent we give to the past existence of objects of memory—both of which are of course often also inputs to reasoning—consists in this force and vivacity as well. Presumably these circumstances are disturbing for Hume because (i) the mind cannot directly observe that vivacity is constantly conjoined with truth and (ii) the prospect of vivacity having non-veridical causes generates an argument in what he calls “the probability of chances” (T, 1.3.11) for the conclusion that the truth of forceful and vivacious ideas is relatively improbable. (See Garrett 2013 for a detailed account of this argument.)

The second doubt-inducing discovery is that there is a conflict between reason and the senses—“or more properly speaking, betwixt those conclusions we form from cause
and effect, and those that persuade us of the continu’d and distinct existence of body” (T, 1.4.3.15/ 231). This conflict, which he calls “the contradiction of the modern philosophy,” arises from a “satisfactory” piece of probable reasoning for the conclusion that bodies lack qualities resembling the color perceptions and/or tactile perceptions that the mind must nevertheless employ to conceive specifically of how bodies occupy space. Because belief is itself a lively idea, however, conception is a prerequisite for it; hence, he concludes, it is not “possible for us to reason justly and regularly from causes and effects, and at the same time believe the continu’d existence of matter” (T, 1.4.7.4/ 266; citing T, 1.4.4). Accordingly, we must either resist this particular piece of probable reasoning or find ourselves unable to specify the qualities by which we suppose bodies to occupy space.

The third doubt-inducing discovery is a defect in our “reasoning” concerning the relation of cause and effect itself. This defect, which lies in a natural illusion about causal necessity that results in part from conflating demonstrative and probable reasoning, leads us either to “contradict ourselves, or talk without a meaning” when we speak of a “tie” or “ultimate and operating principle” between causes and effects themselves (T, 1.4.7.5/ 266-67; citing T, 1.3.14).

The fourth discovery is the topic of the section “Of scepticism with regard to reason” (T, 1.4.1) mentioned previously and affects both demonstrative and probable reasoning. First, although genuine demonstrations are infallible, reflection on the fallibility of our faculties in trying to perform them shows that “our reason must be consider’d as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect; but such-a-one as by the irruption of other causes, and by the inconstancy of our mental powers, may frequently be prevented” (T,
Accordingly, the certainty that a demonstration initially provides for its conclusion is naturally replaced by a degree of assent, lower than “proof,” that is produced by probable reasoning from the less-than-completely-uniform conjunction between attempted demonstration and truth, and thus “knowledge degenerates into probability” (T, 1.4.7.3/181).

Second, however, the degree of assent that any probable reasoning provides for its conclusion is subject to a similar reflective review in light of experienced past successes and failures of probable reasoning. This review will serve to diminish to some extent the felt degree of assent to the original conclusion of probable reasoning; and the probable reasoning that constitutes this review is itself subject to a similar review. By applying a normal variety of probable reasoning—namely, “the probability of causes” (T, 1.3.12), which applies to mixed experiences—each iterated probable reasoning would further diminish the felt assent to the conclusions of each of the previous reasonings, Hume argues, leading eventually, after a finite number of steps, to the loss of all assent or assurance whatever for any conclusion. This dire outcome does not actually occur, Hume argues, only because the unnatural posture of the mind in performing such iterated reflections turns out to prevent the repeated parallel reasonings from having the amount of reverberating destructive force they would otherwise have. Thus he concludes:

The understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either of philosophy or common life. We save ourselves from this total scepticism only by means of that singular and
seemingly trivial property of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things. (T, 1.4.7.7/267-68; citing 1.4.1)

By ‘degree of evidence in any proposition’, as his use of the term elsewhere in the Treatise confirms, he means psychological “evidentness”—that is, degree of belief or assent. ‘The fancy’ is a synonym for ‘the imagination’.

Interpreting the details of this argument about reason’s own (blocked) self-annihilation is a matter of controversy, and critics have proposed a number of objections to it. What matters for present purposes, however, is that Hume accepts it in the Treatise, and derives his fifth and final discovery primarily from it (although he also mentions the third discovery in this connection). This fifth discovery he calls “a very dangerous dilemma” concerning the question of when we ought to yield to trivial features of the imagination that affect reasoning and belief. To approve all such features would lead to the endorsement of the most extravagant and inconsistent opinions—a “false reason.” To disapprove all of them, however—which might have seemed the safer and more obvious course—would be to reject the only feature of the mind that prevents reason’s annihilation of its own initial assent, and would leave us with endorsement of “[no reason] at all.” The reasoning that would lead to reason’s self-annihilation is “refin’d and elaborate,” but we cannot make it a principle simply to reject all refined and elaborate reasoning. For this would cut off all science and philosophy; it would demand, by parity of reasoning, that we accept after all the other trivial features of the imagination as well; and it could not be justified by any reasoning that was not itself refined and elaborate, and thus to be disapproved (T, 1.4.7.7/267-8). Accordingly, Hume concludes, reason alone cannot resolve the Dangerous Dilemma concerning the appropriate standard for the
epistemic endorsement of principles of the imagination as they affect reasoning and belief.

