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# Hume's Diffident Skepticism

PHILLIP D. CUMMINS

## Introduction

One of the chief problems facing interpreters of Hume's philosophy is what I shall call the integration problem. It is a global problem inasmuch as it casts a shadow on every component of his philosophy, but does not directly affect how we interpret their details. The integration problem arises at the end of Book I of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, where Hume seemed to acknowledge that his account of human understanding, his logic, leads directly to total skepticism regarding both everyday beliefs and abstruse thought. Nonetheless, he neither reconsidered and repudiated this virulent skepticism nor aborted and disowned his investigation of human nature, the project announced in the Introduction to the *Treatise*. Instead, he continues with Books II and III, neither of which dwells on or even acknowledges the skepticism with which Book I concludes. The resulting puzzle is not just about his decision to publish the three books as one work, since Hume appears paradoxically to endorse the triumph of skepticism and, yet, continue his pursuit of just the kind of knowledge the triumph of skepticism would entirely preclude. How, one is led to ask, can Hume consistently integrate the destructive skepticism of Book I with the constructive project of explaining and understanding human nature? It is not surprising that a wide range of proposals have been put forward by Hume scholars in response to this question. The crux of every such proposal is specifying how the skepticism of Book I is to be regarded. Is it genuine, a mere facade, or something in between?

In this paper I shall not take another stab at solving the integration problem, but hope to lay the indispensable foundation for such an attempt by tracing the onset of Hume's skepticism in the *Treatise*. This will involve paying close attention to the text, distinguishing several senses of skepticism, and noting the ways in which Hume distanced himself from or aligned himself with the skeptical arguments he stated. This done, I shall also attend to his initial explicit responses to the skepticism he embraced or acknowledged. Rather than attempt a survey and critical assessment of competing hypotheses on the role of skepticism in the *Treatise*—perhaps an impossible task—I shall concentrate on making my reading as compelling as possible. My goal is to demonstrate the significance of Hume's introduction of the concept of diffident skepticism and thus take one small step towards solving the integration problem, if, indeed, it can be solved.

### 1. The Absence of Skepticism

The title of part iv of Book I of the *Treatise* is "Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy." Although skepticism is thus highlighted in part iv, little occurred previously to prepare readers for its prominent place there. Indeed, in parts i, ii, and iii, the word "sceptics" appears but once, while "sceptic," "scepticism," and allied terms such as "Pyrrhonist" and "Pyrrhonism" are completely absent.<sup>1</sup> In the Introduction to the *Treatise*, Hume uses "scepticism" once, while discussing a common prejudice against metaphysical reasoning. Such reasoning is identified with "every kind of argument, which is in any way abstruse, and requires some attention to be comprehended." According to Hume, because we have frequently "lost our labor" in researches that employ such arguments, we commonly reject them in favor of topics which are "natural and entertaining." He takes no such step, adopting instead the following stance:

And indeed nothing but the most determined scepticism, along with a great deal of indolence, can justify this aversion to metaphysics. For if truth be at all within the reach of human capacity, 'tis certain it must lie very deep and abstruse; and to hope we shall arrive at it without pains, while the greatest geniuses have failed with the utmost pains, must certainly be esteemed sufficiently vain and presumptuous. I pretend to no such advantage in the philosophy I am going to unfold, and would esteem it a strong presumption against it, were it so very easy and obvious.<sup>2</sup>

Hume provides no explanation of how skepticism and indolence can justify an aversion to metaphysics. Instead, he states that the philosophy he is about to present will not deserve attention unless it is founded on arguments that are

metaphysical in the special sense just assigned. Thus, at the beginning of the *Treatise*, Hume appears ready to carry forward his researches in opposition to skepticism, which questions or rejects the type of arguments he intended to employ.

