

General rules and the normative dimension of belief in Hume's epistemology

As regras gerais e a dimensão normativa da crença na epistemologia de Hume

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ABSTRACT

The main concern of this paper is whether Hume's account of belief has a normative dimension, especially concerning his account of general rules of reasoning in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, and consequently, whether it is possible to offer an account of the normative force of those rules in spite of his naturalist framework. I conclude that there are many normative elements in his conception of belief and reasoning, and that, as many authors in recent studies of normativity have suggested, naturalism can sufficiently account for the normative structures of our cognition and their normative authority. Such a view of the normative dimension of belief in Hume's epistemology also shows an interesting and close connection with the moral dimension of his thought, which I believe is of fundamental importance for understanding his thought in general.

Keywords: Hume, general rules, normativity, belief.

RESUMO

O principal objetivo deste artigo é discutir se o relato da crença de Hume tem uma dimensão normativa, especialmente no que se refere ao seu relato de regras gerais de raciocínio em seu Tratado da Natureza Humana e, conseqüentemente, se é possível explicar a força normativa destas regras apesar de sua estrutura naturalista. Concluo que há muitos elementos normativos em sua concepção de crença e raciocínio e que, como muitos autores de estudos recentes de normatividade sugeriram, o naturalismo pode explicar as estruturas normativas de nossa cognição e sua autoridade normativa. Esta visão da dimensão normativa da crença na epistemologia de Hume também mostra uma conexão interessante e próxima com a dimensão moral de seu pensamento, que acredito ser de fundamental importância para a compreensão de seu pensamento em geral.

Palavras-chave: Hume, regras gerais, normatividade, crença.

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In recent decades, Hume's apparent concern for normative issues in his philosophical writings has been of increasing interest among scholars (see Hearn, 1970, 1976; Martin, 1993; Falkenstein, 1997; Lyons, 2001; Searjeantson, 2005; Morris, 2006; Schliesser, 2007). One of the main questions seems to be whether his account of general rules in his *Treatise* and subsequent writings is an expression of normative claims concerning epistemic and moral judgment, or, on the contrary, whether appealing to rules is nothing more than a careless use of normative language within a naturalist framework, which cannot provide a foundation for the normative force of epistemic rules (see Lyons, 2001, p. 270, 273, n. 14; Falkenstein, 1997, p. 30).

Even from the very beginning of the discussion one could call the matter a "pseudo problem" based on an anachronism. In fact, the concern with rules was common throughout early modern philosophy, at least since Descartes's *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*, and especially in early modern logic² (see Easton, 1997; Serjeantson, 2005, p. 188), while normativity is itself a 20th-century concern of philosophers.

In this paper, I will be dealing with some difficulties concerning how to articulate a normative view of Hume's account of general rules. In order to do this, I will try to support the following three claims: (i) Hume uses the concept of rules in at least three different ways, one of which is normative in a strong sense. To support this statement it will be necessary to recall what a general rule is and to examine its relation to belief and normativity; (ii) If there is a source of the normative force of general rules in Hume's thought, then this means that the theory is in itself normative, even though neither the general rules nor their normativity are explicit subjects of analysis in the *Treatise*, but instead serve as operative concepts; and (iii) Hume's novel view of philosophy and reason explain to some extent the generation of normative structures in his philosophy.

Rules in Hume's philosophy

That Hume's thought is concerned with the problem of rules in its central parts has been well known since Hearn's two papers on general rules from the 1970's, in which he shows that *general rules* play a systematic role in the *Treatise*, being present in each of its three books (Hearn, 1970, p. 404-406³). In this paper, however, I will be dealing only with the problem of the normativity of general rules in Hume's epistemology, mostly in part 3 of book 1 of the *Treatise*. There we find for the first time an

extensive exposition of general rules and their influence on our judgment and belief.