Having reached this new and disturbing discovery, Hume proceeds to narrate in the first person a succession of three moods or frames of mind initiated by his consideration of all of his five doubt-inducing discoveries, but most especially by the last. The first mood is one of “philosophical melancholy and delirium,” and it is only in describing the psychology of this state that he writes in Passage B of “the intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections” as leaving him “ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and … look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another.” He soon discovers that although reason itself is “incapable of dispelling these clouds,” nature is capable of doing so, for the mood is not psychologically sustainable. With relaxation, activity, or “lively impressions of the senses,” it is soon replaced by “indolence and spleen,” a mood in which he (i) rejects sceptical speculations as “cold, and strain’d, and ridiculous”; (ii) “submits” to his “senses and understanding” (thus reiterating the distinction between them) and doing so returns to “belief in the general maxims of the world”; and (iii) proposes to foreswear “torturing” his brain with philosophy for the future.

Importantly, the Title Principle arises initially not through renewed reasoning about the veracity of reason in its various applications but rather as a natural expression of indolence and spleen. Soon, however, the return of the two passions of “curiosity” and “ambition”—along with more general reflection on the unavoidability of speculation about philosophical topics and the practical need to choose a guide to them less dangerous than religion—lead naturally from indolence and spleen to the third mood, an
active return to philosophizing. As Hume now realizes, philosophical enquiry itself is “lively”—that is, it enlivens ideas, producing assent—and it “mixes with some propensity”—that is, it stimulates and satisfies desires or inclinations, such as curiosity and ambition. Philosophizing is therefore fully in accordance with the Title Principle. For this reason, endorsement of the Title Principle offers Hume the prospect of a resolution to his Dangerous Dilemma, by providing a satisfactory principle after all for determining which reasoning to accept and which to reject. To see just how it does so, it is helpful to appreciate the default acceptance principle that it serves in effect to replace.

Because reason typically carries assent to its own conclusions with it, reasoners will naturally find themselves accepting the default principle: “Reason ought to be assented to.” This default principle need not be understood to mean that *every* conclusion of reasoning should be accepted without further question, reflection, or revision, of course; for further reasoning either about the facts or about the circumstances of success and failure in various kinds of past reasonings, or both, may often lead reason itself to give an ultimate verdict different from its initial or provisional one. Well before the final section of *Treatise* Book 1, Hume has already provided a set of “rules by which to judge of causes and effects” (T, 1.3.15) that are themselves “founded on” reasoning concerning previous operations of reason and on (what we thereby come to regard as) the distorting factors to which it is often subject. The default principle should therefore be understood as stating that *reason, as developed by its own self-reflection, ought to be assented to.*

For Hume, however, the surprising moral of his fourth doubt-inducing discovery, giving rise to the Dangerous Dilemma, is that this natural default principle is unacceptable. For the toxic iterated reasoning that would lead to the loss of all assurance
and assent is itself a set of reflective applications of reason to itself in accordance with
the normal operations of probability. By granting normative approval only to the final
outcomes of reflective reasoning that is “lively and mixes with some propensity,” the
Title Principle happily removes from the scope of approval the iterated destructive
reasoning that leads to the Dangerous Dilemma. For on the one hand, this potentially
toxic reasoning fails, as result of a feature of the imagination, to be “lively” enough for
the applications of its higher-order conclusions to diminish assent to lower-level
conclusion. And on the other hand, the potentially toxic reasoning, unlike mundane and
even philosophical reasoning of other kinds, fails to mix with any propensity, even
curiosity or ambition. Nor is that all. Although reasoning from the other doubt-inducing
discoveries generates some lively assent to the proposition that our reason is so “infirm”
as to be highly unreliable, its liveliness proves to be very limited beyond an initial shock;
and it, too, mixes little with any propensity. Accordingly, the Title Principle recommends
retention of some considerable level of belief in the lively results of other reasoning even
in the face of these disturbing discoveries. This recommendation is aided, Hume remarks,
by the recognition that the reasonings to those doubt-inducing discoveries are themselves
products of the very faculty whose veracity they then call into question (T, 1.4.7.17/ 273).