Just as "sceptic" and related terms occur but once in parts i, ii, and iii of Book I, so there are few if any explicitly skeptical arguments or attitudes to be found there.<sup>3</sup> Consider part i. From section 1's causal principle for deriving simple ideas, to section 7's claim that we can and must think about abstract objects without general ideas, it features substantive nonskeptical assertions. And in part ii, far from being skeptical about the composition of extension, Hume rejects infinite divisibility and affirms unextended points.<sup>4</sup> Finally, to appreciate fully the absence of skeptical rhetoric in part iii of *Treatise* Book I, one can note the contrasting ways in which Hume's position on causal inference is presented there and in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. In the latter, it is explicitly characterized as skeptical. Hume uses "Sceptical doubts concerning the understanding" and "Sceptical solutions to those doubts" as titles for the sections in which he formulates his position. In the first, section IV, Hume insists that when one asks how the understanding arrives at causal conclusions, each answer yields another question, leaving the initial question essentially unanswered. This dialectic culminates in the following passage:

Let the course of things be allowed hitherto ever so regular; that alone, without some new argument or inference, proves not that, for the future, it will continue so. In vain do you pretend to have learned the nature of bodies from your past experience. Their secret nature, and consequently, all their effects and influence, may change, without any change in their sensible qualities. This happens sometimes and with regard to some objects. Why may it not happen always, and with regard to all objects? What logic, what process of argument secures you against this supposition? My practice, you say, refutes my doubts. But you mistake the purport of my question. As an agent, I am quite satisfied in the point; but as a philosopher, who has some share of curiosity, I will not say scepticism, I want to learn the foundation of this inference.<sup>5</sup>

Hume holds out small hope of doing so, taking consolation that "We shall at least, by this means, be sensible of our ignorance, if we do not augment our knowledge" (EHU 38). Section V begins with praise for the "Academic or Sceptical" philosophy. Hume proceeds to address the final question of section IV, maintaining that the step taken in a causal inference in the wake of the experience of constant conjunctions is due to habit or custom, not evidence or reason. The belief manifested in such an inference was identified as an

enlivened idea. Lacking only a detailed account of how constant conjunctions trigger associations of ideas, this is the same position that was presented in sections 4 through 8 of part iii of *Treatise* Book I. In both formulations no pattern of logical reasoning either a priori or from the data of experience can prove a substantive causal conclusion. However, the title of EHU section IV suggests that this aspect of causal inference constitutes a skeptical problem, and the title of section V conveys the impression that the skeptical problem is not so much overcome as acknowledged and built upon. The tone of the sections in the *Treatise* devoted to causal inference is much different. There, Hume's treatment of such inferences emerges from a thwarted investigation of the nature of causation and the central idea of necessary connection. Reasons for rejecting the thesis that causal judgments and inferences are a priori prepares the way for a detailed positive account of what might be called associative inference and an equally positive account of belief as an enlivened idea. Neither the reasons nor the positive accounts are labeled "sceptical" in the *Treatise*. Instead, the reasons are used to reject a rationalistic account of causal inference, and so open the door for Hume's alternative, his affirmative accounts of associative inference and belief.

In T I iii 13, entitled "Of unphilosophical probability," the word "sceptic" finally occurs. In a group of paragraphs devoted to general rules,<sup>6</sup> by which Hume initially meant hasty generalizations—including national stereotypes—he first tries to account for our tendency to form and cling to such generalizations in the face of obvious counterexamples. Next, he states that to avoid or discredit such generalizations, careful reasoners develop and employ rules of inference, a list of which will be set forth in section 15. These rules Hume also classifies as general rules, despite their opposition to the first type. This distinction between what he calls the first and second influences of general rules leads to the following remark:

Mean while the sceptics may here have the pleasure of observing a new and signal contradiction in our reason, and of seeing all philosophy ready to be subverted by a principle of human nature, and again sav'd by a new direction of the very same principle. The following of general rules is a very unphilosophical species of probability; and yet 'tis only by following them that we can correct this, and all other unphilosophical probabilities.<sup>7</sup>

Much in this comment is puzzling. How is "contradiction" understood and what is the supposed contradiction in our reason? Why is philosophy nearly subverted merely because there are psychological roots for our tendency of make hasty generalizations and reach other unfounded inductive conclusions? Does Hume really regard the rules governing generalizing from experience as themselves generalizations from experience? If so, why? And why does the

comment regarding the skeptic's pleasure prove to be an isolated remark? After making it, Hume changes the subject, offering next an explanation of why humans typically respond differently to veiled and open insults. Section 13 concludes with a confident reaffirmation of Hume's causal explanation of inferences from experience. The threat allegedly posed to philosophy by the first kind of general rules was not discussed again. In Section 15, when the rules for inductive reasoning are duly delivered, no mention is made of the earlier point, even though Hume touches on the multiplicity of circumstances one must sort through in arriving at defensible causal conclusions.<sup>8</sup> Thus in parts i and ii, skepticism is neither discussed nor defended, while the sole skeptical remark of part iii seems to lead nowhere.

