Hume's Doxastic Involuntarism

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1. Three Inconsistent Views

Hume is famous for providing a naturalistic account of belief-formation according to which belief is a purely involuntary phenomenon. Yet he is also famous for his disapproval of irrational beliefs held by the vulgar and the superstitious, among others. However, if we take these two positions together with the intuitive principle that 'Ought implies Can', we have an inconsistency. The contrapositive of 'Ought implies Can' is 'Cannot implies not-Ought'. Since beliefs are involuntary, we cannot believe otherwise than we do. Thus, according to the principle that 'Cannot implies not-Ought', it is not the case that we ought to hold any set of beliefs other than the set that we actually hold (that is, it is not the case that we ought to drop beliefs that we have, or hold beliefs that we do not). Therefore, in claiming that there are certain beliefs that some people ought not to hold (and therefore ought to drop), Hume is violating the contrapositive of 'Ought implies Can'.

In what follows I will put forward some evidence that Hume maintains each of the three positions outlined above. I then examine what I call the 'Prior Voluntary Action' solution endorsed by Passmore (1980), Norton (1982, 1994, 2002), Falkenstein (1997), Owen (1999), Williams (2004), and McCormick (2005), among others. I argue that 'Prior Voluntary Action' in any form fails to account for synchronic rationality. I then raise more specific objections depending on how we disambiguate 'Prior Voluntary Action'. 'Prior Voluntary Action' can be read as either granting beliefs derivative voluntariness, or derivative

normative significance; the former version is textually unsubstantiated and indeed textually problematic, while the latter version falls to a regress given Hume's thesis regarding the inability of actions and passions to intrinsically bear epistemic normativity.

In the end, I propose dropping the assumption that Hume subscribes to 'Ought implies Can' in the epistemic realm for two reasons: first, the weakness of textual support for Hume's subscribing to 'Ought implies Can'; secondly, Hume's recognition of the irrelevance of involuntariness to the moral evaluation of qualities of the mind.

1.1 Doxastic Involuntarism

In arguing that what distinguishes an idea from a belief cannot be an additional idea annexed to the former, Hume endorses doxastic involuntarism (that is, the thesis that beliefs are involuntary):

> ... The mind has the command over all its ideas, and can separate, unite, mix, and vary them, as it pleases; so that if belief consisted merely in a new idea, annex'd to the conception, it wou'd be in a man's power to believe what he pleas'd. We may, therefore, conclude, that belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment, in something, that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles, of which we are not masters. (THN App 2; SBN 623-4) [1]

> The mind has a faculty of joining all ideas together, which involve not a contradiction; and therefore if belief consisted in some idea, which we add to the simple conception, it would be in a man's power, by adding this idea to it, to believe any thing, which he can conceive.

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[1] In references to Hume's texts throughout the paper, 'THN' refers to the *Treatise of Human Nature*, 'EHU' to the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and 'EPM' to the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Arabic numerals refer to section and paragraph numbers (EHU and EPM), or to book, part, section, and paragraph numbers (THN). SBN numbers refer to pages in the Selby-Bigge and Nidditch editions of the *Treatise* and two *Enquiries*.

Since therefore belief implies a conception, and yet is something more; and since it adds no new idea to the conception; it follows, that it is a different manner of conceiving an object; *something* that is distinguishable to the feeling, and depends not upon our will, as all our ideas do. (*Abstract* 20-21; SBN 653)

For as the mind has authority over all its ideas, it could voluntarily annex this particular idea to any fiction, and consequently be able to believe whatever it pleases; contrary to what we find by daily experience. We can, in our conception, join the head of a man to the body of a horse; but it is not in our power to believe, that such an animal has ever really existed.

It follows, therefore, that the difference between *fiction* and *belief* lies in some sentiment or feeling, which is annexed to the latter, not to the former, and which depends not on the will, nor can be commanded at pleasure. (EHU 5.10-11; SBN 48)

One question is whether Hume simply means the weaker thesis that is the denial that we have a power of 'libertarian-can' with respect to beliefs—in other words, the thesis that beliefs are beyond our libertarian control (i.e. we do not possess a contra-causal power of agent causation that would allow us to contravene the physically determined outcome in the doxastic realm); or whether he means the stronger thesis that is the denial that we have a power of 'voluntary-can' with respect to our beliefs; in other words, the thesis that that beliefs are beyond our voluntary control (i.e. doxastic involuntarism). I think the passages clearly state the latter. But it would help to specify what involuntariness consists in for Hume. In his discussion of free will, Hume notes that the only meaningful sense of liberty is that sense that applies to voluntary actions, which is determination by the will:

For what is meant by liberty, when applied to voluntary actions? … By liberty, then, we can only mean *a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will*; that is, if we chuse to remain at rest, we may; if we chuse to move, we also may. (EHU 8.23; SBN 95)

To say that X is under my voluntary control is to say that X is suitably determined by the will.[2] Conversely, Hume characterizes involuntariness as being 'independent from the will' (EPM App 4.20) and being 'beyond the dominion of the will' (EPM App 4.21). Crucially, if beliefs are not subject to determination by the will, then they are not subject to voluntary control.

In THN App 2, Hume states that 'belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment, in something, that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles, of which we are not masters'. In Abstract 21, Hume states that 'belief … is a different manner of conceiving an object; *something* that is distinguishable to the feeling, and depends not upon our will, as all our ideas do.' In EHU 5.11, Hume says: 'It follows, therefore, that the difference between *fiction* and *belief* lies in some sentiment or feeling, which is annexed to the latter, not to the former, and which depends not on the will, nor can be commanded at pleasure.' All three discussions of belief above emphasize that the sentiment constitutive of belief is independent of the will; in short, belief is involuntary. It is important to note that in these three passages, Hume rules out not only our wilfully believing, but also our wilfully disbelieving. Hume's central point is that 'belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment … that depends not on the will' (THN App 2); since we cannot control when this sentiment is present *or absent*, we can neither control our believing nor our disbelieving.

The point can also be established by examining Hume's argument in all three passages. Hume's point in all three passages is that belief cannot consist in an additional idea

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[2] Work will need to be done to adequately flesh out this sense of 'suitably'; for instance, there will need to be a clause ruling out determination by deviant causal chains. Nevertheless, I gloss over the matter here. The only result I require for my purposes is that if something is not determined by the will, it is involuntary; this holds true regardless of how we flesh out the suitability clause.

annexed to the believed idea, because this would entail the false thesis that we could believe whatever we like. This is because, Hume says, 'the mind has the command over all its ideas, and can separate, unite, mix, and vary them, as it pleases' (THN App 2); 'the mind has authority over all its ideas' (EHU 5.11); 'The mind has a faculty of joining all ideas together, which involve not a contradiction' (*Abstract* 20). Clearly, Hume means that the mind has *voluntary* control over its ideas; he certainly does not mean that the mind has *libertarian* control over its ideas, because the mind does not have libertarian control over *anything*, since it is determined; recall Hume's words in EHU 8.23 cited earlier. If this is the case, Hume must mean that belief is beyond our *voluntary* control. The sense of control Hume appeals to in both premises must be the same one; otherwise, the conclusion that belief cannot be an additional idea annexed to the believed idea would not follow. Indeed, in these three passages, Hume finds doxastic involuntarism so obvious that he does not even bother arguing for it at this point in his dialectic—as Passmore (1980, p. 160) puts it, 'the *reductio* is complete' for Hume, who takes it to be patently clear that the distinction between beliefs and ideas is not grounded on their contents, given the obviousness of doxastic involuntarism.

Moreover, there is other textual evidence that belief is involuntary for Hume. In THN 3.1.1.12, Hume argues that mistaken beliefs are not morally culpable, pointing out that moralists do not typically consider them criminal because they are 'perfectly involuntary'. Moreover, Hume compares beliefs to the passions with regard to their involuntariness: ' … belief … is an operation of the soul, when we are so situated, as unavoidable as to feel the passion of love, when we receive benefits; or hatred, when we meet with injuries' (EHU 5.8). All in all, there seems extremely strong textual evidence for Hume thinking belief to be involuntary.

It is worth further investigating the nature of Hume's doxastic involuntarism. As stated above, beliefs are involuntary for Hume because they are characterized by 'some sentiment or feeling', which 'depends not on the will' (EHU 5.11). Our beliefs are involuntary, because we cannot generate this unique sentiment (i.e. force and vivacity) merely by willing to. This is not to say that we cannot manipulate the circumstances under which this sentiment arises through more indirect means. Crucially, reasoning consists in the manipulation of ideas in such a way as to generate beliefs, for instance. 'The mind has authority over all its ideas' (EHU 5.10), and so the act of putting ideas together is a free and voluntary one. In his discussion of miracles, Hume memorably describes the reasoning involved in what amounts to crude enumerative induction as consisting in arranging certain relevant ideas:

> A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence. In such conclusions as are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experience as a full *proof* of the future existence of that event. In other cases, he proceeds with more caution: He weighs the opposite experiments: He considers which side is supported by the greater number of experiments: To that side he inclines, with doubt and hesitation; and when at last he fixes his judgment, the evidence exceeds not what we properly call *probability*. All probability, then, supposes an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence, proportioned to the superiority. A hundred instances or experiments on one side, and fifty on another, afford a doubtful expectation of any event; though a hundred uniform experiments, with only one that is contradictory, reasonably beget a pretty strong degree of assurance. In all cases, we must balance the opposite experiments, where they are opposite, and deduct the smaller number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence. (EHU 10.4; SBN 112)

Here Hume describes the probable reasoning of a wise man as putting the ideas of similar outcomes together and contrasting these with the ideas of differing outcomes. Of course, note

that these ideas of outcomes have to themselves be vivacious in order to carry weight in this process. This arrangement of ideas is a voluntary act; however, the output—that is, the sentiment of belief—is nevertheless involuntary. For instance, shortly after the above passage Hume states: 'Where this experience is not entirely uniform on any side, it is attended with an *unavoidable* contrariety in our judgments' (EHU 10.6, emphasis added).

Just as one can manipulate the circumstances under which we believe something, we can also manipulate the circumstances under which we doubt something. Doubt itself, being the diminishing of vivacity, is an involuntary phenomenon. However, by voluntarily considering countervailing evidence or the sorry state of our faculties, we can nevertheless attempt to diminish the vivacity of a certain idea. An example of this would be Hume's mitigated scepticism, which suggests that we adopt 'a small tincture of Pyrrhonism' to induce 'a degree of doubt, and caution, and modesty' (EHU 12.24). Clearly, there are many voluntary mental acts that lead to both belief and doubt, and these form an important part of Hume's discussions of reasoning and scepticism.