3. Normativity in the Title Principle

Thus far then, the Title Principle has, in a phrase Hume uses elsewhere, a “promising
aspect,” for its scope is precisely such as to mandate a return to philosophy in the face of
the doubt-inducing discoveries. But what kind of normativity is expressed by its ‘ought’?
Hume acknowledges and discusses several kinds of normativity, encompassing both reasons to act and reasons to believe. For example, aesthetic normativity, as he explains it, is derived from the value of beauty and the disvalue of deformity in (a) perceptible natural objects, both animate and inanimate; and (b) productions of artifice including but not limited to visual, dramatic, and literary productions. Moral normativity, he argues, is derived from the value of virtue and the disvalue of vice in human characters. Epistemic normativity, he makes clear in a variety of contexts, is derived from the value of truth and probable truth, and the disvalue of falsehood and probable falsehood in beliefs. Probable truth and probable falsehood are relative to a body of experience, for Hume; truth and falsehood themselves are not.

In narrating his progress from indolence and spleen to a renewed pursuit of philosophy through the return of curiosity and ambition, he writes:

These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition; and shou’d I endeavor to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I feel I shou’d be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy. (T, 1.4.7.12/271)

This remark has suggested to some commentators that Hume denies any epistemic value to his beliefs and continues to philosophize solely on the basis of his pleasure in doing so. However, the passage says nothing about the ultimate value or merit of his beliefs, pro or con; it reports only the cause of his not attempting to suppress his curiosity and ambition, and hence an initial necessary causal condition of his return to philosophizing.
In fact, there is a very close connection for Hume between holding a given belief and holding the belief that that belief is true. According to his theory of belief, a basic belief*-that-p is simply a lively idea-of-p. According to his theory of truth, truth consists “in the discovery of the proportions of ideas, consider’d as such, or in the conformity of our ideas of objects to their real existence” (THN 2.3.10.2/ 448). For matters of fact, then, a basic belief*-that-’p’-is-true is simply a lively idea-of-[p & an idea-of-p]. Since lively ideas of complexes are complexes of lively ideas for him, it follows that a belief*-that-’p’-is-true already contains, as an element, a belief*-that-p. Moreover, simple reflection on the fact that one has a belief*-that-p is sufficient to generate a belief*-that-’p’-is-true. It is therefore psychologically untenable, in Hume’s psychology, to continue to hold beliefs with a given degree of strength without, upon reflection, also holding with a similar degree of strength that those beliefs are true—thereby attributing to them a primary epistemic value.

This connection notwithstanding, Hume’s admissions that reason is subject to doubts, contradictions and imperfections, or objections that it cannot itself entirely defend against, dispel, or remove have led some commentators to propose that the ‘ought’ of the Title Principle must ultimately be not epistemic but entirely moral. This proposal has some appeal, for as David Owen (1999) has well observed, Hume does characterize “wisdom”—that is, the use of reason in accordance with the standards of judgment achievable by reflection—as a moral virtue.

However, Hume makes this remark about wisdom only in Treatise Book 3, which was published separately from Books 1 and 2, and more than a year later, so it seems unlikely that he intended it to provide a key to interpreting the Title Principle at the
conclusion of Book 1. In the passage in question, moreover, Hume writes that “wisdom and good-sense are valu’d because they are useful to the person possess’d of them” (T, 3.3.4.8/611; emphasis original), in explicit contrast to other character traits that are virtues primarily because they are immediately agreeable to the possessor of the trait, immediately agreeable to others, or useful to others. Yet the appreciation of a character trait for its usefulness depends essentially for Hume on stable beliefs about the causal consequences of actions and characters. As we have seen, however, to reject the truth or probable truth of one’s beliefs or even to remain agnostic about their truth or probable truth, would inevitably undermine the stability of one’s beliefs about the causal consequences of actions and characters, for Hume, and it would thereby undermine the moral approval of wisdom as well. Thus, although the disposition to reason in accordance with the Title Principle does indeed achieve moral approval for Hume as a trait that is useful to its possessor, that approval depends for its force on an independent epistemic approval of the results of such reasoning. It seems, in short, that being morally serious depends, for Hume, on being epistemically serious.

