Hume Day, December 7, 2016
A Treatise of Human Nature 1.4.1 – 'Of scepticism with regard to reason'

Faculty of Philosophy (room Alpha)
University of Groningen
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Groningen, the Netherlands

Programme

9:10 – 9:15	Welcome
9:15 – 10:45	David Owen (University of Arizona)
10:45 – 11:00	Coffee break
11:00 – 12:30	Kevin Meeker (University of South Alabama)
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 15:00	Jeanne Peijnenburg (University of Groningen)
15:00 – 15:15	Tea break
15:15 – 16:45	Don Garrett (New York University)

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Reason, knowledge and probability in 'Scepticism with regard to the reason' (*Treatise* 1.4.1)

David Owen

There are two negative arguments in 1.4.1. The first argues that "all knowledge degenerates into probability"; the second, concerning probability, that a regress argument results in "a total extinction of belief and evidence." Hume spends just about as much time on the first argument as on the second, but the second has received most of the attention. Furthermore, Hume's response to the negative arguments seems to be a response only to the second. In this paper, I will examine the first argument, paying especial attention to the two sorts of knowledge, intuitive and demonstrative, and the grounds of the first argument. I will then look at the first argument's relation to the second argument, and offer an evaluation of the second argument, and interpret it in light of Hume's response to it.

Hume's certain doubts: why we should worry too

Kevin Meeker

Hume's regress argument contains at least two important claims: first, "all knowledge degenerates into probability" (T 1.4.1.1, 180) and, second, "all the rules of logic require. . . a total extinction of belief and evidence" (T 1.4.1.6, 183). In this talk, I focus on the surprising ramifications of a relatively neglected argument in

support of the first claim. After providing some brief background on I.iv.1, I show how this underappreciated argument helps us to understand the motivation and structure of the reasoning of this section. Then I contend that this argument provides a worrisome sceptical threat to our knowledge, even if we think of knowledge differently than Hume did.

Can probability theory help us understand Hume's argument?

Jeanne Peijnenburg

In 'Of scepticism with regard to reason' Hume presents a regress argument based on higher and higher order probabilities. He finds the argument totally unconvincing, but also intimates that one "can find no error" in it. Scholars using probability theory have maintained that the argument rests on a simple calculational mistake. Others have however contested this, emphasizing that it disregards the message of Hume's text. In this talk I will argue on the basis of probability theory that the regress argument is only partially mistaken.

Probability and obligation in Hume's 'Scepticism with regard to reason'

Don Garrett

In the section of his *Treatise* entitled "Of scepticism with regard to reason," Hume argues (i) that "knowledge degenerates into probability" and (ii) that "we are oblig'd by our reason" to add a series of "new doubts … *in infinitum* … till at last there remain nothing of the original probability." Yet he evidently does not regard these conclusions as preventing him from offering a system of the sciences on a foundation that has a unique "security." In order to explain what Hume means by these two conclusions and the arguments for them, I will seek to explain what he means by 'probability' and how, he thinks, our reason can "oblige" us to introduce doubts that diminish it.

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Registration is required, which can be done by sending an email to:
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