Despite our ability to manipulate the sentiment that constitutes belief, it should be emphasized that this sentiment is nevertheless wholly involuntary. It is helpful to compare vivacity with other sentiments. I may be able to manipulate my stimuli through various physical and mental acts in order to engender certain passions: I know that if I visit a website espousing racism or misogyny, I will experience anger; if I recollect the scene of Fantine's death, I will feed sadness; if I stand on the rooftop of a high building, I will feel fear. This limited ability to manipulate our sentiments through changing our stimuli does not change the fact that these sentiments are wholly involuntary. Willing to feel anger and willing to believe by themselves cannot produce the desired outcomes; in contrast, willing to perform voluntary actions such as raising my hand can produce the desired outcomes. If we wish to affect

involuntary phenomena such as anger or belief, we will need to manipulate our stimuli; this gives us only at best very limited and crude control over the result, which is nowhere near sufficient for voluntariness.[3] Thus sentiments remain involuntary despite our having some weak indirect influence over them. All in all, for Hume beliefs are clearly involuntary, as evinced by his repeated statements to this effect.

1.2 The Normative Accountability of Belief

It is equally uncontroversial that Hume holds our beliefs up to normative appraisal,[4] as his philosophy is replete with the endorsement and censure of various beliefs.[5] First, Hume repeatedly expresses his endorsement of some forms of causal inference, labelling them 'just' (THN 1.3.6.7, THN 1.3.13.3, THN 1.4.4.1); Hume also frequently labels beliefs, opinions and conclusions reasonable or unreasonable (THN 1.3.12.19; THN 1.4.3.1; THN 2.3.3.6, and THN 1.3.8.14; EHU 5.3). Furthermore, he states that inductive inferences provide *knowledge* (EHU 5.2), which implies their justification. Moreover, Hume is also unapologetic about criticising certain beliefs. For example, in discussing the sources of 'unphilosophical

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[3] Feldman (2000, 2001) points out that there is one class of belief over which we have significant control, that is, beliefs about states of the world we can directly affect. For instance, I can cause myself to believe that the lights are on, simply by switching on the lights. He points out that this is not very epistemologically significant, because the large majority of beliefs that we do hold accountable do not fall under this category.

[4] A distinction is sometimes raised between the normative and the evaluative, the difference being that normative evaluations concern praise and blame (e.g. 'she is a good person') while evaluative ones do not (e.g. 'the cat has nice fur'). However, Hume does not seem to demarcate a realm of value that is independent of praise and blame, at least not where persons are involved. For example, many aesthetic qualities are thought to be evaluative rather than normative, but Hume treats them on a par with virtue and vice, which clearly concern praise and blame (THN 3.3.4.3); similarly with 'cowardice, meanness, levity, anxiety, impatience, folly', which Hume holds to be vices (EPM App 4.20), but are sometimes taken to be strictly evaluative in modern discussions. Thus, one cannot escape the inconsistency by claiming that Hume only holds beliefs subject to evaluative but not normative censure. Indeed, this strategy seems independently implausible anyway, since Hume frequently seems to praise and blame people on the basis of their beliefs, for example when he praises as wise those who proportion their belief to the evidence (EHU 10.4). Thanks to Robert Hopkins for helpful discussion on this issue.

[5] Of course, to endorse or censure a belief is simply to hold its believer accountable on the basis of this belief. Similarly, to praise a virtue or to condemn a vice is to praise or blame the agents who possess these qualities of the mind: Hume notes that the object of hatred or anger is 'a person or creature endow'd with thought and consciousness' (THN 2.3.2.6). For convenience I will speak of normatively appraising beliefs and other similar expressions, even though I mean normatively appraising an agent on the basis of her belief, etc.

probability', Hume dismisses prejudices as 'errors' that we 'rashly form' (THN 1.3.13.7). In addition, Hume takes his argument on miracles to condemn 'arrogant bigotry' and 'superstitious delusions', freeing us from 'their impertinent solicitations' (EHU 10.2).

Nor is Hume shy about using deontological language in his epistemology, frequently making 'ought' claims in epistemological contexts. He notes that hypotheses that pretend to discover the original principles of human nature 'ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical' (THN Intro 8). He speaks of his general rules in THN 1.3.15 'by which we ought to regulate our judgment concerning causes and effects' (THN 1.3.13.1). In his 'Of Scepticism With Regard to Reason', Hume points out that 'we ought always to correct the first judgment, deriv'd from the nature of the object, by another judgment, deriv'd from the nature of the understanding' (THN 1.4.1.5), although this principle eventually proves problematic in engendering said scepticism regarding reason. Notably, in his Title Principle, Hume states: 'Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to' (THN 1.4.7.11). In his discussion of miracles, Hume argues that 'where there is an opposition of arguments, we ought to give the preference to such as are founded on the greatest number of past observations' (EHU 10.16). Similarly, in discussing the possibility of a future state, Hume argues that 'If the cause be known only by the effect, we never ought to ascribe to it any qualities, beyond what are precisely requisite to produce the effect' (EHU 11.13). And in recommending his brand of mitigated scepticism, he points out that 'there is a degree of doubt, and caution, and modesty, which, in all kinds of scrutiny and decision, ought for ever to accompany a just reasoner' (EHU 12.24).

This is but a small selection of the many instances where Hume normatively appraises beliefs; it should, however, be sufficient to demonstrate in no uncertain terms Hume's

holding that at least some beliefs are subject to normative appraisal.[6] Note that for the purposes of this paper, I assume the rejection of interpretations of Hume as a thoroughgoing sceptic; elsewhere, I argue for this claim more extensively, but to repeat the arguments here would take me too far afield.[7]

1.3 Ought Implies Can

Before we go on to examine the plausibility of attributing 'Ought implies Can' to Hume, I will take a moment to deal with a *prima facie* objection to doing so. It might be thought that Hume cannot hold this principle given that he is perfectly willing to make judgments on moral responsibility despite his commitment to determinism. Just as we differentiated two senses of 'control' in discussing the involuntariness of beliefs, we can also distinguish two senses of 'can' with respect to 'Ought implies Can'. Hume's compatibilism does not entail that Hume cannot subscribe to 'Ought implies Can' *tout court*, but merely entails that he cannot subscribe to a certain *version* of 'Ought implies Can', where 'can' is given a libertarian reading as implying some sort of contra-causal agent-causation (call this 'Ought implies Libertarian-Can'). Clearly Hume does not subscribe to this libertarian principle, given his denial of such forms of agent-causation (EHU 8.25). However, if we interpret 'can' as opposed not to necessity, but to constraint, we get a much more defensible reading of 'Ought implies Can'. We should read the relevant notion of 'Can' to concern *voluntary*

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[6] It is fairly uncontroversial that Hume does hold beliefs up to normative appraisal. Nevertheless, it might be thought that his remark that 'false judgements... are commonly very innocent, and draw no manner of guilt upon the person who is so unfortunate as to fall into them' (THN 3.1.1.12) indicates that he in fact does not. However, a cursory examination of this passage will reveal that Hume is concerned here with *moral* appraisal, which of course says nothing about *epistemic* appraisal; Hume's point is merely that people are not held morally responsible for their false beliefs, which leaves open their being held epistemically responsible for them.

[7] I reject the reading of Hume as a thoroughgoing inductive sceptic in detail in my 'Hume's Positive Argument on Induction' (forthcoming); see also my 'Hume's Practically Epistemic Conclusions?' (forthcoming) and 'Differentiating Hume's Conclusions' (draft) for a defence of interpretations of Hume that are not excessively sceptical in THN 1.4.7 and EHU 12 respectively. An interpretation of Hume as a throughgoing sceptic is in any case somewhat at odds with his self-professed mitigated scepticism in EHU 12.

control: as mentioned previously, to say a person 'can X' in the sense of having voluntary control is just to say that he has '*a power of acting or not acting* [to do X]*, according to the determinations of the will*' (EHU 8.23). Thus understood, 'Ought implies Can' is broadly equivalent to saying that if a person ought to perform X, then X is suitably determined by her will (call this 'Ought implies Voluntary-Can'). In what follows, when I discuss 'Ought implies Can', I mean 'Ought implies Voluntary-Can', unless otherwise stated. More specifically, the form of 'Ought implies Voluntary-Can' that is relevant to the puzzle of doxastic involuntarism is '*Epistemic*-Ought implies Voluntary-Can'; I take it that normative evaluations of beliefs fall under the epistemic (rather than, say, the moral or aesthetic) realm of normativity.

Having specified the relevant form of 'Ought implies Can', we can now evaluate the plausibility of attributing this principle to Hume. 'Ought implies Can', although traditionally viewed as a Kantian principle,[8] seems an intuitive constraint on normativity, as it seems unreasonable to fault someone for failing to perform an action of which she is incapable. Although commentators do not usually explicitly attribute 'Ought implies Can' to Hume, many implicitly hold him to it.[9] Other commentators do explicitly attribute 'Ought implies Can' to Hume. Ridge (2003, p. 172) does so on the basis of the following passage:

> ...false judgements... are commonly very innocent, and draw no manner of guilt upon the person
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> who is so unfortunate as to fall into them... They extend not beyond a mistake of *fact*, which

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[8] Reid also defends a version of 'Ought implies Can' in Chapter 6, Essay 6 of his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (published in the years between Kant's First and Second *Critique*s), noting that a person should not be blamed for something that the person did not have the power to prevent.

[9] Price (1969, pp. 239–40) and Flew (1961, p. 98) believe Hume to be inconsistent in holding (a) and (b), which seems to presuppose 'Ought implies Can'. Owens (2000, p. 5) also holds that Hume's doxastic involuntarism rules out beliefs being subject to normative assessment. Similarly, Passmore (1980), Norton (1982, 1994, 2002) and Owen (1999), in recognising this puzzle (and going on to offer 'Prior Voluntary Action' as a solution to it), are taking (a) and (b) to be inconsistent positions, which again seems to presuppose 'Ought implies Can'. Although none of these commentators explicitly state the problem in terms of 'Ought implies Can', they clearly assume it in Hume in some form or another.

moralists have not generally suppos'd criminal, as being perfectly involuntary. (THN 3.1.1.12; SBN 459).