Partly because of this problem about causal reasoning, a different version of the moral interpretation of the ‘ought’ in the Title Principle has been proposed by Michael Ridge (2003). According to this proposal, Hume’s initial moral approval of the disposition to believe in accordance with the Title Principle is based on the disposition’s immediate agreeableness to himself as a possessor of it, while moral approval based on other features or other individuals arises only later. Since it is plausible to suggest that the immediate agreeableness of something to oneself might be known without causal
reasoning, Ridge suggests, Hume can morally approve the disposition without any prior reliance on such reasoning.

There are several objections to this proposed interpretation, however. First, as we have already observed, Hume’s own description of the moral approval of wisdom appeals exclusively to its usefulness to its possessor, rendering it unlikely that he regarded another basis for approval as prior. Second, even the recognition of immediate pleasure as due to a feature of one’s own character—especially one involving a relation to a rather unexpected principle such as the Title Principle—requires some causal reasoning. Third, as Ridge himself astutely notes and we shall soon have further occasion to observe, stable moral judgment requires, for Hume, that one’s immediate moral sentiment be confirmed or corrected by reference to a standard of judgment consisting in what an idealized observer would feel from a “general point of view.” Finally, and most importantly, the two passions that Hume describes as motivating his return to philosophy are (i) curiosity, which he also calls “love of truth”; and (ii) ambition to “contribute to the instruction of mankind” by his “discoveries and inventions.” Both of these passions require for their satisfaction that he achieve results that (he regards as) true or probably true. The Title Principle can be adopted and properly applied only if the beliefs that are in accordance with it are first judged to be beliefs that one ought epistemically to hold.

4. The Normative Role of Reason

The ‘ought’ of the Title Principle must express epistemic normativity. But can Hume properly continue to grant epistemic value as he understands it—in particular, truth or the probability of truth—to the beliefs supposedly mandated by the Title Principle even in
the face of the doubts, contradictions and imperfections, and objections that reason cannot defend against, dispel, or remove? In order to answer this question, we must examine more closely in the context of his philosophy (i) what exactly the doubts, contradictions and imperfections, and objections do and do not show about reason; (ii) the precise character of reason’s inability to defend against, dispel, or remove them; and (iii) probability itself as a basis of epistemic normativity.

Hume does not treat any of the doubts, contradictions and imperfections, or objections as indicating a failure of reason or its products to meet a requirement for antecedent justification that a cognitive faculty or its results must meet before it can legitimately be employed; for as we have seen, Hume rejects as unreasonable the suggestion that there are such antecedent standards. Instead, the difficulties arise consequently, from particular discoveries about reason made by reason itself. Nor does he treat these consequent discoveries as combining with substantive a priori epistemic normative principles to entail that no beliefs produced by reason have any epistemic value. He states no such principles, and there is no room within his naturalistic philosophy of mind and epistemology for an explanation of how any substantive normative epistemic principles could be known a priori. Indeed, he does not even treat the discoveries as showing that most beliefs produced by reasoning are not, all things considered, probably true. Although he describes himself in Passage B as temporarily attracted to an epistemic stance in which no belief is regarded as probably true, he does not endorse this stance; on the contrary, in A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh, he emphasizes that this stance is “positively renounced in a few Pages afterwards, and called the Effects of Philosophical Melancholy and Delusion” (LG 20).
Instead, each of the five discoveries constitutes a consideration that carries some negative weight in judging how probable or improbable it is that exercises of reason lead to truth. The first discovery, as we have observed, supports an argument from “the probability of chances” for assigning a fairly low probability to the veracity of probable reason. The second discovery supports a lowering of the probability of reason’s veracity by showing that one important piece of methodologically satisfactory probable reasoning is false if another important and difficult-to-renounce belief—its partly the result of an “irregular” kind of probable reasoning (T, 1.4.2.20/ 241)—is true. The third discovery weighs against the probable veracity of reason by showing that the mind is subject to a pervasive illusion in the course of much or all of its most important and pervasive probable reasoning. The fourth discovery shows that one application of normal probable reasoning would result in the loss of assurance and assent to any truth derived from either demonstrative or probable reasoning. The fifth discovery shows that reason alone cannot even reach a conclusion about which instances of reasoning will lead to truth or probable truth and which will not. Because one can reflectively sustain belief in a proposition, for Hume, only to the extent that one believes it to be probably true, lowering one’s assessment of the probable veracity of reason must bring with it a lowering of one’s first-order degree of assent to all of one’s beliefs.