General rules are, as described by Hume in T 1.3⁴, generalizations concerning the behavior of a kind of phenomenon of our experience that can be expressed by proposition in the form "every X is/has the property/ is predicable-of Y". This kind of general statement appears within the analysis of probabilities, for they lack the universality of mathematical and logical propositions and they cannot be demonstrated (as Hume understands the term, probabilities are both our beliefs of matters of fact, as well as the statements themselves that articulate such beliefs). Instead, they are conveyed by the imagination's tendency to generalize, based on past experience and custom. Nonetheless, not every generalization has the same status, and this fact reinforces the distinction commonly drawn in the secondary literature between general rules of prejudices (also referred to as "extensive general rules") and the so-called corrective general rules.

The way in which general rules affect our judgment is also addressed by Hume in his treatment of *probability* in the *Treatise* since it also belongs to the topic of belief and belief-formation mechanisms. According to Hume, a belief is a "strong and steady conception of an idea" that includes a claim to truth and with a number of different causes, such as memory, imagination, and causal inference: "we join belief to the conception, and are persuaded of the truth of what we conceive" (T 1.3.7; SBN 96-7 footnote). Hume naturally endorses some of those mechanisms which are in a better position to fulfill that expectation (see Loeb, 2002, p. 13) and prevent our ideas from being the mere "offspring of the imagination" (see T 1.3.9.4; SBN 108). Besides, considering the *probability of causes*, Hume holds that our judgments take place by virtue of *custom* and *general rules* (see T 1.3.12.24; SBN 141), and that "custom can lead us into false comparison of ideas" (T 1.3.9.17; SBN 116. See also T 1.3.13.2; SBN 143-144), especially when we, as a result of the imagination's propensity to generalize, form *general rules* of the following type: "An Irishman cannot have wit, and a Frenchman cannot have solidity". This kind of judgment is called an "unphilosophical species of probability" and "is that deriv'd from general rules, which we rashly form to ourselves, and which are the source of what we properly call prejudice" (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 146; for another example see T 2.2.5.12-13; SBN 362). This first kind of general rule leads to false reasoning in so far as the rule is caused by the "propensity of the imagination to extend the scope of judgments formed in one set of circumstances to other resembling but non-identical circumstances" (Hearn, 1970, p. 405).

² See for example Hutcheson, *Logicae Compendium* (1756), Watts, *Logic* (1724) or Arnauld et al., *La Logique ou l'art de penser* (2011 [1662]). The latter works were probably very well known by Hume.

³ Hearn barely mentions the issue of the value of general esthetic judgment, which Railton addresses (2000, p. 10-16)

⁴ I cite Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (T) according to the critical edition of *Oxford Philosophical Texts* by D. Norton and M. Norton, using the abbreviation T and four numbers (book, part, section, paragraph) and according to the traditional edition of Sellby-Bigge/Niddich using the abbreviation SBN followed by the number of the page. In all quotations of Hume's work, I respect the original orthography.

Although every judgment on probability is a function of custom, i.e. past experience and the projection of the imagination, the mind is not condemned to follow its faulty natural tendencies. It is possible to prevent the mind from forming false beliefs founded on rules of prejudices and from "the reposing any assurance in those momentary glimpses of light, which arise in the imagination from a feign'd resemblance and contiguity" (T 1.3.9.6; SBN 110), by means of the reflective mediation of second level judgments.⁵ Thus, the same propensity of the imagination to generalize can result in "philosophical probability" when it is mediated by reflection. Reflection is a pivotal element in Hume's account of mental activity, it explains some aspects of our cognition by playing a twofold roll: transforming some instances of the generalization tendency of the imagination into patterns of adequate judgments, i.e. proper "general rules"; but it also distinguishes, by means of correction, between those cases that are in accordance with those rules. That is why Hume suggests that mediation in judgment leads to the so-called corrective general rules, which are allowed "to influence their judgments <of men> even contrary to present observation and experience" (T 1.3.13.8; SBN 147, clarification added). In a very central passage for this investigation Hume claims that

We shall afterwards take notice of some general rules, by which we ought to regulate our judgment concerning causes and effects; and these rules are form'd on the nature of our understanding, and on our experience of its operations in the judgments we form concerning objects. By them we learn to distinguish the accidental circumstances from the efficacious causes [...] The

*general rule is attributed to our judgment; as being more extensive and constant*⁶ (T 1.3.13.11; SBN 149, emphasis added).