Morris (2000, p. 105) also assumes Hume's endorsement of 'Ought implies Can', but only in passing. To support the claim that Hume endorses this principle, Wilson (1997, p. 202) points to Hume's dismissal of 'Pyrrhonian' scepticism due to the impossibility of anyone adhering to these standards of belief-formation: Hume remarks that 'nature is always too strong for principle' (EHU 12.23), and that 'Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel' (THN 1.4.1.7).[10] Thus, there is at least a *prima facie* case for attributing 'Ought implies Can' to Hume.

1.4 The Puzzle

In the previous sections we saw that there is a case for attributing to Hume the following three claims: (a) All beliefs are involuntary; (b) Some beliefs are subject to normative appraisal; and (c) 'Ought implies Can'. As pointed out in Section 1, these three claims are jointly inconsistent. Here is a more detailed exposition of this inconsistency. Let us examine these claims with respect to my particular belief X, which is held normatively censurable:

(1) My believing X is involuntary (from a).

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[10] Wilson attributes 'Ought implies Can' to Hume only incidentally, as his main aim is to establish that Hume subscribes to the stronger principle that 'Must implies Ought'. It is fairly easy to derive 'Ought implies Can' from 'Must implies Ought', using standard definitional principles and assuming that 'Ought implies Permissible':

(1)   Must X → Ought X
(2)   Ought X → Permissible X
(3)   Therefore, Must X → Permissible X
(4)   Taking the contrapositive of (3): ¬Permissible X → ¬Must X
(5)   By definition, ¬Permissible X ≡ Ought ¬X
(6)   Also by definition, ¬Must X ≡ Can ¬X
(7)   Substituting (5) and (6) into (4): Ought ¬X → Can ¬X,
which is 'Ought implies Can'.

(2) If believing X is involuntary, then I cannot directly refrain from believing X.[11]

(3) I cannot directly refrain from believing X (from 1 and 2).

(4) 'Cannot implies not-Ought' (contrapositive of c).

(5) It is not the case that I ought to directly refrain from believing X (from 3 and 4).

(6)   My belief X is subject to normative censure (given; b implies that at least one belief is subject to normative censure, and I assume it is mine for ease of exposition).

(7) If a belief is subject to normative censure, I ought to refrain from believing it.

(8) I ought to refrain from believing X (from 6 and 7).

As we can see, (5) and (8) straightforwardly contradict each other. Thus, it is inconsistent jointly to hold (a), (b), and (c). We thus have an interpretive puzzle (henceforth 'the puzzle'), given the initial plausibility of Hume's holding all three theses.[12] I will first examine the received 'Prior Voluntary Action' solution which can be read either as denying (a) or (b); I argue that, although initially plausible, both versions are in fact deeply problematic.

2. Prior Voluntary Action

2.1 Characterising the Position

The ubiquitous solution to this puzzle in the Hume scholarship is to argue that beliefs, although in themselves involuntary, are the result of prior actions that are voluntary—call this

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[11] Of course, one might *indirectly* refrain from believing by undertaking some prior voluntary action (such as attending to certain evidence) that would lead to one's not forming the relevant belief. This will prove crucial to the 'Prior Voluntary Action' strategy. I examine this position shortly.

[12] This is, of course, a substantive philosophical puzzle as well as an interpretive one: all three claims (a), (b), and (c) are all plausibly true but jointly inconsistent. This paper will focus primarily on the interpretive puzzle rather than the philosophical one—the question I primarily address is what consistent position Hume adopts (if any) rather than which position is the most philosophically defensible. Of course, in scholarship the two cannot entirely be divorced: given considerations of charity, which I believe play a significant role in scholarship, philosophical defensibility does contribute to textual tenability.

position 'Prior Voluntary Action'.[13] Here I am construing 'actions' in a wide sense to include both physical and mental acts (e.g. the conjoining of ideas); I also take the non-performance of an act to itself count as an action (for instance, failing to gather evidence). This seems to be a plausible way of resolving this puzzle, but it is worth investigating how it purports to do so. Given that the set {a,b,c} is inconsistent, which of the three premises is rejected by 'Prior Voluntary Action'? I believe that 'Prior Voluntary Action' can be read as solving the puzzle in two distinct ways. First, it might be seen as maintaining that beliefs are voluntary in a weakened derivative sense that is nevertheless relevant to 'Ought implies Can', that is, it can be seen as denying (a). Alternatively, it can be seen as arguing that beliefs are merely subject to derivative normative appraisal, which is not the relevant type of normative appraisal that 'Ought implies Can' concerns; that is, 'Prior Voluntary Action' can be seen as denying (b).

According to the version of 'Prior Voluntary Action' that denies (a) (henceforth 'Voluntary Inheritance'), beliefs are derivatively voluntary insofar as they derive from voluntary actions, and 'Ought implies Can' extends to whatever is derivatively voluntary. Beliefs are both voluntary (in a weakened but nevertheless relevant sense) and epistemically assessable, and there is no contradiction of 'Ought implies Can'. According to the version of 'Prior Voluntary Action' that denies (b) (henceforth 'Normative Inheritance'), beliefs are not in themselves epistemically assessable because of their involuntariness, and 'Ought implies Can' is maintained. Nevertheless, they may possess derivative normative significance, insofar as they issue from actions for which we are responsible, because done voluntarily. 'Normative Inheritance' maintains that 'Ought implies Can' does not extend to derivative normative significance; beliefs are both involuntary and do not possess intrinsic normative

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[13] In the modern philosophical debate on doxastic involuntarism, this position is defended by Alston (1988), Audi (2001, 2008), Huss (2009), and Leon (2002), among others.

significance, in accordance with 'Ought implies Can', but we nevertheless speak loosely in attributing to them derivative normative significance in virtue of the actions that cause them.

One way of cashing out the difference between the two positions is through the notion of 'inheritance'. Let us roughly characterize 'inheritance' such that A 'inherits' X from B iff A's being X is determined (where determination is a non-symmetric relation) by B's being X. 'Voluntary Inheritance' takes beliefs to 'inherit' derivative *voluntariness* (in a sense relevant to 'Ought implies Can') from the prior voluntary actions that cause them; this allows for beliefs to be normatively assessable—recall that given 'Ought implies Can', normative assessability is impossible without voluntariness. Of course, this leaves open the basis on which these beliefs are subsequently normatively assessed; once they inherit voluntariness from their prior voluntary actions, their particular normative status might turn on factors entirely independent of these actions. Meanwhile, 'Normative Inheritance' takes beliefs to 'inherit' derivative *normative significance* (in a sense *not* relevant to 'Ought implies Can') from their prior voluntary actions; in contrast to 'Voluntary Inheritance', this does not leave open the basis on which beliefs are normatively assessable, since their normative status is directly inherited from and therefore determined by their prior voluntary actions.[14,15]

To sum up, instead of the inconsistent triad {a,b,c}, 'Voluntary Inheritance' accepts the following consistent triad:

(a') Some beliefs are derivatively voluntary,

(b) Some beliefs are subject to normative appraisal, and

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[14] Note that both 'Voluntary Inheritance' and 'Normative Inheritance' read 'Ought implies Voluntary-Can' differently. I do not take either of them to reject (c), but rather to adopt different disambiguations of it.

[15] Note that it is implausible for a version of 'Normative Inheritance' to hold that beliefs inherit normative assessability in a loose way of speaking without also inheriting a particular normative status, because then their normative status would be underdetermined—not truly being assessable in their own right, beliefs will have to inherit their particular normative status from *something* voluntary if they are to have one at all, rendering such a view simply a version of 'Normative Inheritance'.

(c') Ought implies (derivatively voluntary) Can.

'Normative Inheritance' instead accepts the following (different but equally consistent) triad:

(a) All beliefs are involuntary,

(b*) Some beliefs are subject to derivative normative appraisal, and

(c*) (Non-derivative) Ought implies Can.

2.2 Objecting to 'Prior Voluntary Action' in either Form

One objection to attributing 'Prior Voluntary Action' in either form to Hume is the lack of textual support for Hume taking prior voluntary actions to be essential to the evaluation of our beliefs.[16] Some textual evidence is put forth by Falkenstein (1997), Owen (1999), McCormick (2005), and Hickerson (2013). Falkenstein (1997, p. 33) and Owen (1999, p. 216) point to Hume's Endnote H to Section 9 in his first *Enquiry*. In this endnote, Hume seeks to explain differentials in reasoning ability between people and animals, and also between different people. Hume offers a variety of explanations; those important to Falkenstein's account are the ones involving prior voluntary actions, such as greater experience in reasoning by analogy (number 7 on Hume's list) and engaging in 'books and conversation' (number 9). However, this endnote fails to adequately substantiate 'Prior Voluntary Action'. For one, it is unclear that Hume is offering a normative rather than a merely descriptive explanation for differentials in reasoning ability. But even if we take him

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[16] Passmore (1980) was one of the earliest to offer this defence, and he does so at the end of his chapter without meaningful textual support, more as a position that Hume *must* hold in order to maintain 'an ethics of belief', rather than one that Hume explicitly defends. Williams (2004, p. 274) defends 'Prior Voluntary Action' only in passing and without offering textual evidence. Norton (2002, p. 384) appeals to the fact that Hume exhorts us to proceed in our enquiries with a degree of doubt (EHU 12.4, EHU 12.24) as evidence that doubting is to some extent voluntary. But this is little evidence for 'Prior Voluntary Action': Hume also exhorts us to hold certain beliefs (e.g. beliefs that are proportionate to the evidence, in EHU 10.4), despite belief being involuntary. Indeed, it is difficult to see how doubt, as the diminishing of vivacity, could be voluntary if vivacity is an involuntary sentiment. As detailed in Sect. 1.1, there are of course voluntary actions that can engender doubt (such as considering the sorry state of our faculties), but this does not come close to establishing Hume's holding that beliefs are only assessable relative to their prior voluntary actions.

to be offering a normative explanation here, endnote H nevertheless fails to support 'Prior Voluntary Action'. Although a few of the considerations Hume offers are related to prior voluntary actions (as detailed above), the vast majority of them concern *involuntary* qualities (superior memory, attention, and powers of observation; having a larger mind; being able to carry on a chain of consequences longer; greater accuracy and subtlety; a less hasty and narrow mind; being less susceptible to bias). If we take Hume to be offering grounds for epistemic evaluation in endnote H, then it seems that he takes involuntariness to be irrelevant to epistemic evaluations. Thus, endnote H offers little evidence for 'Prior Voluntary Action'.