We may distinguish several different respects in which reason is unable to defend itself against, dispel, or remove the doubts, contradictions and imperfections, and objections constituted by these discoveries. First, reason cannot discover any irregularity in the reasoning that leads to any of the discoveries about the operations of reason themselves. Each discovery is made by normal reasoning that is in accordance with
established reflective methodological standards reached by reason itself, and each
discovery remains as an established thesis of Hume’s philosophy when his confrontation
with skepticism is concluded. Second, reason cannot completely destroy the capacity of
any of the discoveries to function as a consideration weighing against the probability that
reason leads to probable truth. On the contrary, as Hume points out in each of Passages
[A]-[C], intense focus on the discoveries themselves only serves to enhance their doubt-
inducing capacity. Furthermore, he holds, appreciation of the discoveries tends to
produce a standing diminution of one’s overall level of assent. Third, as we have already
noted, reason cannot provide a countervailing general argument for the veracity of
probable reason that does not already presuppose that veracity. Finally, reason must be
supplemented by passion in order both to discover the Title Principle that resolves the
Dangerous Dilemma and to bring philosophical reasoning within the scope of that
principle by allowing such reasoning to “mix with some propensity.” These are all
serious incapacities. They leave open, however, the question of whether the difficulties
about reason’s probable veracity can be at least partially outweighed by epistemic
considerations in another way. The key to answering this question lies in Hume’s
concept—what he would call the “abstract idea”—of probability itself.

For Hume, the fundamental aesthetic and moral normative concepts are what we may
call “sense-based” concepts. That is, just as concepts of colors, sounds, tastes, and smells
are derived from external senses, so too the concepts BEAUTY and DEFORMITY, VIRTUE
and VICE are derived from internal senses—which he calls the “sense of beauty” and the
“moral sense,” respectively. In the development of any Humean sense-based concept, the
mind begins with a basic sensibility, consisting in a capacity to have certain felt
responses—in these cases, aesthetic pleasure or displeasure, moral approbation or disapprobation—to particular stimuli. Ideas of things that resemble each other in producing the mental response characteristic of such a sense naturally become associated with each other and with a shared linguistic “general term,” with the result that one idea, serving as a kind of exemplar, is reliably elicited by the general term while the mind is also disposed to call up or “revive” ideas of resembling objects and to use any of these ideas “in discourse and reasoning” (T, 1.1.7; “Of abstract ideas”). Where the felt response itself admits of degrees, concepts of various degrees will arise as well.

In the development of any sense-based concept, natural divergences in response—both for one person at different times and between different persons even at the same time—are felt to be disturbing and so lead naturally to social convergence on a convenient “standard of judgment” by which we “correct our sentiments” (T, 3.3.1 and ESY, 23.3). This standard consists in an idealized perspective and an idealized set of sensitive endowments. Users of the concept come naturally to defer, in their application of the concept to particular instances, to the response that would be felt from this perspective with these endowments. In many cases, “rules” of judgment also arise, as methods for anticipating what will or will not accord with the standard. Where a lively idea of something is placed within the set of ideas associated with the exemplar for a concept, the result is a predicative judgment applying that concept. Where the lively idea is of something that would in fact elicit the felt response from the idealized perspective and endowments constituting the standard of judgment, the predicative judgment is true.8

Crucially, for Hume, the concept PROBABILITY—in the broad sense of ‘probability’ that includes what he calls “proof”—is also a sense-based concept: the capacity to feel
force and vivacity when conceiving a possible state of affairs may properly be called a "sense of probability." It is for this reason that he writes:

All probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. 'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy. When I am convinced of any principle, 'tis only an idea, which strikes more strongly upon me. When I give the preference to one set of arguments above another, I do nothing but decide from my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence. (T, 1.3.8.12/103)

The concept PROBABILITY develops from this sensibility through the correction of sentiments provided by a standard of judgment consisting simply of "experience" (T, 1.3.9.12/112) for an observer who "proportions his belief" to it (EU, 10.4/89). Rules of probability serve to facilitate and precisify that standard. As previously noted, probability is always relative to a particular body of "experience."