Hume continues: "Sometimes the one, sometimes the other prevails, according to the disposition and character of the person. The vulgar are commonly guided by the first, and wise men by the second <kind of rules>" (T 1.3.13.12; SBN 150). It seems that the character of the beliefs a person forms, that is, the way someone structures his or her doxastic life, reflects the extent to which he or she is actually influenced by epistemic norms, the extent to which his or her beliefs express rationality or irrationality.⁷ Thus for Hume, the rational epistemic agent is the one who is able to assume a critical philosophical perspective. A wise person is someone whose beliefs are reliably formed due to a reliable disposition to judge reflectively, and justified for the same reason (setting aside the problem of the criteria for justification of belief). This is because, according to the corrective general rules account, a rational belief not only expresses a *healthy* mental attitude of a believer, but it is also somehow related to the content of the beliefs.⁸ Thus, according to Hume, more extensive and constant experience is "of a grosser and more stubborn nature, less subject to accidents, and less influenced by whim and private fancy" (Essays⁹ 1. XIV, p. 112; G&G, p. 175).¹⁰ An extended and constant experience of the same phenomenon or kind of phenomenon in the light of certain evidence (copy principle) is of a nature that can be expressed by general rules: "But however intricate they may seem, it is certain that general principles, if just and sound, must always prevail in the general course of things, though they may fail in particular cases; and it is the chief business of philosophers

⁵ The first use of reflection in the Treatise concerns impressions. Thus Hume distinguishes between first order perceptions – also called impressions or ideas of sensation, which are directly related to sense perception – and second order perceptions, that is, impressions and ideas of reflection that result from the affection produced by the mind on itself. This kind of perception implicitly recalls some kind of self-consciousness or self-experience as a source of representations. This distinction seems similar to the one that Hume is accused of making in his appeal to reflection at the level of judgments. Those general statements that the mind proceeds to form without any mediation of reflection, and which can be false (the case of prejudices) or, and may also be subject to a second order judgment which can only arise as a result of reflection. Wilson (2008, p. 416) grasps the chief role of reflection in Hume's thought, writing that for Hume "the mind arrives at standards of rationality through a process of reflection upon the world as it is experienced and, equally importantly, upon itself as it is experienced".

⁶ Constancy and extensiveness are criteria for justifications and rationality of belief. But these terms belong more properly to a cluster of terms; frequency, stability, and stubbornness are also to be mentioned. (For the discussion of these criteria see Lyons, 2001; Loeb, 2001; Guerrero del Amo, 2005, for three different positions). These concepts are the fruit of reflection, in so far as they arise from the analysis and abstraction of properties of our experience. Furthermore, reflection is a topic of great relevancy in current discussions about belief and normativity (Owens, 2000).

⁷ This is what Owens calls the problem of "doxastic control" (2003, p. 284). For a discussion of epistemic norms in Hume, see Lyons (2001). He distinguishes between "criteria for epistemic norm correctness" and the "defense of the criteria". This is an important distinction that is assumed in this paper.

⁸ It appears that Hume's theory of justification of belief includes an interesting confluence of different elements of reliabilism, coherentism and foundationalism.

⁹ I quote both Eugen Miller edition (1985) and T.H. Green and T.H. Grosse (G&G) edition (1889): Essay part 1, XIV: Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences. Essay part 2, I: Of Commerce.

¹⁰ I agree that there is a doctrinal continuity between Hume's Treatise and the subsequent Essays. Immerwahr (1991) shows the harmonic continuity and coherence of both works, and moreover, the complementing nature of both approaches to human nature and business.

to regard the general course of things” (Essays 2. I, p. 254; G&G, p. 287)¹¹.