In similar vein, McCormick (2005, pp. 7–9), citing Falkenstein (1997), appeals to Hume's account of general rules in THN 1.3.13, arguing that Hume is here offering a way for us to influence our beliefs by means of the application of general rules. Hickerson (2013) substantiates this line of argument by putting considerable weight on Hume's appeal to the 'second influence of general rules', by which 'we take a review of this act of the mind [of the first influence of general rules, involving overgeneralisation]', and 'find it to be of an irregular nature and destructive of all the most establish'd principles of reasoning; which is the cause of our rejecting it' (THN 1.3.13.12); Hickerson argues that this 'review' is an act of 'voluntary reflection'. However, this account is also unsatisfactory, because it fails to account for many epistemic judgments that Hume does indeed make. Indeed, in the same section as the above passage, Hume argues that *immediate* causal inferences are 'just' in THN 1.3.13.3; obviously, such immediate inferences do not involve any higher-order reflection involving general rules. Similarly, his claim that 'One who concludes somebody to be near him, when he hears an articulate voice in the dark, reasons justly and naturally; tho' that conclusion be deriv'd from nothing but custom' (THN 1.4.4.1) concerns an immediate inference which arises directly from custom, rather than from any higher-order reflection involving general

rules. Note that it is not just that such inferences do not in fact involve any higher-order reflection, but that they *could not* involve any higher-order reflection—such beliefs are derived 'from nothing but custom', and so there is no higher-order reflection that could have been done (but was not) that could serve as a basis on which to evaluate these immediate beliefs. This is problematic for Hickerson's account.

Indeed, we can see that both THN 1.3.13 and endnote H ultimately fail to provide compelling textual evidence for 'Prior Voluntary Action', because they establish only that Hume thinks we can influence our beliefs through prior voluntary actions, which is, after all, an uncontroversial thesis; at a push, they also might be taken to show that Hume thinks that prior voluntary actions are *sometimes* relevant to normative evaluations, which is plausible but not particularly controversial. What 'Prior Voluntary Action' requires is evidence that Hume thinks the normative evaluation of *every* evaluable belief *inextricably rests* on the prior voluntary actions that produce them (since every belief is involuntary) and moreover is *only possible* with respect to these prior voluntary actions, and both Endnote H and THN 1.3.13 fall far short of providing evidence for this. Endnote H fails to establish this, because Hume there also cites involuntary characteristics as responsible for powers of reasoning, and so it cannot be evidence that he takes normative evaluations of beliefs to be only possible with respect to prior voluntary actions; pointing to Hume's appeal to general rules similarly falls short of the mark, because it fails to account for various forms of epistemic judgments that he makes which do not (and cannot) concern higher-order reflection involving general rules at all (e.g. THN 1.3.13.3; THN 1.4.4.1; THN 1.4.7.11). Therefore, these passages fail to adequately substantiate 'Prior Voluntary Action'.

Moreover, another objection to 'Prior Voluntary Action' in any form as a solution to the puzzle is that it fails to account for synchronic rationality. To clarify this objection, let us

distinguish between diachronic and synchronic epistemic evaluations. Diachronic epistemic evaluations are evaluations of beliefs relative to an extended time period (e.g. evaluations regarding evidence-gathering; the development of intellectual virtues), while synchronic epistemic evaluations are evaluations of beliefs relative to a given point in time, without reference to anything that came before (e.g. evaluations of evidence-responsiveness at a given point in time).

One objection is that 'Prior Voluntary Action' is too weak to rescue an ethics of belief because 'Prior Voluntary Action' only explains diachronic evaluations of beliefs, since it claims that *temporally prior* actions are relevant to the epistemic evaluations of beliefs. However, Feldman (2000, 2001) argues that synchronic evaluations of beliefs are crucial to epistemic normativity:

> ... the control that we do have [over our beliefs] comes at the wrong point in the belief-forming process... The real worry is that epistemic evaluations have to do with how we respond to evidence, and we don't have voluntary control over that. (2001, p. 83)

Chuard and Southwood (2009, pp. 610–11) echo this worry, and adduce more arguments in favour of this plausible intuition. They raise two reasons to think that synchronic norms are crucial to epistemic evaluation. The first reason is that it is an empirical fact that in order to satisfy diachronic norms, we must be able to satisfy synchronic norms. They cite evidence-gathering as an example: we can only effectively gather evidence if we satisfy the synchronic norm of being able to recognize evidence. The second reason they cite is that prior voluntary actions such as evidence-gathering are only epistemically valuable insofar as an agent satisfies synchronic norms such as being able to recognize evidence and being appropriately responsive to evidence: the most respectable evidence-gatherer would still be fundamentally

irrational if she were unable to form appropriate beliefs in response to the gathered evidence.[17]

It is important to note that the converse does not hold. It is not true that in order to effectively satisfy synchronic norms, we require diachronic norms. One can be appropriately responsive to evidence even if one makes no extra efforts to gather evidence; similarly, one can also be appropriately responsive to evidence even if one makes no efforts to improve one's evidence-responsiveness over time. Moreover, it is not true that synchronic norms only have value insofar as the agent satisfies diachronic norms: being appropriately responsive to evidence still has value even if one does not satisfy diachronic norms such as evidence-gathering and developing intellectual virtues. In light of this, it seems that there is a sense in which diachronic norms are derivative on synchronic norms. Even if one does not accept this claim, the weaker claim that synchronic norms cannot merely be reduced to diachronic norms seems undeniable. This is of course not to say that an epistemology could satisfactorily leave out diachronic norms; plausibly, a satisfactory epistemology should accommodate both. An epistemology that leaves out synchronic norms is therefore incomplete; therefore 'Prior Voluntary Action' is unsatisfactory.

We can make the transition from a philosophical problem to an interpretive one by noting that some of Hume's epistemic exhortations concern synchronic rationality.[18] Notably, his famous remark that 'a wise man... proportions his belief to the evidence' (EHU 10.4) seems to express epistemic approbation towards agents who synchronically respond

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[17] Note that there are both synchronic *and* diachronic norms governing evidence-responsiveness: synchronic norms governing evidence-responsiveness concern the agent's doxastic reaction to the available evidence at the point when faced with evidence, while diachronic norms concern the development of intellectual virtues, which can influence synchronic evidence-responsiveness to some degree. My claim is that 'Prior Voluntary Action' can accommodate the latter, but cannot entirely account for the former.

[18] This is not to say that Hume is never concerned with diachronic rationality; certainly he would think that we have a responsibility to collect and attend to evidence. A good epistemology should account for both synchronic and diachronic rationality.

appropriately to evidence. Of course, 'being wise' is not a punctuate act, since wisdom is a character trait, and is persistent through time. However, 'proportioning belief to the evidence' clearly seems a punctuate act; it is something that happens at a given point in time. In short, having a diachronic virtue (being wise) is dependent on synchronic acts of belief (proportioning belief to the evidence). Similarly, Hume's 'rules by which to judge of causes and effects' (THN 1.3.15) provide a normative framework for correctly responding to the available evidence concerning causal relations at a given time, rather than advocating the development of appropriate intellectual virtues or the gathering of evidence, and thus this framework also concerns synchronic rather than diachronic rationality. Moreover, what Garrett (1997) calls Hume's 'Title Principle' (THN 1.4.7.11) likewise regards synchronic rationality:

> Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us. (THN 1.4.7.11; SBN 270)

Here Hume is spelling out the conditions under which we should assent to a piece of reasoning at a particular time. The Title Principle is clearly an epistemic norm governing *synchronic* rationality, given that it concerns the conditions under which we should assent to reason at a given time. Since 'Prior Voluntary Action' cannot account for synchronic norms of rationality, 'Prior Voluntary Action' fails to accommodate the Title Principle. To sum up, insofar as Hume is often concerned with synchronic evaluations of beliefs, and insofar as 'Prior Voluntary Action' in either form only gives us at best diachronic evaluations of beliefs, 'Prior Voluntary Action' fails to do justice to Hume's epistemology, as it cannot accommodate an important class of his normative claims.[19,20]

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[19] Another problem for 'Prior Voluntary Action' in either form is that of deviant causal chains. A belief could causally issue from a belief-policy, but in the wrong way, thereby blocking the 'inheritance' of either

Besides these problems for any form for 'Prior Voluntary Action', 'Voluntary Inheritance' and 'Normative Inheritance' have their respective worries in being inconsistent with some of Hume's other theses. I will highlight these problems in the following two subsections. Even if this section has not yet convinced the reader that 'Prior Voluntary Action' is untenable as an interpretive solution to the puzzle, the following problems for its disambiguations should do so. I take it that inconsistency with a figure's other theses is a major strike against an interpretation, and so the following objections should prove decisive.

2.3 Objecting to 'Voluntary Inheritance'

In light of my distinction between the two forms of 'Prior Voluntary Action', it should be noted that proponents of this position in the literature generally seem to characterize 'Prior Voluntary Action' as 'Voluntary Inheritance'.[21] However, despite its popularity, I believe that 'Voluntary Inheritance' is unsatisfactory as an interpretation of Hume.

For one, the details of such an account are somewhat problematic. Being causally derived from a voluntary action confers derivative voluntariness only under certain

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voluntariness or normative significance. Specifying what the 'right way' consists in is no trivial matter. I bracket such issues for the purposes of my paper.

[20] It may be objected that we only focus on the synchronic factors in epistemic evaluation because they are less remote and more relevant to our sentiments of approbation and blame, but diachronic considerations provide more reasoned support for our epistemic assessments. However, given that synchronic factors *are* relevant to our epistemic evaluations because they stir our sentiments of disapprobation and blame, it seems there is a clear sense in which synchronic factors are epistemically crucial, and so there is something that 'Prior Voluntary Action' fails to capture. As Hume says in EPM 4.21, 'But this, in the mean time, must be allowed, that *sentiments* are every day experienced of blame and praise, which have objects beyond the dominion of the will or choice, and of which it behoves us, if not as moralists, as speculative philosophers at least, to give some satisfactory theory and explication.' A similar point can be made here. Just as a moral theory should account for our holding involuntary traits responsible since they stir our sentiments of blame and praise, an epistemic theory should account for our holding synchronic factors responsible since they stir our sentiments of blame and praise. Given that synchronic factors such as evidence-responsiveness significantly affect our epistemic praise and blame, they should count as epistemically relevant, just as involuntary characteristics count as morally relevant because they stir sentiments of moral praise and blame.