## 2. A Candidate Rejected

That remark does reveal that, when writing about causation in the *Treatise*, Hume was alert to a possible skeptical dimension or interpretation of his position. Still, he did not there characterize it as skeptical, as later was done in the *Enquiries*. What produced his remarkable change in emphasis? Happily, answering this exceedingly difficult question<sup>9</sup> is not my task, which is, instead, to identify the onset of Hume's skepticism in the *Treatise* itself. I shall address, then, the following questions: Did Hume in the *Treatise* ever switch from portraying skepticism as opposed to or at least different from his project or point of view, to identifying himself as a skeptic in at least some sense of the term? If so, what kind of skepticism did he embrace? What marked or revealed his conversion to it? I hope also to touch on a fourth, related question: How did he characterize or justify his attempt to found a science of human nature after revealing his skepticism?

Answering these questions or, at least, the first three of them, might seem to be an easy matter of attending to section titles. The first section of part iv of *Treatise* Book I is entitled "Of scepticism with regard to reason." In it, Hume introduced an argument I shall call the argument from fallibility. It was explicitly portrayed as skeptical and was presented as applicable to all beliefs resulting from reasoning. It has achieved great notoriety. Hume did not reject or critique this argument. On the contrary, he portrayed it as neither self-refuting nor discredited by counterargument. If, therefore, by the onset of skepticism one merely means the first endorsement of an openly skeptical argument of wide application, it must be conceded that the explicit onset of Hume's skepticism was in T I iv 1. But there is a good reason for not equating skepticism with endorsing a general skeptical argument. Besides this sense, which may be called skepticism-1, several other senses of skepticism deserve recognition.<sup>10</sup> All turn on Pyrrhonism, which was and is a recognized philosophical outlook. Pyrrhonism prescribes suspension of belief or judgment with regard to all

propositions that make claims about what is as opposed to what seems to be. This suggests two additional closely related senses of skepticism. One (skepticism-2a) is that to be a skeptic is to prescribe complete suspension of belief about what is on the basis of general evidence-destroying arguments. The related sense (skepticism-2b) is to follow the prescription; on it, to be a skeptic is to suspend belief completely. Was Hume a skeptic in either of these two senses? I think not. He insisted that skeptical arguments, either because of their abstruseness or their being overpowered by less cogent but more instinctual inferences, do not have the psychological force needed to destroy or prevent belief. Skepticism-2b is humanly unattainable. Consequently, skepticism-2a, prescribing it, is futile.<sup>11</sup>

If this is correct, then in T I iv 1 Hume was a skeptic-1, but neither a skeptic-2a nor a skeptic-2b. Why not, then, equate his skepticism with skepticism-1? Because there is in the *Treatise* another sense of skepticism, one stemming directly from Hume's acceptance of skepticism-1 and rejection of skepticism-2a and 2b. It is a skeptical assessment of the human cognitive situation, what he later called humanity's whimsical condition, which seems to legitimize profound doubts about any project, Hume's included, of understanding the world, generally, or human nature, in particular. In T I iv 1, however, he apparently did not see our inability to achieve skepticism-2b, despite the presumed cogency of the argument from fallibility, as evidence of cognitive incompetence. Equally, he there entertained no reservations about his own project of investigating human nature. On the contrary, in our inability to doubt he only found support for his theory of belief.<sup>12</sup>

Consider the details. In T I iv 1, Hume first stated the argument from fallibility. For each product of reasoning, he held, genuine rationality requires an additional fine-grained assessment of the process from which it is derived. Even if the reasoning itself is infallible, there may be error stemming from some undiscovered interfering cause. Hence, he argued, rigorous reasoning requires a calculation of the likelihood of error-making interference based on a review of previous occurrences of error when doing the same kind of reasoning. However, this calculation, as an instance of reasoning, requires a similar assessment and for the same reason each new assessment will require a further one. Because these further calculations will be probabilistic, the assessment process, if rigorous, will at best gradually lead to "total extinction of belief and evidence." Hume next contended that, despite being mandated by reason, the required calculations cannot be sustained. In practice, reason ignores its mandate or soon abandons the review process. Hence, he concluded, "Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this *total* skepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavour'd by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and render'd unavoidable."<sup>13</sup> Finally, this psychological result was taken as evi-

dence for his own hypothesis on the nature of inference and belief. Anticipating the question—Why did you display so carefully this skeptical argument when it is devoid of impact?—Hume stated that his intention in doing so was “to make the reader sensible of the truth of my<sup>14</sup> hypotheses, *that all our reasoning concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, rather than of the cogitative part of our natures.*”<sup>15</sup> From this, he proceeded to draw the practical consequence that our fundamental inferences cannot be destroyed by mere ideas and reflections.