As we can see above, there is an underlying connection between what can properly be an object of our knowledge and the method that can lead a *reasoner* to that knowledge; a connection that we can make sense of only by appealing to Hume’s account of general rules. Along this path, I argue that in order to fully understand the aforementioned connection, it is necessary to distinguish not two (as has been often done), but three different categories within the concept of “general rule”. Firstly, there are extensive general rules of prejudice. Secondly, there are *general principles*, which are, so to speak, materially determined, for they express specific properties or characteristics of phenomena (in physics, politics, economics, moral, for example) and correspond to the distinction between “what is owing to *chance*, and what proceeds from *causes*” (Essays 1. XIV, p. 111; G&G, p. 174; also T 1.3.11.12; SBN 128-9) or, according to Hume, “between particular deliberation and general reasoning” (Essays 2. I p. 254). The conditions for the achievement of this kind of knowledge¹² – which corresponds to Hume’s *philosophical probability* – are “the greater refinements and improvements of human reason” (Essays 1. XIV, p. 118; G&G, p. 180). This also supports Hume’s claim that politics, metaphysics and morals “form the most considerable branches of science. Mathematics and natural philosophy, which only remain, are not half so valuable” (Essays 1. XIV, p. 126; G&G, p. 186). These first two kinds of rules make space for the third, the one we have been calling “corrective”. These general rules are “the logic” of probable reasoning and is required to achieve justified and reliable belief, on which all valuable sciences are based. Corrective general rules have therefore at least a threefold function: (1) they display a model of reliable belief formation and correction; (2) they can also correct judgment produced by the first kind of general rules (T 1.3.13.12; SBN 149-50); and (3) they make it possible to return irreflective judgment or belief to its cognitive sources and foundations and, thus, to identify false belief as such (see T 1.3.8.14; SBN 104-5).

General rules for causal reasoning

After developing his theory of philosophical probabilities and its dependency on causal inference, Hume outlined his famous set of *Rules by which to judge causes and effects* (T 1.3.15; SBN 173). They are 8 criteria that allow us to distin-

guish between a relation of constant conjunction that describes a causal nexus and an *apparent* causal relation. They should permit us to discern the correctness of inferences and beliefs based on causal reasoning. Furthermore, Hume affirms that the 8 rules are “all the logic I think proper to employ in my reasoning” (T 1.3.15.11; SBN 175). They should rule our causal reasoning so that they resemble as much as possible the *Proof*¹³ horizon. The general rules for causal reasoning are the natural conclusion of Hume’s treatment of probabilities and probable belief in the *Treatise* (and not the skeptical conclusion of T 1.4). This is not only because of the plain fact that, according to Hume, every reasoning concerning matters of fact relies on causal inference, but also and mostly, because despite this reliance “the relation of cause and effect has all the opposite advantages” compared to reasoning based on “feign’d resemblance and contiguity” since “the objects it presents are fixt and unalterable” (T 1.3.9.7; SBN 110). There are many other principles that enlivened our ideas similarly bringing us to believe “and command our assent beyond what experience will justify; which can proceed from nothing beside the resemblance between ideas and facts” (T 1.3.9.12; SBN 113), for example, credulity (“easy faith in the testimony of other”) and education, which rest “almost on the same foundation of custom and repetition as our experience or reasoning from causes and effects” (T 1.3.9.19; SBN 117). As a result, accuracy in the determination of causes is needed to avoid the “inaccuracy”, which is “contrary to true philosophy” (T 1.3.9.19 footnote; SBN 117). The corrective principles for causal reasoning, which are “a true species of reasoning and the strongest” (T 1.3.7 footnote), are all the logic necessary in order to “rectify non philosophical probabilities into causal probabilities” thus achieving a true philosophy, upon which, according to Hume’s project, depends the real possibility of reaching “a system of proofs;”¹⁴ or in other words: science.