[21] C.f. Passmore (1980, pp. 175–6); Falkenstein (1997, p. 66); Owen (1999, p. 216), McCormick (2005, p. 7), and Williams (2004, p. 274). In correspondence, Hickerson indicates that he characterizes his position as 'Normative Inheritance' rather than as 'Voluntary Inheritance'.

conditions—for instance, my tripping over a rock was caused by my voluntarily walking on the road, but surely my tripping is not derivatively voluntary. The additional criteria include at the very least a stipulation that voluntariness is 'inherited' only when the subsequent involuntary result is a *foreseen* consequence of the earlier voluntary action; foresight seems a minimum condition for a consequence being derivatively under voluntary control. However, such a stipulation is difficult to implement with respect to 'Voluntary Inheritance' since in performing actions such as evidence-gathering, we do not typically foresee the resulting belief—and indeed, foreseeing the resulting belief when gathering evidence often results in the epistemically culpable phenomena of confirmation bias![22]

We have seen in the previous section that there is little textual evidence that Hume thinks prior voluntary actions relevant to the normative evaluation of beliefs. However, 'Voluntary Inheritance' lies in even more dire textual straits, as even the mere *concept* of the 'inheritance' of voluntariness is not one that Hume explores. On the other hand, 'Normative Inheritance' is much more plausible in comparison, as Hume recognizes many instances of normative 'inheritance': Hume takes actions and passions to 'inherit' a measure of reasonableness or unreasonableness from their associated beliefs (THN 3.1.1.12, THN 2.3.3.6); he also takes actions to 'inherit' their laudability and blameability from the underlying qualities that produce them (THN 3.3.1.4); moreover, he recognizes the 'inheritance' of epistemic justification via the 'founded on' relation in his treatment of induction (EHU 4.14).[23] Insofar as we take Hume to hold that beliefs 'inherit' one of either

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[22] Thanks Don Garrett for raising this point in correspondence.

[23] At least, according to normative interpretations of Hume's argument on induction. See Millican (2002b) for a detailed examination of the structure of Hume's argument, with the transitivity of the 'founded on' relation made clear. Garrett (1997) and Owen (1999) disagree, reading Hume's argument descriptively. I defend a normative interpretation in my 'Hume's Positive Argument on Induction' (forthcoming).

voluntariness or normative significance from the prior voluntary actions that produce them, it is textually far more likely that they 'inherit' normative significance.

Indeed, 'Voluntary Inheritance' actively seems textually problematic. Hume argues that natural abilities are as morally evaluable as moral virtues (THN 3.3.4.1), going on to note that they are not susceptible to influence from prior voluntary actions:

> Men have observ'd, that tho' natural abilities and moral qualities be in the main on the same footing, there is, however, this difference betwixt them, that the former are almost invariable by any art or industry; while the latter, or at least the actions, that proceed from them, may be chang'd by the motives of reward and punishment, praise and blame. (THN 3.3.4.4; SBN 609)

Here Hume notes that while moral qualities may be changed by suitable motivation, natural abilities are 'almost invariable by any art or industry'. 'Art or industry' might refer either to any prior actions on the part of the agent, or to other people's efforts to change the agent. Either reading rules out natural abilities being significantly influenced by the agent's prior actions. Obviously, the first reading straightforwardly contradicts this option, but the latter version rules it out as well. Since the agent's actions can be changed by reward and punishment, as Hume notes in THN 3.3.4.4 above, if the agent's actions could influence her natural abilities, then rewards and punishments could change natural abilities via affecting these actions. But clearly Hume thinks that rewards and punishments cannot change natural abilities. So it seems clear that Hume thinks that natural abilities cannot be meaningfully influenced by prior actions on the part of the agent. Hence why these abilities are 'natural', rather than acquired.[24]

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[24] It may be objected that one can in fact improve one's natural abilities through prior actions, such as doing mental exercises to improve one's memory. Even so, Hume clearly seems not to think this is the case, which casts doubt on 'Voluntary Inheritance' as an interpretation, if not as a philosophical position.

This renders it highly unlikely that natural abilities could be derivatively voluntary for Hume; since prior voluntary actions cannot meaningfully influence natural abilities, it seems implausible that any voluntariness could be 'inherited' from these actions—nor are there any other suitable candidates from which these natural abilities can 'inherit' voluntariness. This would mean that natural abilities are normatively assessable despite (a) being involuntary, and (b) failing to 'inherit' any voluntariness from prior voluntary actions. This certainly casts substantial doubt on 'Voluntary Inheritance' as an interpretation of Hume, since he seems to hold that an involuntary entity need not 'inherit' any derivative voluntariness in order to be normatively assessable.

2.4 Objecting to 'Normative Inheritance'

First, it should be noted that although Hume recognizes many instances of normative 'inheritance' (as previously noted in section 2.3), there is no textual evidence that he thinks the normative significance of beliefs can be 'inherited' from the normative states of the actions that eventually produce them.

A more pressing objection is that 'Normative Inheritance' falls to a vicious regress in conjunction with Hume's normative framework. 'Normative Inheritance' holds that beliefs are derivatively subject to normative appraisal on the basis of the prior voluntary actions that cause them. However, Hume tells us that actions are not themselves the fundamental subjects of attributions of reasonableness or unreasonableness:

> Actions may be laudable or blameable; but they cannot be reasonable or unreasonable: Laudable
> or blameable, therefore, are not the same with reasonable or unreasonable. (THN 3.1.1.10; SBN
> 458)

> … false judgments may be thought to affect the passions and actions, which are connected to them, and may be said to render them unreasonable, in a figurative and improper way of speaking.
>
> (THN 3.1.1.12; SBN 459)

Hume clearly uses 'laudable' and 'blameable' as terms of moral approbation and blame (e.g. THN 3.1.1.3, THN 3.1.2.3, THN 3.3.1.11). And Hume typically uses 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' as terms of epistemic approbation and blame: he describes philosophical probability as *reasonable* foundations of belief and opinion in THN 1.3.13.1; he describes the production of certain proofs in metaphysical subjects as 'reasonable' in THN 1.2.5.21; he claims that his account of necessity is 'reasonable' in THN 1.3.14.26; and he seeks to establish the principle of allegiance to government on more 'reasonable' principles in THN 3.2.9.2. Furthermore, he often uses 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' hand-in-hand with other unambiguously normative terms, for example, when he describes the fictions of the 'antient philosophy' as 'unreasonable and capricious' (THN 1.4.3.1). Hume therefore seems to be claiming that actions are subject to moral but not epistemic appraisal in THN 3.1.1.10 and THN 3.1.1.12.[25] And indeed, Hume seems to repeat this claim elsewhere in this section in claiming that 'reason can never immediately prevent or produce any action by *contradicting or approving* of it' (THN 3.1.1.10, emphasis added); given that epistemic normativity is surely reason-based, the impossibility of actions being contradicted or approved of by reason seems to rule out their intrinsically bearing epistemic normativity.

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[25] It may be objected that Hume denies a distinction between epistemic and moral normativity in THN 3.3.4, wherein he argues against there being a substantive distinction between natural abilities and moral virtues. However, Hume is not here denying that there is a substantive distinction between moral and epistemic normativity; rather, he is merely making the point that intellectual qualities can be morally assessed on the basis of their usefulness and agreeableness to the possessor and to others, and so it makes little sense to call benevolence a moral virtue, but not a profound genius. This leaves it open that a profound genius can also be *epistemically* assessed on the basis of (say) its truth-conduciveness, and also count as an *epistemic* virtue. Thus, these passages are perfectly consistent with Hume thinking there to be a substantive distinction between moral and epistemic normativity.

But if this is so, then the work of 'Normative Inheritance' is not done; an explanation must be given in turn for how actions are derivatively epistemically appraised as reasonable or unreasonable if we are to accept that beliefs 'inherit' their reasonableness or unreasonableness from them.[26] Therefore, if one is to adopt 'Normative Inheritance', one must search deeper for the source of the unreasonableness of the prior voluntary action itself. For Hume, all voluntary actions are the products of beliefs and desires. So we have two *prima facie* candidates for this source: the doxastic component (i.e. the beliefs) or the affective component (i.e. the passions) that jointly produce the prior voluntary action.

If it is claimed that the fundamental subject of epistemic normativity is the doxastic component, then it should become immediately obvious that we set ourselves upon a vicious regress. For we are claiming that the initial involuntary belief is derivatively unreasonable on the basis of the prior voluntary action that causes it, and this prior voluntary action is itself derivatively unreasonable on the basis of the beliefs that produce it; yet these beliefs are themselves involuntary! We have come no closer to solving the puzzle of how Hume attributes normative accountability to involuntary beliefs. If we pursue this line of defence any further, we embark upon a vicious regress—beliefs are derivatively subject to normative

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[26] Could it be that beliefs 'cross-inherit' reasonableness or unreasonableness from the laudability or blameability of the actions that cause them, therefore halting the potential regress? I find the suggestion that something could 'inherit' a different kind of normative appraisal in this way a doubtful one. First, the notion of 'cross-inheritance' seems problematic, as different types of normativity do not seem to interact. For instance, one cannot 'inherit' prudential blame from moral blame: say John performs a cruel act A, which causes a state of affairs such that he is able to perform an action B that benefits his long-term interests—his performing action B is prudentially blameless despite proceeding from a morally blameworthy action, and there is no cross-inheritance of normativity. More importantly, note that the moral status of A has *no bearing* on the prudential status of B: his performing B is prudentially blameless, and his failing to perform B would have been prudentially blameworthy, regardless of whether A was moral or immoral. Moreover, from a textual point of view, the only cases of normative 'inheritance' Hume recognizes involve the direct 'inheritance' of the same sort of normative appraisal: see THN 3.1.1.12, given above, which involves the 'inheritance' of reasonableness or unreasonableness; or the 'inheritance' of laudability and blameability by actions from underlying qualities (THN 3.3.1.4); or the 'inheritance' of epistemic justification via the 'founded on' relation in his discussion of induction (EHU 4.14). Indeed, Hume explicitly denies the cross-inheritance of moral normativity from epistemic normativity in THN 3.1.1.12: here he rules out the possibility of moral deficiency stemming from errors in belief, which 'are so far from being the source of all immorality'; this renders it unlikely that the converse could hold, viz. that epistemic merit or demerit could derive from moral merit or demerit.

appraisal in virtue of other beliefs, which are derivatively subject to normative appraisal because of other beliefs, and so on.

However, to turn to the affective component (that is, the end-setting passion or passions) would do no better. Recall that THN 3.1.1.12 makes clear that the passions, like actions, 'inherit' their reasonableness or unreasonableness from their associated beliefs; similarly in THN 2.3.3.6:

> Where a passion is neither founded on false suppositions, nor chooses means insufficient for the end, the understanding can never justify nor condemn it … a passion must be accompany'd with some false judgment, in order to its being unreasonable; and even then 'tis not the passion, properly speaking, which is unreasonable, but the judgment. (THN 2.3.3.6; SBN 416)

Here, Hume clearly states that passions are only derivatively (also only figuratively and improperly said to be) unreasonable due to the unreasonableness of their associated beliefs. But as we have seen, delegating normativity to a belief brings us no closer to solving the puzzle of how an involuntary belief can be held up to normative censure in the first place.