Not all sense-based concepts are normative for Hume: the concepts of particular colors, sounds, tastes, and smells, for example, although equally derived from their own distinctive sensibilities through the development of standards of judgment, have no normative character. Nor is the sense-based concept PROBABILITY itself a normative concept, for to say that afternoon rain is probable is neither to praise nor to condemn that possible matter of fact. Furthermore, just as some concepts are sense-based without being normative, so, too, some concepts are normative without being sense-based. In particular, the concepts TRUTH and FALSEHOOD are not sense-based concepts for Hume; rather, he remarks, "truth is discerned merely by ideas, and by their juxtaposition and comparison" (T, 3.1.1.4/456).
Because Hume is a naturalist about value, however, he will not allow that a concept’s possession of normative character be explanatorily basic; rather, its acquisition of this character must be explained naturally, in virtue of its role in human life. We may distinguish at least two elements in his view of the acquisition of normative character by a concept. First, the quality conceived through that concept must be socially valued (either positively or negatively), by others as well as oneself, and in its relation to others as well as to oneself. Second, it must become in a manner a part of the very meaning of the general term associated with the concept that it is to be used as one of shared approval or disapproval, or, as Hume himself puts it, “taken in a good [or bad] sense.” In utilizing a term for a normative concept with a practical linguistic role of this kind, one thereby also expresses one’s own commitment to the value of the quality it designates.

Indications of the process by which Truth and Falsehood come to acquire the status of normative concepts for Hume can be found in the concluding section of Treatise Book 2, “Of curiosity, or the love of truth” (T, 2.3.10; see Garrett forthcoming). (Curiosity is itself, of course, one of the two crucial passions that motivate Hume’s return to philosophy and final adoption of the Title Principle.) The same psychological mechanisms that can explain the social appreciation of truth, however, serve equally to explain the valuing and social appreciation of probable truth—that is, the feature of beliefs that consists in their being probably true. It is thus that probable truth, as a special case of the probability of matters of fact more generally, comes to be an epistemic value.

The sense-based character of the concept of Probability has important consequences for its normative use in relation to the epistemically normative concept of Probable Truth. The ultimate arbiters of moral and aesthetic value for Hume are sensibilities that
have been corrected and refined through natural convergence on a standard to yield final (or at least provisionally final) moral and aesthetic verdicts. While he of course endorses and employs morally and aesthetically normative principles or “rules for judging,” these are themselves generalizations from the a posteriori deliverances of the aesthetic and moral senses. Where general rules conflict with the sentiments that result from the idealization of perspective and endowments on which human being stably converge as a standard, it is the rules, and not the sentiments, that must yield.

The same relation between relation between rules and refined sensibility applies to the case of the “probability” of truth as well. Hume’s doubts about reason are the result of empirical discoveries about the various “infirmities” of human cognitive faculties; but the particular amount of belief-diminishing force that they properly have is to be determined ultimately precisely by their considered impact on the corrected and refined sense of probability itself, which establishes its own standard of judgment. It is not ruled out in advance that the corrected and refined sense of probability should approve as probably true the results of reason in spite of some doubt-inducing discoveries about that faculty, nor that that sense should ultimately disapprove the results of some otherwise quite regular probable reasoning that fails to have its expected effect on force and vivacity. In fact, assessments of both of these kinds occur at the conclusion of Treatise Book 1, in the adoption of the Title Principle.

For Hume, a certain resistance to global error is characteristic of sense-based concepts in general. He writes concerning morals:

It must be observed, that the opinions of men, in this case, carry with them a peculiar authority, and are, in a great measure, infallible. The distinction of
moral good and evil is founded on the pleasure or pain which results from the view of any sentiment or character; and, as that pleasure or pain cannot be unknown to the person who feels it, it follows, that there is just so much vice or virtue in any character as every one places in it, and that it is impossible in this particular we can ever be mistaken. (THN 3.2.8.8/ 546-7)

Similarly in the *Enquiry*, when he rejects the proposal that human actions could not be morally blamable if those they were necessary consequences of the design of a perfect Deity, he does so specifically on the grounds that such considerations are too distant to affect the morally authoritative moral sense (EHU 8.33/ 79).

