Beebee on Hume's inductive scepticism

Ichinose Masaki

First of all, I would like to express my impression that, as long as I know as a researcher who is somehow interested in Hume's philosophy, Professor Beebee's understanding on Hume's argument of causation is quite unique and stimulating indeed. Looking back at the history of Hume study, we easily find that Hume was initially understood to be a philosopher of scepticism (perhaps because of the influence of Thomas Reid's interpretation of Hume). However, this traditional interpretation was dramatically changed by Norman Kemp Smith, who delineates Hume as a philosopher of naturalism rather than scepticism. According to the naturalistic reading of Hume, Hume is supposed to develop his arguments in the following way; It is true that we might have to fall into a kind of scepticism at the theoretical level if we seriously and reasonably carry out philosophical scrutiny about our perceptions, nevertheless (or, correctly speaking, in contrast to sceptical consequences that we must fall into at the theoretical level) we come to recognize freshly at the practical level that we actually continue to live our real lives every day, thus philosophers must face this fact (abandoning sceptical consequences) and clarify how we lead our everyday lives by taking our function of imagination (that is, human nature) into account. This naturalistic view of Kemp Smith has been dominant over Hume scholars, even if how to evaluate Hume's sceptical arguments depends on each scholar. Of course, Hume's naturalism as Kemp Smith highlights is distinctly different from current naturalism of epistemology as Quine once introduced; in that Humean naturalism focuses upon human nature whereas Quinean one tries to equate epistemology to natural science. Human nature is not necessarily the same as natural science. However, there is one common feature to both naturalism of Hume and Quine. That is to say, broadly speaking, they share the key idea that philosophy (particularly of knowledge) should be engaged in the task of DESCRIBING how our knowledge is generated rather than NORMATIVELY or rationally justifying our knowledge. Thus, as far as I understand, a core characteristic to be positively emphasized of Hume's philosophy consists in his basic strategy to simply describe generation of our knowledge or belief without taking the problem of justification seriously. I myself mostly agree with this current, dominant, naturalistic interpretation of Hume's philosophy.

At first glance, Professor Beebee's view on Hume's inductive scepticism seems to sympathize with the currently dominant, naturalistic interpretation of Hume, because she regards the status of scepticism as something to be abandoned. She says about sceptical arguments, "they are positively pernicious, in promoting philosophical principles." Rather, she emphasizes Hume's negative attitude towards sceptical arguments by finally concluding that; "his view would be that they should be consigned to the flames too." As far as her denial of scepticism is concerned, her standpoint sounds to have close affinity with the currently dominant, naturalistic interpretation, as the naturalistic interpretation arose from diminishing the significance of scepticism in Hume's philosophy. However, if I am not mistaken, Professor Beebee's argument seems to go beyond this. As I argued before, naturalism, whether Humean one or Quinean one, is supposed to simply focus upon the issue about how our knowledge or belief is generated from a descriptive point of view. But, Professor Beebee seems to draw a kind of normative implication (rather than descriptive analysis) from Hume's argument. What makes me think so is a part of her concluding remarks with negatively evaluating the significance of scepticism. She says, sceptical
arguments "have no practical application, and therefore conceiving philosophy itself as a discipline with no significance for how we should live our lives." This is quite unique, as, as far as I understand, Professor Beebee clearly supposes that Hume's argument on causal reasoning could be a kind of guide, or more radically speaking, a kind of norm, which teaches us how we should live our lives. To be honest, however, I was wondering how we could understand Professor Beebee's reading of Hume. At least, I would like to raise two questions.

First, I am curious to know what Professor Beebee exactly means by "practical application." For instance, according to Hume's argument, we reach causal judgement between flame and heat in terms of our experience of constant conjunction between those two sorts of phenomena. Of course, it is undoubtedly true that this causal knowledge is useful for us to lead comfortable lives when we treat something related to those like candles. But, this usefulness can make sense only if we put comfort or happiness as a kind of standard or norm that we ought to achieve in our lives. This putting some value as a norm is conceptually independent of our acquiring causal knowledge in an empirical way. It is one thing to understand causal relation between phenomena, and it is another thing to have some value as our goal. Actually, causal knowledge can be used in various ways, depending on goals we select. Please remember cases of war or firefighters, where causal knowledge would be used in a different way from the case we simply avoid burn. This fact suggests that causal knowledge itself has no practical significance without accepting practical value in advance. In fact, as long as we interpret Hume's argument as a kind of naturalism rather than scepticism, we must be very careful to make distinction between descriptivity and normativity, in accordance with the sense of the concept, "naturalism."

Second, I would like to raise another question from a completely different, or perhaps opposite, angle from the previous paragraph. Professor Beebee emphasizes repeatedly that Hume's arguments on causal reasoning are proposed from a psychological point of view rather than epistemological viewpoints where justification matters. I entirely agree with her, and this understanding evidently fits in well with popular reading of Hume as a naturalist. However, conversely, this very point makes me feel a bit unsatisfied with Hume's arguments. What I want to raise here is that causal relations are sometimes applied in our society not so much psychologically as realistically or objectively. A typical case is that we ascribe criminal or moral responsibility to someone at the basis of causal relation between harm victims suffered and behaviours offenders conducted. If this causal relation is just a psychological one, our social system sounds to be too weak, or (much worse) arbitrary or variable depending on who judges, to be acceptable as a public treatment. Our commonsense tells that causal relation to support the judgement of the court must be as objectively founded as possible, otherwise it might be unjust. At least, if Hume takes causal relation to be just psychological, he should offer additional explanation about how those psychological phenomena could be the basis of our real society.

Next, I would like to take the issue of a priori knowledge. Professor Beebee says, "Hume thinks that he has already explained the origin of a priori knowledge, through his account of reasoning concerning 'relations of ideas' (pp.8-9)." As to this point, I would like to ask my longtime question. As his argument in 'Of scepticism with regard to reason' suggests, Hume seems to understand our mathematical calculation or reasoning as our mental process temporally occurring. If this is the case, I think that even mathematical reasoning should be absorbed into a category of causal relations in the context of Hume's philosophy. Then, a question arises. Does Hume really and consistently maintain what is called 'Hume's fork' (i.e. the distinction between 'matters of fact' and 'relations of ideas') or finally abolish (rather than polish) the fork? I am quite interested in how Professor Beebee understands this point based on her unique, normativity interpretation of Hume.
執筆者一覧（五十音順）

一ノ瀬 正樹 東京大学大学院教授
井上 克人 関西大学文学部教授
大西 克智 東京藝術大学非常勤講師
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関 陽子（山村 陽子） 東洋大学国際哲学研究センター研究支援者
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メール、エドゥアール ストラスブール大学教授

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〒112-8606 東京都文京区白山5-28-20 東洋大学 6号館4階6046室
電話・FAX：03-3945-4209
E-mail：ircp@toyo.jp
URL：http://www.toyo.ac.jp/rc/ircp/

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