To sum up this argument, 'Normative Inheritance' argues that the normative significance of a belief is derivative from the normative appraisal of the prior voluntary actions that produce it—beliefs 'inherit' their epistemic significance from these prior voluntary actions. However, these prior voluntary actions are not themselves the fundamental subjects of attributions of reasonableness and unreasonableness, and are only derivatively so (THN 3.1.1.12). If it is claimed that attributions of reasonableness and unreasonableness toward these prior voluntary actions are 'inherited' from their doxastic component, we get a straightforward regress; however, to turn to the affective component is no better, as passions

are themselves only derivatively rendered reasonable or unreasonable via their associated beliefs (THN 2.3.3.6; THN 3.1.1.12), leading to a vicious regress all the same.[27]

Could actions 'inherit' their reasonableness or unreasonableness from epistemic character traits, in the same way that they arguably 'inherit' laudability and blameability from moral character traits (THN 3.3.1.4)? This possibility is unlikely, for two reasons. First, Hume claims that actions 'inherit' their unreasonableness from associated *beliefs* (THN 3.1.1.12). The second reason that this strategy will not work is that epistemic character traits are themselves involuntary; they are not determined by the will, and so they are beyond our voluntary control. Proponents of 'Normative Inheritance' typically maintain 'Ought implies Can', which is why it argues that involuntary beliefs only derivatively possess their normative statuses. To argue that the ultimate bearer of normative significance is itself involuntary would be to begin by denying 'Ought implies Can', thus resolving the puzzle of how involuntary beliefs are held normatively accountable in the first place; the solution to this puzzle would then be the denial of 'Ought implies Can', exactly as I go on to argue. That is, one could consistently hold both 'Normative Inheritance' and also deny 'Ought implies Can', but then what would be resolving the puzzle would be the latter rather than the former. Therefore, 'Normative Inheritance' cannot maintain that the ultimate sources of epistemic significance are involuntary epistemic character traits, if it is to be taken as a resolution of the puzzle.

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[27] Note that the argument goes through even when the relevant 'prior voluntary action' is the non-performance of a particular action, since the non-performance of an action is an action in the relevant Humean sense. Take the example of my forming a belief regarding the weather tomorrow. Instead of checking weather reports, I instead stare blankly at a wall. The belief is culpable because the entire set of my prior actions (in this case staring blankly at the wall) is culpable in virtue of failing to contain the action 'check the weather report' (or relevantly similar actions). This set of prior actions, because voluntary, are produced by beliefs and desires, and so the argument I raised goes through the same.

One might object to my regress argument by arguing that Hume does not use 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' as terms of epistemic normativity in THN 3.1.1. I lack the space here to fully defend this interpretive claim, although I say more on this elsewhere;[28] in any case, the same conclusion can be reached via a different route, independently of how one reads Hume's usage of 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable'.

Hume emphasizes that actions cannot be the fundamental basis on which a person is judged morally vicious or virtuous because they lack sufficient durability, and so cannot influence our sentiments:

> If any *action* be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character. Actions themselves, not proceeding from any constant principle, have no influence on love or hatred, pride or humility; and consequently are never consider'd in morality. (THN 3.3.1.4; SBN 575)

Insofar as we take epistemic normativity to require an affective response as well,[29] actions cannot be the fundamental basis on which a person is judged epistemically reasonable or unreasonable, also because of their transience. By parallel to the moral case, they must therefore serve as an indication of a durable quality if they are to play a role in epistemic evaluation. Recall also that for 'Normative Inheritance', the basis on which a person is epistemically judged must be voluntary if it is to be a viable solution to the puzzle. So we have two criteria that the basis on which we are epistemically judged must satisfy if 'Normative Inheritance' is to be viable: this basis must be (a) durable and (b) voluntary.

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[28] See my 'Hume's Practically Epistemic Conclusions?' (forthcoming).

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

The problem is that anything that is sufficiently durable to play this normative role will have to be involuntary. Actions and acts of the imagination are free but transient, for example, while character traits, the underlying operations of the imagination, and the functioning of our faculties are durable but involuntary, since they all are not determined by the will. Whatever we take to be the basis on which we are epistemically judged will be involuntary as well if it is to be sufficiently durable to play this normative role, whether this basis is a character trait, or a dispositional belief,[30] or a belief-forming operation such as custom. And this means that the fundamental question of how we can attribute epistemic normativity to an involuntary quality remains unanswered. In the end, it seems that the only solution to the fundamental problem is to reject 'Ought implies Can'.[31]

Given the dearth of compelling textual evidence for 'Normative Inheritance', as seen in section 2.2, there seems no strong reason to attribute to Hume a position that proves inconsistent with his other theses. I therefore reject 'Normative Inheritance' as a viable interpretation.

3. Denying Ought Implies Can

In this section, I will give two arguments for the claim that Hume does not subscribe to 'Ought implies Can', and therefore can consistently hold both (a) and (b).[32,33] First, this claim

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[30] Loeb (2002) argues that Hume is fundamentally committed to a dispositional account of beliefs, although his official theory treats them as occurrent. For a dissenting view, see Marusic (2010). In any case, the issue is largely orthogonal to my purposes in this paper.

[31] Of course, the arguments in this section do not preclude beliefs from 'inheriting' normative significance from actions in some (but crucially not all) cases. Indeed, I find it plausible that in certain diachronic epistemic evaluations, beliefs are partly evaluated in light of the prior voluntary actions that produce them. But this cannot explain how involuntary beliefs can be held accountable, since actions cannot be the fundamental subjects of epistemic normativity, and must inherit epistemic significance from other beliefs. Whatever the details of Hume's epistemology, this puzzle is ultimately resolved by denying 'Ought implies Can'.

[32] My position agrees with that of Vitz (2009), who argues that for Hume, beliefs are not subject to voluntary control but are nevertheless subject to normative appraisal, also citing Hume's treatment of character traits.

is the least textually substantiated of the three jointly inconsistent claims (a), (b) and (c); secondly, Hume clearly holds involuntary characteristics subject to praise and blame in the moral case, therefore removing any presumption that he should not do the same in the epistemic case.

3.1 Weakness of Textual Support

Of the three jointly inconsistent statements (a), (b) and (c) attributed to Hume, 'Ought implies Can' seems to have the weakest textual support by far; if we are looking to dismiss one of the three, this seems the best candidate. That he holds beliefs to be involuntary is substantiated by explicit textual evidence where he forthrightly and unambiguously makes this claim, as we saw in section 1.1 previously. Meanwhile, that he holds beliefs up to normative appraisal is substantiated by numerous instances throughout his philosophical work, as we saw in section 1.2. In contrast, the claim that Hume subscribes to 'Ought implies Can' is clearly the weak link of the three.

Wilson's suggestion that Hume's dismissal of extreme forms of scepticism derives from this principle is substantially weaker than the evidence we have seen for the other two claims, both in terms of quality and quantity. The main textual support that Wilson adduces is

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[33] For a defence of denying 'Ought implies Can' with respect to epistemic obligations in the modern debate on doxastic involuntarism, see Wolterstorff (1997), who compares epistemic oughts to 'paradigm' oughts, and Feldman (1988, 2000, 2001), who gives two differing explanations. In his 1988 paper, he argues that we can have obligations that we are not capable of carrying out, for example our obligation to pay our mortgage despite not having any money; the claim is that epistemic obligations are of this sort. Feldman (2000, 2001) later rejects this view in favour of one close to Wolterstorff's; he claims that epistemic obligations are more like 'role' oughts, which 'describe the right way to play a certain role' (p. 676); examples are the obligations associated with being a teacher, or a commander, or indeed a believer. Denials of 'Ought implies Can' which also extend to the moral case are given by Sinnott-Armstrong (1971), Stocker (1984), and Saka (2000), although not in the context of the debate regarding doxastic involuntarism. Ryan (2003) does the same, but while explicitly discussing doxastic involuntarism; indeed, she argues that Feldman (2000, 2001) should also deny the principle with respect to morality, given that we all play roles as 'moral agents', just as we play roles as 'believers'. Chuard and Southwood (2009) take themselves to maintain 'Ought implies Can', but essentially argue against there being a relevant notion of 'voluntary can'.

Hume's citing the involuntariness of inductive beliefs in his discussions of scepticism (THN 1.4.1.7; EHU 12.23), but this certainly falls far short of Hume endorsing 'Ought implies Can' in any form; indeed, Hume might be read as giving a *practical* (rather than normative) dismissal of sceptical worries by pointing out their irrelevance to our everyday practices, as Beebee (2006, p. 69) argues.[34]

> Ridge's (2003, p. 172) textual support seems more promising:

> ...false judgements... are commonly very innocent, and draw no manner of guilt upon the person who is so unfortunate as to fall into them... They extend not beyond a mistake of *fact*, which moralists have not generally suppos'd criminal, as being perfectly involuntary. (THN 3.1.1.12; SBN 459).

However, while Hume clearly agrees with the 'moralists' that false beliefs are not morally reprehensible, it is doubtful that he agrees with them on the *basis* of this conclusion, viz. that they are involuntary. This explains why in THN 3.1.1.12 above Hume unreservedly endorses the claim that false beliefs are not morally blameable while being careful to put the 'involuntariness' basis for this claim in the mouths of 'moralists'—note also the hedging terms 'commonly' and 'generally suppos'd'. Far from endorsing the thought that beliefs could not be morally blameable because involuntary, Hume wields this argument as an *ad hominem* attack against his rationalist opponents, who typically accept 'Ought implies Can' while maintaining that moral turpitude derives from false beliefs. Indeed, were Hume to agree with the moralists on this matter, this would create a tension with his claim in THN 3.3.4.3 that natural abilities are subject to moral appraisal despite being involuntary.[35]

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[34] Although I read EHU 12.23 as giving a merely practical dismissal of scepticism, I argue that Hume also gives a robust epistemic refutation of excessive scepticism elsewhere in Section 12 in my 'Differentiating Hume's Conclusions' (draft).

[35] This claim will be discussed more extensively shortly.