As can be seen, this set of rules has a unique character. Since cause and effect is, properly speaking, the only relation of matters of fact that results in reasoning (T 1.3.2; SBN 73) – that is, drawing a conclusion from given premises, or the generation of new beliefs from given ones – the rules for judging cause and effect relations have to mediate this process of forming beliefs in order for that judgment to be an expression of an adequacy between the natural tendency of the mind and the “stubborn nature” of the object of its judgment, both of which are necessary for developing science. They rectify judgments in so far as they evaluate if they are “subject to accidents or influenced by whim and private fancy” (Essays 1. XIV, p. 112; G&G, p. 175).

¹¹ See also the following quotation from the *Treatise* “in order to establish a general rule, and extend it beyond its proper bounds, there is requir’d a certain uniformity in our experience, and a great superiority of those instances, which are conformable to the rule, above the contrary” (T 2.2.5.12-13; SBN 362).

¹² I am using the word in its general sense and not specifically in reference to the demonstrative scope of reasoning.

¹³ For the meaning of this concept in Hume’s thought see T 1.3.11.2; SBN 124.

¹⁴ Saltel (1999, p. 44, the English translation is my own) “redresser les probabilités non philosophiques en probabilités causales, ou en système de preuves”.

That is why I ultimately think Hume's account of corrective general rules, though terminologically akin to the use of modern logic, is different in nature in so far as it is the result of an inquiry into the deep nature of believing and judging. Those rules are not mere recommendations or simply an instrument for reaching certainty. They represent instead the structure of a corrected natural faculty of reason; in other words: a standard. Precisely on this point rests the origin of their normativity¹⁵. I agree with Hearn's claim that "these rules come for Hume to occupy a different status [...] the function of the causal rules is to correct and stabilize the sentiment of belief which is generated by certain natural, causal factors" (1976, p. 65). It seems to be the case that corrective general rules are normative rather than descriptive, that is, they are prescriptions about how we ought to form and correct states of belief. Now, this is still insufficient to prove that general rules have normative force, indeed, someone could insist that Hume is just describing the way we form more stubborn and reliable beliefs, as he did with false beliefs. Hence the important issue here is to determine the extent to which the account of general rules belongs to this level of discourse, that is to say, whether the rules are meant to account for the doctrine of natural causes of belief or if there is something else to say about them.

General rules and the normative dimension of belief

The question concerning the normative dimension of belief runs into the intricate relationship between belief and truth. This relationship can be described as follows: to believe that *p* is to believe that *p* is true. Thus, *prima facie*, a correct belief, that is, one that fulfills that pretension, is ultimately a true belief¹⁶. It follows, therefore, that a rational agent should believe *p* if and only if, there is enough evidence for the truth of *p*. The same would apply for the case of rules: if *A*, *B* and *C* are principles for forming true beliefs, it follows that in rea-

soning (coming to a correct conclusion) we have to consider beliefs that are consistent with those rules to be more reliable than ones that are not.¹⁷

Yet by itself, this relationship does not seem adequate to account for the source of normativity of belief. In fact, the assumption outlined in the above paragraph is exactly what needs to be proved here. For even if belief aims at truth, the following naturalist objection cannot be easily avoided: "To elevate this trivial fact to the status of a 'norm' is to transform an innocent platitude into a pompous falsehood. For there is nothing normative about believing: neither we believe with an eye fixed on the horizon of an ideal of truth nor we obey any prescription to believe the truth" (Engel, 2007, p. 179)¹⁸. In other words, the relation that our beliefs have to truth can be seen as a plain fact; it expresses the fact wherein one believes *p*, rather than a compulsory prescription about what to believe.