Just as Hume holds that the ultimate judge of morality is the ideally corrected and refined moral sense of all humankind, so he regards the ideally corrected and refined sense of probability as the ultimate judge of the probability of truth. Thus, for example, he dismisses the question of whether a possible matter of fact for which there is “a superior number of equal chances” is *really more probable to occur* on the grounds that it is a question about an “*an identical proposition*” (THN 1.3.11.8/ 127), to which the answer is *trivially* “yes.” For he has just delineated the probability of chances as that particular *species* of probability that lies in an “a superior number of equal chances.” To ask, therefore, whether a possible future matter of fact having this feature is *really more probable to occur* is to suggest a prospect of error where none is readily available. In just the same way that is it difficult to conceive how *all humankind* could *always* be wrong about what colors things are, or what things are beautiful, or what characters are virtuous, so it will be difficult to conceive, on Hume’s view, how all humankind could always be wrong about what is probable relative to a given body of experience.
Nevertheless, Hume is right to characterize the “peculiar authority” of the corrected and refined moral sense as “infallible” only “in a great measure.” Sense-based concepts are only resistant, not immune, to global error. Not only can standards of judgment prove extremely difficult to apply properly in a particular case, but the process of developing a sense-based concept, investigating its applications, and reflecting on the results may ultimately undermine the application of that very concept. On one prominent view—though not on Hume’s—this actually occurs in the case of color concepts derived from the sense of color, so that inquiry convinces us that no qualities corresponding to the requirements of color concepts can actually exist. It is unquestionably in serious danger of occurring for Hume with respect to probability in Passage B. Fortunately, however, this is a report of a transitory episode; ultimately, the deliverances of many though not all exercises of reason are approved as probably true, though with a diminished degree of probability resulting from the remaining, “mitigated” force of the doubt-inducing discoveries, in accordance with the Title Principle. Accordingly, reason—which is at the heart of the sense of probability—retains a chastened status as a tribunal whose dictates carry normative weight in the determination of probable truth.

5. Contemporary Significance

Central to Hume’s philosophical project is a two-part aim: (i) to investigate through “the experimental method” the operations of the cognitive faculty of reasoning or inference, and then (ii) to apply the results of that investigation to the normative assessment of that very faculty. While he shares the first part of that aim with Locke and others, the second part is largely his own innovation. This two-part aim remains of the greatest importance
in contemporary cognitive psychology and epistemology. On the other hand, of the five particular doubt-inducing discoveries he proposes, perhaps none would be fully endorsed by contemporary cognitive psychologists, at least in its Humean form. In particular, the argument concerning reason’s potential annihilation of belief is no longer on the philosophical agenda; and without the need to disapprove the toxic iterated reasonings that it invokes, the urgency of the Title Principle is at least diminished. Nevertheless, the approach to epistemic normativity embodied in Hume’s adoption of that principle has important connections with the most promising and influential approaches in contemporary epistemology for avoiding what Hume calls “excessive scepticism.” I will briefly mention just two: (i) Crispin Wright’s conception of “entitlement” and (ii) James Pryor’s conception of “dogmatism.”

For Wright, entitlement is a warrant to place trust in certain propositions without first having evidence for them. Thus, he offers the proposal that

in all circumstance where there is no specific reason to think otherwise, we are each of us entitled to take it, without special investigative work, that our basic cognitive faculties are functioning properly in circumstances broadly conducive to their successful operation. If so, that immediately empowers us to dismiss the various scenarios of cognitive dislocation and disablement—dreams, sustained hallucination, envatment and so on—which are the stock-in-trade of Cartesian scepticism. (2004: 194-5)

This is directly reminiscent of Hume’s rejection of Cartesian antecedent skepticism; for Hume as for Wright, one may be entitled to employ one’s faculties without having first vindicated their veridicality. Prominent among the potential objects of entitlement for
Wright is the uniformity of nature that underwrites what Hume calls “probable reasoning.” Like Wright, Hume characterizes the uniformity of nature as something we “put trust in” without having an available argument (EU, 4.19/30). Like Wright, too, Hume notes the importance of such trust to our epistemic and practical projects.

Whereas it has sometimes been objected that Wright’s defense of entitlement ultimately offers only a practical rather than an epistemic source of approval, however, Hume’s sense-based conception of probability allows him to go one step further. Dogmatism, as Pryor explains it, is the view that “whenever you have an experience as of p, you thereby have immediate *prima facie* justification for believing p,” even in the absence of (i) anything that could ordinarily be called “evidence” for p or (ii) any non-question-begging argument for p (Pryor 2002: 536). Pryor focuses on dogmatism about perceptual beliefs. If, however, the general capacity to feel degrees of assent is the basic “sense of probability” from which the concept of *probability* is derived, then there is a basis for extending dogmatism more broadly. Just as moral sentiments are *prima facie* (though highly defeasible) sources of information about virtue, the fundamental moral value, so too sentiments of belief are *prima facie* (though highly defeasible) sources of information about probable truth, a fundamental epistemic value.