In the absence of textual substantiation for Hume's subscription to 'Ought implies Can', the major motivation for attributing this principle to Hume seems to be its commonsensical status, but Hume's philosophy is frequently revolutionary. Furthermore, the fact that Hume never seems to recognize a tension between his subscriptions to theses (a) and (b) seems to provide at least a *prima facie* interpretive reason not to attribute 'Ought implies Can' to him. On the whole, if we are to interpret Hume as rejecting one of the three claims, 'Ought implies Can' seems the best bet.

3.2 A Parallel to Moral Normativity

The second and most powerful objection to Hume's subscription to 'Ought implies Can' points to a peculiarity in that Hume's moral evaluation of qualities of the mind is not typically considered problematic, despite their being just as involuntary as beliefs. If we take this attribution of normativity by Hume to be textually unproblematic, then we are implicitly taking Hume to reject 'Ought implies Can' with respect to qualities of the mind in the moral case, which lends much plausibility to the notion that he rejects 'Ought implies Can' in the epistemic case as well.[36]

Hume clearly holds that we are legitimately held morally accountable on the basis of the involuntary qualities of the mind:

> In general, we may observe, that the distinction of voluntary or involuntary was little regarded by
>
> the ancients in their moral reasoning; where they frequently treated the question as very doubtful,
>
> *whether virtue could be taught or not*? They justly considered, that cowardice, meanness, levity,

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[36] Admittedly, Hume clearly draws a distinction between epistemic and moral normativity, as noted in Sect. 2.4, which might be thought to compromise the strength of this analogy. But both types of normativity appear to share a common logic (e.g. the equivalence between 'X is not obligatory' and 'not-X is permissible' in the relevant senses), and this makes it odd to accept 'Ought implies Can' with respect to epistemic rationality but not with respect to morality.

anxiety, impatience, folly, and many other qualities of the mind, might appear ridiculous and deformed, contemptible and odious, though independent of the will. Nor could it be supposed, at all times, in every man's power to attain every kind of mental, more than of exterior beauty. (EPM App 4.20; SBN 321-2)

Here Hume approvingly remarks that the ancient philosophers *justly* condemned involuntary characteristics. Whether something is normatively censurable is not, therefore, a function of its attainability—in other words, ought does not imply can! Hume goes on to say:

Philosophers, or rather divines under that disguise, treating all morals, as on a like footing with civil laws, guarded by the sanctions of reward and punishment, were necessarily led to render this circumstance, of voluntary or involuntary, the foundation of their whole theory. Every one may employ terms in what sense he pleases: But this, in the mean time, must be allowed, that sentiments are every day experienced of blame and praise, which have objects beyond the dominion of the will or choice, and of which it behoves us, if not as moralists, as speculative philosophers at least, to give some satisfactory theory and explication. (EPM App 4.21; SBN 322)

This is echoed in the *Treatise*:

Those, who represent the distinction betwixt natural abilities and moral virtues as very material, may say, that the former are entirely involuntary, and have therefore no merit attending them, as having no dependence on liberty and free will. But to this I answer, *first*, that many of those qualities, which all moralists, especially the antients, comprehend under the title of moral virtues, are equally involuntary and necessary, with the qualities of the judgment and the imagination... *Secondly*, I wou'd have any one give me a reason, why virtue and vice may not be involuntary, as well as beauty and deformity. These moral distinctions arise from the natural distinctions of pain and pleasure; and when we receive those feelings from the general consideration of any quality or character, we denominate it vicious or virtuous. (THN 3.3.4.3; SBN 609-10)

Again, here Hume is dismissing the view that voluntariness is required for moral responsibility, and he is happy to hold involuntary characteristics morally responsible – indeed, he holds *only* involuntary characteristics culpable in the moral evaluation of agents, since the basis on which we are morally assessed (i.e. qualities of the mind) are beyond our voluntary control. Hume argues that what determines matters of moral responsibility are the moral distinctions which arise from our natural sentiments of pain and pleasure,[37] and these natural sentiments are not directly sensitive to considerations of voluntariness.[38] The voluntariness of qualities of the mind is therefore irrelevant to their normative status, according to Hume. Why then should we think him to see things differently in the epistemic case? Perhaps epistemic worth is seen by Hume as akin to aesthetic and moral worth, and is best considered a kind of *beauty*;[39] such evaluations of beauty do not rest on considerations of voluntariness, and involuntary epistemic beauty is as pleasing to our sentiments as voluntary epistemic beauty.

However, there seems to be a bit of a puzzle here, for denying the intuitive 'Ought implies Can' is a difficult bullet to bite. If we read Hume as claiming that voluntariness is utterly irrelevant to normative evaluations, it seems we commit him to a counterintuitive position, with ludicrous consequences such as attributing equal moral blame to the man who accidentally kills someone as the man who wilfully and knowingly commits murder. Of course, this is not Hume's position; indeed, he rejects the doctrine of 'liberty or chance' (that is, the denial of determinism) partly on the grounds that it fails to account for the fact that we

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[37] These natural sentiments are corrected and systematized first, which distinguishes Hume's position from the crudest forms of moral subjectivism.

[38] Of course, considerations of voluntariness affect our moral sentiments in more indirect ways, particularly with respect to actions. I discuss this shortly.

[39] Hume notably speaks of moral beauty in THN 3.1.1.21, THN 3.2.1.8, THN 3.2.2.1, THN 3.2.6.4, EPM 1.9, EPM App 1.13, and EPM App 4.20. He also makes reference to 'beauty and deformity in action, composition, and external objects' (THN 2.1.1.3); 'beauty and deformity in action' most likely refers to virtue and vice respectively, as Loeb (1977) points out.

tend to be held accountable for voluntary but not accidental actions, since Hume takes the denial of determinism to undermine the connection between an action and the underlying durable character of the person who performed it (THN 2.3.2.6).

We can make the bullet of denying 'Ought implies Can' easier to chew by pointing out that voluntariness does play some role in the normative evaluation of actions but not beliefs or qualities of the mind, therefore going some way in explaining the intuitiveness of 'Ought implies Can'. But what reason could there be for drawing this arbitrary-seeming distinction? I propose that the answer centres on the evidential role that voluntariness plays with respect to actions. Recall that actions are not the fundamental basis on which a person is epistemically assessed, and play only an informative role in revealing underlying character: [40]

> If any *action* be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character... Actions are, indeed, better indications of a character than words, or even wishes and sentiments; but 'tis only so far as they are such indications, that they are attended with love or hatred, praise or blame. (THN 3.3.1.4-5; SBN 575)

Voluntariness is relevant to our (derivative) appraisal of actions because *ceteris paribus*, voluntary actions usually accurately reflect underlying character, while involuntary actions usually do not accurately reflect character. For example, we should not morally blame someone who involuntarily spasms and steps on our foot, because we recognize that this

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[40] To accurately reflect underlying character, an action will have to proceed from it: as we cannot directly observe character, we are only licensed to make inferences about it via its visible products, viz. the actions it produces; these actions are only causally linked to character traits by being produced by them, and so the only way for an action to accurately reflect a character trait is by proceeding from it. However, it is not sufficient for an action to proceed from but not accurately reflect an underlying character trait for it to be used to evaluate this character trait. Take the example of a man who performs an action out of greed but successfully hides the motive for this action. In this case, we are not in an epistemic position to subjectively judge him greedy on the basis of his apparently non-greedy action. Of course objectively speaking, we would judge him on the basis of his greedy character, but not on the basis of his action, since actions are too transient to be properly used as a basis for evaluation. Insofar as actions are subjectively relevant to normative evaluations, we are not licensed to judge the man to be greedy on the basis of his apparently non-greedy action. In short, an action must proceed from *and* accurately reflect underlying character to adequately signify underlying character.

action did not proceed from his character; in contrast, it would be permissible to blame someone who deliberately trod on our foot, as this action would accurately paint an unflattering picture of his underlying character.[41]

This point can be verified by observing that where involuntary actions accurately reflect underlying character, we are more inclined to hold accountable these actions: if I am of a mean character and am so used to insulting others that I produce abusive comments automatically and involuntarily, I would be held equally (or even more) accountable than if these comments had been voluntary. Therefore, it seems that the involuntariness of an action serves to excuse an agent only if it entails that this action is unreflective of underlying character.[42] Where involuntariness entails that an action is unreflective of underlying character, we are inclined not to hold the agent responsible for this action; conversely, where an involuntary action is reflective of underlying character, we are inclined to blame this action, as Hume notes:

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[41] It might be counterintuitive to some to think that a voluntary action that did not accurately reflect a durable character trait of the agent—perhaps because it merely issued from a transient quality—would not count towards the moral evaluation of this person. Nevertheless, this seems to be Hume's view, as he states it in THN 3.3.1.4: if an action is not 'a sign of some quality or character', then it cannot be 'either virtuous or vicious'. So a voluntary action that did not accurately reflect a durable character trait would not properly count towards the moral evaluation of the agent. This is Hume's explanation for why 'repentance wipes off every crime' (THN 2.3.2.7), since sincere repentance demonstrates that the past action no longer accurately reflects the agent's (now reformed) character.

[42] This is essentially the 'epistemic' solution to the problem of moral luck (see Bernard Williams 1981 for a classic statement of this puzzle). Briefly, the problem of moral luck may be stated as follows: how can we be held morally accountable on the basis of factors beyond our control? Take an example: driver 1 fails to check his brakes regularly and consequently runs over a child, while driver 2 is equally negligent but luckily never encounters any pedestrian children. We judge driver 1 more harshly than driver 2; yet the only difference between them (that is, a child's running in front of driver 1's car) was beyond either of their control. The epistemic solution to this puzzle (propounded by Richards 1986, Thomson 1993, and Rescher 1993, among others) argues that drivers 1 and 2 are equally morally accountable since they have the same characters, but we are not in an epistemic position to know this, and therefore presume the unlucky driver to have a worse character. In short, it is characters that we normatively assess, with actions playing a merely evidential role in allowing us to discern underlying character. Latus 2000 argues that this solution fails because it leaves unanswered the further question of how we can be morally judged on the basis of our involuntary characters; but as we have seen, Hume would at this point head off the potential regress by arguing that voluntariness is irrelevant to moral evaluations beyond playing a merely evidential role with respect to actions; that our character is beyond our control is not morally relevant, given that these characters are equally apt to excite love and hatred, pride and humility whether voluntary or not.