I would like to draw attention to the problem concerning the scope of normativity as a first step to present my response to the naturalist objection. Normativity, at least in a philosophical sense, is not mere necessity (logical or physical). Rather, it concerns what is not absolutely necessary and, accordingly, it would be pointless to attach in any way normativity to a plain fact as breathing or sunshine. The proper scope of normativity, in the sense I am interested in, is that of practice (see, for example, Stemmer, 2008, p. 32; Railton in Dancy, 2000, p. 4). If believing and breathing are not two different kinds of phenomenon I would agree that there is no point in ascribing normativity to the realm of belief. But I think that there is certainly a difference between them, in so far as belief is the result a typical kind of agency, namely, epistemic agency, which involves other typical components of the realm of normative facts, such as judgment, will, epistemic freedom and, in short, rationality. Now, the claim that believing is a subject of the will is – for good reason – controversial (see Owens, 2000), and though I cannot address this controversy here, I will instead, assume a position very close to McDowell's (1998, p. 434f) and O'Hagan's (2005, p. 45f),

¹⁵ Lyons rejects the claim that the general rules for causal reasoning are second order mental states, evident by their reflective character (T 1.3.13.11; SBN 149). Instead he holds that they are about objects (Lyons, 2001, p. 273, n. 13). I believe Lyons's claim is wrong since according to Hume causation cannot be objectively predicated on objects, but only as a projective function of the intellectual power of men. General rules are explicitly rules "to judge", thus, they refer to acts of the mind rather than to objects. Nevertheless, I agree with Lyons that they are reflective in the sense that they involve the idea of causation, which is an idea of reflection.

¹⁶ In a deeper analysis this claim has to be qualified. Epistemic norms are in a sense standards of correctness of belief. Norms governing beliefs are nonetheless still related to their characteristic aim: truth. Nevertheless from the perspective of real epistemic agency, believing is not necessarily a matter of "all or nothing", but of degrees of rationality, certainty, correctness, evidence, assurance, confidence. This is also something that Hume has permanently in mind while dealing with probability (see for example T 1.3.7.2; SBN 130-31, 1.3.13.2; SNB 143). For Hume, different degrees of evidence constitute important epistemic distinctions, as is the case, for example, between probability and proof. For Hume there are some states of belief which are justified, and that justification is a function of their sources (if they are reliable or not), their stability and the dispositions of the epistemic agent to believe

¹⁷ For further developments on this issue see, in particular, Stemmer (2008, p. 77-79, 99). For the topic of normativity and epistemic norms, as well as norms of truth, see Lyon (2001), Owens (2003, p. 285-289) and Engel (2007, p. 182 ff).

¹⁸ The objection is formulated by Engel, although he does not contend it. For a contrary position see O'Hagan (2005, p. 44) and Stemmer (2008). Basically, these authors will sustain a "constitutive argument" in the sense that, as Stemmer for example put it, "it appears that the will-to-be-rational is an intrinsic goal of reasoning" ("Es kommt hinzu, dass das Rational-sein-wollen ein intrinsisches Telos des Überlegens ist", Stemmer, 2008, p. 60, the English translation is of my own).

in the sense that even if belief is not typically the result of our deciding what to believe, its occurrence is inseparable from, even constitutive of, the exercise of judgment, which cannot take place outside of the space of reasons.

Hence, in so far as freedom and rationality are involved in how we structure our doxastic lives, there are *prima facie* good reasons to assume that there is also a normative dimension involved. Hume's theory penetrates this dimension by moving from a descriptive account of natural causes of belief formation to a deeper level, where reflective mechanisms of belief correction and formation reveal that belief is not a mere mechanical response¹⁹, but also a matter of rational deliberation. Corrective general rules are mechanisms of reflective thinking, directed to judgment and, therefore, standards of rational thinking. Now, standards belong naturally to the practice of reasoning itself, but they only become explicit if we assume a critical perspective and pay attention to what underlies the mere possibility of the practice. Reflection shows that it is inherent to epistemic agency to be normative, and this fact does not contradict in any measure the fact that real epistemic agents are most of the time insensible to their being "responsive" to reasons.