Much more could be said, of course, about Hume’s relation to entitlement, dogmatism, and contemporary epistemology more generally; and many qualifications, objections, and defenses would be in order in a more detailed examination. I hope it is clear, however, that his treatment of the normativity of reason in the face of skeptical discoveries still has much to offer.
References


Beattie does not list the broad normative sense or the narrow epistemic sense, but he adds two senses for which he cites Locke as providing a precedent: “that quality of human nature that distinguishes man from the inferior animals” and “the power of invention” in discovering and arranging proofs.

In one passage, however (T, 3.1.1.10/458), Hume uses the terms ‘reasonable’ and ‘unreasonable’ more restrictedly, as synonyms for ‘conformity to reason’ and ‘contrariety to reason’, respectively, as the context of the argument clearly indicates.

Hume’s rough identification of the scope of the understanding with that of reason is explicable in terms of Locke’s own definition of ‘the understanding’ as encompassing just three perceptive acts:

The Power of Perception is that which we call the Understanding. Perception, which we make the act of the Understanding, is of three sorts: 1. The Perception of Ideas in our Minds. 2. The Perception of the signification of signs. 3. The Perception of the Connexion or Repugnancy, Agreement or
Disagreement, that there is between any of our Ideas. All these are attributed to the Understanding, or Perceptive Power, though it be the two latter only that use allows us to say we understand. (An Essay Concerning Human Understanding II.xxi.5)

With respect to the first element, Hume differs from Locke in not recognizing a separate mental act of perceiving ideas—for what we call the perception of an idea by a mind is for Hume just the occurrence of that idea in the bundle that constitutes that mind. (And in any case, Locke notes, the mere perceiving of ideas does not generally allow us to say, “we understand.”) With respect to the second, Hume argues that grasping the meaning of signs is itself a species of association dependent on causal inference (T, 1.3.6.14-15/93; so that it need not be considered as a operation of the understanding distinct from reasoning or inference. (See also his mention of a dog “inferring” that by the use of “an arbitrary sound” its master “mean[s] him” [E, 9.3/84].) The third and remaining element, however, is just the kind of perception that Locke regards as always the result of either intuition or reasoning. Properly construed, therefore, the Lockean understanding comes for Hume to differ from reason at most by including also the immediate intuitions on which demonstrative reasoning depends for input
4 I have presented a more detailed version of what I take to be the correct interpretation of it in Garrett 1997, Chapter 10.

5 Among these contexts are the Introduction to the Treatise, with its emphasis on acquiring “truth” and “knowledge”; the concluding section of Treatise Book 1, with its emphasis on contributing to “knowledge” and “the instruction of mankind”; the concluding section of Treatise Book 2 (T, 2.3.10; “Of curiosity, or love of truth”), which serves in part to explain why truth and probable truth are subject to “approbation”; and the Abstract of the Treatise, with its emphasis on “probability” as “the guide of life.” At the outset of the first Enquiry, he describes it as a central task of philosophy to “fix the foundation of morals, reasoning, and criticism” and to “determine the source” of the distinctions between “truth and falsehood, vice and virtue, beauty and deformity” (EU, 1.2/2). He also characterizes “opinions” as subject not only to “assent” but also to “approbation” when they are judged to be true (T, 3.3.2.2/592).

6 A more contemporary term would be ‘response-dependent’. I will use the term ‘sense-based’ in order to avoid unnecessary disputes about the precise meaning of ‘response-dependent’.

7 I follow the common convention of using small capital letters to spell the names of concepts.
For a more detailed account of sense-based concepts, predicative judgments, and truth, see Garrett 2013.

Thus Hume writes in *Treatise* Book 2 that the inciting of pride and humility, love and hatred “is, perhaps, the most considerable effect that virtue and vice have upon the human mind” (THN 3.1.2.5/ 473). Love, in turn, inspires benevolence and the doing of good offices, with all their complex social ramifications, whereas hatred inspires anger and the doing of harm. It is fair to say that Book 2 of the *Treatise* contains most of that work’s naturalistic explanation of how and why VIRTUE and VICE are such importantly normative concepts.

In his essay “Of the Standard of Taste,” he writes of this further “part” of the full meaning or “idiom” of the fundamental normative moral terms as follows:

The word *virtue*, with its equivalent in every tongue, implies praise; as that of *vice* does blame: And no one, without the most obvious and grossest impropriety, could affix reproach to a term, which in general acceptation is understood in a good sense; or bestow applause, where the idiom requires disapprobation. (ESY, 23.3/ 228)