> By the intention we judge of the actions, and according as that is good or bad, they become causes
> of love or hatred. But here we must make a distinction. *If that quality in another, which pleases or*
> *displeases, be constant and inherent in his person and character, it will cause love or hatred*
> *independent of the intention: But otherwise a knowledge and design is requisite, in order to give*
> *rise to these passions*. (THN 2.2.3.3-4; SBN 348-9, emphasis added)

Indeed, in the *Enquiry* Hume argues that voluntary freedom (viz. 'liberty') is crucial to
morality precisely because it allows for actions to have evidentiary value regarding our
durable character traits:

> It will be equally easy to prove, and from the same arguments, that *liberty*, according to that
> definition above mentioned, in which all men agree, is also essential to morality, and that no
> human actions, where it is wanting, are susceptible of any moral qualities, or can be the objects
> either of approbation or dislike. For as actions are objects of our moral sentiment, so far only as
> they are indications of the internal character, passions, and affections; it is impossible that they
> can give rise either to praise or blame, where they proceed not from these principles, but are
> derived altogether from external violence. (EHU 8.31; SBN 99)

On the other hand, voluntariness plays no role in moral appraisal beyond this evidential one,
and therefore Hume can reject 'Ought implies Can' with respect to qualities of the mind,
since they are the fundamental basis on which we are morally assessed and do not serve as
mere signs of some underlying quality.

In the epistemic case, beliefs are either the fundamental basis on which we are
epistemically assessed, or they—like actions in the moral case—merely play an informative
role insofar as they reflect some underlying disposition of the agent. If the former is the case,
then voluntariness plays no role in normative evaluation, given that beliefs would not serve as
mere signs of some underlying quality.

On the other hand, if beliefs play only an informative role in epistemic evaluation, voluntariness would equally play no role in the normative evaluation of beliefs, given that an involuntary belief typically will nevertheless accurately reflect underlying epistemic character. In this respect, involuntary beliefs are like involuntary actions such as my automatically insulting others due to my unpleasant character; these actions, like beliefs, proceed directly from underlying (epistemic or moral) character without going through a volitional process, and thus their involuntariness is not apt to mitigate blame or approbation, since they are excellent signs of this underlying character. Contrast this with innocent involuntary actions such as accidentally tripping and treading on someone's foot; such actions do not proceed from underlying character at all, and give one no reason to think poorly of this character. Of course, involuntary beliefs do not always accurately reflect underlying character, for example when resulting from an uncharacteristic error in judgment. The point is that involuntary beliefs *usually* accurately reflect underlying epistemic character; on the other hand, involuntary actions are *usually* unreflective of underlying moral character. The involuntariness of belief does not in itself compromise the evidential value of the belief with respect to underlying epistemic character; if evidentiary value is compromised, it will typically be for reasons unrelated to voluntariness (e.g. the agent being overtaken by emotion, causing uncharacteristic errors in judgment). Thus, the involuntariness of beliefs does not compromise their evidential value with respect to underlying epistemic character. Therefore, considerations of evidential role explain why Hume would consider voluntariness so irrelevant to the normative evaluation of qualities of the mind and beliefs but not to the normative evaluation of actions.

All in all, it should be fairly clear from Hume's own words that he rejects 'Ought implies Can' with respect to qualities of the mind, and we have a principled reason for

extending this rejection to beliefs, while maintaining that voluntariness is relevant to the evidential value of actions in normatively assessing the underlying characters that produce them. Therefore, Hume does not commit himself to an inconsistency in holding that beliefs are involuntary while at the same time subjecting them to normative censure. This interpretation is, unlike both forms of 'Prior Voluntary Action' examined earlier, not only consistent with Hume's theses, but also consonant with them in having a neat parallel to his moral account; on these grounds, I take it to be a much more plausible interpretation.

4. Parallels with Moral Responsibility and Determinism

In section 1.3, I pointed out that the above discussion is to a large degree independent of Hume's position on moral responsibility and determinism, as the two discussions involve different readings of 'Ought implies Can'. Nevertheless, it may be illuminating briefly to draw out some parallels between the two. To facilitate this comparison, let us disambiguate the two relevant readings of 'Ought implies Can':

> **Ought implies Libertarian-Can**: If a person ought to perform X, this implies that she can perform X in a libertarian sense of having the capacity of agent-causation to perform X; she is able to operate in a non-deterministic, self-caused manner in performing X.
>
> **Ought implies Voluntary-Can**: If a person ought to perform X, this implies that X is under her voluntary control: X is determined by her will.

In Hume's discussion of determinism and moral responsibility, he faces three jointly inconsistent positions:

(x) Our actions are determined and therefore beyond libertarian control;

(y) Our actions are subject to normative censure;

(z) 'Ought implies Libertarian-Can'.

Compare this with the three jointly inconsistent positions Hume faces in the case of doxastic involuntarism:

(a) Our beliefs are beyond our voluntary control;

(b) Our beliefs are subject to normative censure;

(c) 'Ought implies Voluntary-Can'.

The parallels between the two should be immediately obvious; both {abd} and {xyz} take an element that is subject to normative censure and beyond our control in a certain way, along with a principle that dictates that normative censure is subject to that form of control.[43]

Hume recommends analogous solutions to both puzzles: he rejects (c) and (z) respectively. Regarding doxastic involuntarism, I argued that Hume rejects 'Ought implies Voluntary-Can'—he recognises that we can and do hold involuntary beliefs normatively accountable. The {x, y, z} parallel to this would be to read Hume as rejecting 'Ought implies Libertarian-Can': according to Hume, we can hold deterministically caused actions normatively accountable. And clearly Hume does take this route:

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[43] The parallel between {xyz} and {abc} is not entirely direct since they concern different notions of control (voluntary versus libertarian). I think the comparison between these two sets is nevertheless the most edifying for my purposes, and {xyz} is a case Hume explicitly discusses, which I why I have focused on {xyz} in the main text. We can briefly examine the directly parallel sets (that are still inconsistent) in this footnote. Examine the set {a'bz}:

(a') Our beliefs are beyond libertarian control;

(b) Our beliefs are subject to normative censure;

(z) 'Ought implies Libertarian-can'.

Hume does not directly discuss this case, since his discussion on free will and determinism center around actions (rather than beliefs) and moral responsibility (rather than epistemic), but it seems clear that his answer would be the same, that is, rejecting (z). We can also examine the set {x'yc}:

(x') Our actions are beyond voluntary control;

(y) Our actions are subject to normative censure;

(c) 'Ought implies Voluntary-can'.

Of course, not all actions are beyond voluntary control, and so we have to restrict our scope to the ones that are to derive an inconsistent set parallel to {abc}. However, as discussed in Sect. 3.2, Hume thinks that involuntary actions are only subject to normative censure under certain conditions (i.e. when they accurately reveal underlying character). It seems more systematic to say that Hume denies (c) for all cases of involuntary actions but nevertheless thinks that some involuntary actions are morally irrelevant for external reasons due to his virtue-based understanding of morality.

A man who is robbed of a considerable sum; does he find his vexation for the loss any wise diminished by these sublime reflections? Why then should his moral resentment against the crime be supposed incompatible with them? Or why should not the acknowledgment of a real distinction between vice and virtue be reconcileable to all speculative systems of philosophy, as well as that of a real distinction between personal beauty and deformity? Both these distinctions are founded in the natural sentiments of the human mind: And these sentiments are not to be controuled or altered by any philosophical theory or speculation whatsoever. (EHU 8.35; SBN 102-3)

Here Hume makes the point that we do in fact hold deterministic actions normatively accountable, regardless of any 'sublime reflections' or philosophical principles (such as 'Ought implies Libertarian-Can') that say otherwise. Compare this passage with what Hume says regarding the involuntariness of moral character:

But this, in the mean time, must be allowed, that sentiments are every day experienced of blame and praise, which have objects beyond the dominion of the will or choice, and of which it behoves us, if not as moralists, as speculative philosophers at least, to give some satisfactory theory and explication. (EPM App 4.21; SBN 322)

Similarly, here Hume points out that we do hold involuntary actions normatively accountable, regardless of what 'philosophers, or rather divines under that disguise' say to the contrary; what matters to moral evaluation are simply our sentiments of approbation and blame. Although his accounts of normativity with respect to determinism and involuntariness differ in some respects, it is clear that we can draw striking parallels between the two.

A brief point to note: perhaps tellingly, Hume describes his project here as that of a 'speculative philosopher'—even when dealing with the prescriptive notion of normativity, Hume stresses his descriptive project of providing a science of man. And given that we do in fact pass normative judgments not only on deterministic actions but also involuntary beliefs,

Hume's account is committed to at the very least allowing for their being held normatively accountable.

5. Conclusions and Implications.

I will end the paper by exploring a few implications of the account contained within. First, what are the implications of this for Hume and 'Ought implies Can'? I will note that the arguments of this paper do not preclude Hume from holding an even weaker version of 'Ought implies Can'. Hume seems to hold 'Ought implies Can' in a very weak sense of 'can', and only limited to actions, that is, the fact that we ought to perform an action implies that human nature in general contains a motive or passion capable of generating this action:

> 'No action can be requir'd of us as our duty, unless there be implanted in human nature some
>
> actuating passion or motive, capable of producing the action' (THN 3.2.5.6; SBN 518).

Needless to say, this is perfectly compatible with holding involuntary, deterministic beliefs normatively accountable, since this principle applies only to actions.

Perhaps a more interesting implication has to do with the relationship between moral and epistemic normativity for Hume. Unlike the structure of Hume's account of morality, the structure of Hume's epistemic account is less well-understood. I have drawn close parallels between the two normative structures, which suggests the possibility that beliefs are evaluable on the basis of the epistemic character traits that they exemplify; I explore such an account in more detail in my 'Hume's Practically Epistemic Conclusion?' (forthcoming). More generally, these close parallels between the two might lend some plausibility to 'practical' interpretations of Hume's epistemology, which take epistemic justification to be grounded in moral justification. Commentators such as Owen (1999) and McCormick (2005) who endorse both 'Prior Voluntary Action' and practical interpretations (in the same works,

no less!) might find that this paper provides reasons to favour my account beyond the arguments I provided; if one takes seriously the parallel (or even identity) between moral and epistemic normativity for Hume, it seems unclear why we should think 'Ought Implies Can' applies to one but not the other. Elsewhere in 'Hume's Practically Epistemic Conclusions?' (forthcoming), I have argued that practical interpretations prove problematic as an interpretation of THN 1.4.7 given Hume's commitments elsewhere in the *Treatise*, but I have recently come to think that given the mess Hume got himself into at this point in the *Treatise*, it might be plausible that he simply propounds a problematic position here. There is much more to be said on this issue, but this paper is not the place in which to do so.[44]

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