Corrective general rules are called upon to determine the standards of correction of causal judgment, and with it, the standards of correction of belief. A belief, accordingly, can be more or less adequate, depending on the degree of evidence and experience available. Furthermore, general rules help to determine the level of adequacy, since those experiences that can be captured (let themselves be explained) by general rules are what concerns science. It is important to keep this point in mind. Given a statement, there are certain conditions under which it should or should not be believed, that is, taken as true. Nonetheless, these conditions, according to my reading of Hume's epistemology, are deeply related to a demarcation criterion, much more than a truth theory. A belief can report different levels of certainty, depending on its nearness to the proof horizon. Proofs are basically beliefs for which there has been no exception in experience, which is what general rules try to secure. We also know that Hume believes that those rules are "very easy in their invention, but extremely difficult in their application" (T 1.3.15.11; SBN 175). In my opinion, the account of general rules is far from being about how to ensure that one's belief is true, as is the case with Descartes, for example; rather, it concerns the conditions under which a doxastic item can count as knowledge in Hume's "liberalized" non-rationalistic sense, which somewhat "divorces questions of justification from questions of truth" (Lyons, 2001, p. 270)²⁰.

All this however, does not solve the problem of the normative force of epistemic rules, as guide of processes of belief

formation and justification, i.e., why should we follow these rules, and where does their normative constraint lie.

Normative force

General rules are corrective, in so far as they state the standard of certain knowledge of causes. Furthermore, since generalization is a natural tendency of the mind, it follows that general rules are the consummation, the *telos*, of such a natural tendency. In other words, nobody expects or intends to fail at reasoning (in the broad, Humean sense of the word), even when the roots of that reasoning are not actually present to the mind. Everyone assumes that he or she reasons correctly – at least aspires to reason correctly – and thereby, that the beliefs he or she forms are correct, in the same sense that believing *p* necessarily involves believing its truth. Believing, as well as reasoning, aim at truth as their intrinsic condition. Since causal reasoning (or causal inference or generalization) is inevitable, and since it naturally involves the intention of truth, it follows that everyone must reason in accordance with general rules. In other words, "the authority of reasons is found within the practice of reasoning itself. We reasoners are bound by rational standards because to engage in reasoning just is to be accountable to rational standards" (O'Hagan, 2005, p. 43). Specifically, since all matter of fact reasoning is a causal reasoning, one ought to pay heed to the 8 causal rules by which one may judge cause and effect in order to avoid false beliefs²¹.

I claim that believing and belief formation by probable reasoning would constitute in themselves what Peter Stemmer has called a "normative situation" (Stemmer, 2008, §4), that is, a situation in which a normative ought-ness is implied, even if that situation is not epistemically present to the agent. The situation can be described as a hypothetical statement: "if we wish to achieve correct beliefs, we should reason according to some G rules". If we wish the end, we are "normatively" required to act – to reason – in a certain way. The aim at truth of belief configures, so to speak, the normative situation. Now, for general rules to have normative force, it must be a condition that we do wish to have correct beliefs, so that they express not merely descriptive value, but also normative authority. This leads to the following question: why should we want to have true beliefs? Why should we be motivated to reason according to general rules?

I think Hume also has an answer to this question, a question that is deeply connected with his naturalist conception of human reasoning: we need to reason correctly, because as agents we desire things, and in order to reach what we want, we need to identify the efficient means for obtaining them. Correct causal reasoning is a necessary condition for achieving the ends

¹⁹ Hume is often taken as the paradigmatic case of an author who neglects the existence of intellectual freedom. See, for example, the introduction of Owens' work (2000).

²⁰ But only somewhat, as Martin has noted (1993, p. 256). Both authors use the same texts as support, see T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272.

²¹ Indeed, the 8 rules are not the only epistemic norms of Hume's epistemology. Besides logical principles, the so-called *copy principle* deserves particular attention. See, for example, Schliesser (2007).

we desire; thus, being responsible epistemic agents by reasoning according to basic epistemic norms is something we must do in order to satisfy our desire. This is also, according to Hume, the primary reason for why we engage in reasoning. Science and truth are secondary targets of reasoning, but certainly not of less importance; the first target, however, is instrumental. This conclusion shows, moreover, how deeply Hume's epistemology is oriented to his Moral theory, and that an understanding of Hume's account of reasoning and general rules sheds light on those passages in book 2 and 3 which at first sight seem to conflict with the "skeptical conclusion" of book 1 (see for example, T 2.3.3.6/7; SBN 416, T 2.3.10.1; SBN 449, T 3.1.1; SBN 458-9. In the secondary literature see especially Winters, 1979).

But since much of our causal reasoning is not conscious, most people do not manage to know that they have to follow general rules in order to reason correctly, for this activity is already normative oriented. Even if they recognize that they have to reason carefully and according to general rules, they may choose not to do it, because they are influenced by other passions. But this is another matter, which has to do with rational deliberations and rational decisions.

Lyons (2001, p. 270) has argued that "the normativity in Hume's epistemology" lies in that "the philosophical method derives its greater value from being a better means of satisfying curiosity (and keeping it satisfied) as well as meeting other, daily, pragmatic ends." I consider this to be correct, but instead of under-valuing it as a case of just "instrumentally-inspired" normativity, I believe, with Stemmer (2008, p. 33-44), that the source of normative ought-ness is – in most cases, at least – a relation of "necessary condition" to which is attached a wish/desire/want that actualizes the normative force of the condition²² in as much as not following it, necessarily means not achieving what is desired. Here rests one of the most important of Hume's legacies: we are not able to deeply understand (even) our most abstractive cognitive processes without reference to the affective scope of human nature. In other words, there is an active exchange between the "sensitive" and the "cogitative" part of our nature. This exchange also takes place in the constitution of *the normative*, as described by Fred Wilson: "Reflecting upon [...] experience we adopt goals that are attainable and means that are efficient. Self-reflection leads to standards of practice that define the (cognitive) virtue of rationality; it leads to standards that are attainable and efficient. In other words, self-reflection leads to a reasonable standard of rationality. Or at least, it does so if one is wise" (2008, p. 416).

Conclusion

The rudimentary tools with which Hume's philosophy and epistemology is equipped make it, at first sight, look very

unfit to be a contribution to the actual debate concerning epistemic normativity. However, his account of corrective general rules provides a more or less persuasive account of the sources of the normative dimension in belief formation and correction, and it also provides a solution to the problem concerning motivation. Hume's ideas seem to be supportive of certain ways of addressing the issue of normativity and epistemic agency, namely, constitutive strategies. Reflection thus uncovers the normative structure of belief itself, and belief's aiming at truth implies a normative relation between epistemic norms and doxastic items. That is the way I think we have to understand Hume's claim that there are some "general rules, by which we ought to regulate our judgment concerning causes and effects; and *these rules are form'd on the nature of our understanding, and on our experience of its operations in the judgments we form concerning objects*." But also the origin of their normative force is uncovered as lying ultimately in the inner psychology of human nature, deeply embedded in the facticity of life. For Hume, believing rightly, that is, believing what is "more probably" true, is determined significantly by utility, and by passions like the *love of truth* and *curiosity*. Now, as he stresses, "the question is *after what manner this utility and importance operate upon us?*" (T 2.3.10.4; SBN 450). This issue is no longer a question for epistemology, but instead for the *science of man* as a whole. Natural dispositions, psychological mechanisms of the mind, and social and cultural constructions are called upon to answer it.

All these nuances seem to configure the normative dimension of Hume's epistemology, which from the very natural ground of our "aiming at truth," is oriented toward the improvement of the understanding and human character. Its significance is not diminished because of the distance of Hume's theory from the question of an objective truth, for as Owens (2003, p. 287) states: "Rational belief is rarely based on conclusive evidence." Nonetheless, and from a certain technical perspective, Hume's epistemological approach is weak, because relevant questions, such as how much evidence, beyond his very general demarcation criteria, is necessary to call a belief "true," are never settled. This lack of tidiness also shows that Hume's first concern was neither epistemological nor logical, but rather moral in the broad sense of the word.

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²²A similar idea was also defended by MacIntyre (1959) with respect to the Is-ought problem.

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