Given this outcome, it is useful to link Hume's tactics in T I iv 1 to those in the previous section, the final unit of part iii.<sup>16</sup> In “Of the reason of animals,” to reinforce his claim that factual inference in humans is experience-based and associative, not intuitive or demonstrative, he had defended the claim that animals, though incapable of abstract reasoning, perform factual inferences. In T I iv 1, he apparently has introduced skeptical arguments, not to inculcate skepticism, but to advance further the same hypothesis. He has remained a theorist of human cognition, albeit one willing to employ skeptical arguments to support positive and substantive claims about the nature of factual inference and belief.

Hume in T I iv 1 seemed unaware that, in employing a sweeping skeptical argument while denying that humans adjust their beliefs to its dictates, he might be introducing a new and powerful form of skepticism. If, as he alleged, the argument from fallibility is cogent and what saves one from suspension of belief, skepticism-2b, is intellectual weakness, the question arises what is the proper philosophical attitude to adopt toward our belief-producing processes? It cannot be one of confidence, since those processes seem to be not just fallible, but unreliable. Furthermore, if they are unreliable, should they be employed in an attempt to gain knowledge of nature and human nature? One might well think not, and therefore despair of philosophy or science as well as ordinary cognition. This epistemological assessment and despairing attitude is what I shall call skepticism-3.

Skepticism-3 may have a personal dimension. Consider again Hume's judgment in T I iv 1 that humans retain the results of their reasoning only because they cannot fully comply with the requirements of rationality and perform the needed check against their fallibility. Were one able to make this judgment as a nonhuman inquirer concerning humans and their belief structures, it might not have implications for oneself. Such is neither Hume's situation nor ours. When this judgment is made by one engaging in exactly the same processes of inference as other humans, it implies the fallibility and destruction of inferences made by the critic, including those that purport to be scientific or philosophical. This skeptical realization is likely to be as disheartening for the inquirer as it is for his audience.

### 3. The Onset of Skepticism

It is my contention that by the end of Book I of the *Treatise*, Hume had embraced skepticism-3 and was struggling to find a way, despite it, to resume his original project of studying human nature. However, he definitely had not reached this situation by the end of T I iv 1. He had used a skeptical argument—the argument from fallibility—but had done so to support his theory of belief. He acknowledged nothing problematic in this, so carried over his positive attitude to the next section of part iv, “Of scepticism with regard to the senses” (T I iv 2), where it was extended to sense perception and belief in bodies. He immediately distanced himself from skepticism-2a and 2b, writing, “We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?* But 'tis in vain to ask, *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasoning.”<sup>17</sup> However, by the end of T I iv 2 Hume has ruefully admitted his inability to sustain this position. It is repudiated in the penultimate paragraph with these words:

Having thus given an account of all the systems both popular and philosophical, with regard to external existences, I cannot forbear giving vent to a certain sentiment, which arises upon reviewing those systems. I begun this subject with premising, that we ought to have an implicit faith in our senses, and that this wou'd be the conclusion, I shou'd draw from the whole of my reasoning. But to be ingenuous, I feel myself *at present* of a quite different sentiment, and am more inclin'd to repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather imagination, than to place in it such an implicit confidence.<sup>18</sup>

In my opinion, this passage is the first in which Hume openly identified his point of view as skepticism-3. To see that this is so requires attending to two prior developments. First, as in T I iv 1, Hume in T I iv 2 introduced skeptical arguments and left them unrefuted. Second, once again he rejected skepticism-2a and 2b. The skeptical arguments, though irrefutable, were characterized as incapable of destroying belief even when recognized as irrefutable. This can be documented by a passage late in T I iv 2 but prior to the penultimate paragraph. It shows Hume remained convinced that Pyrrhonian suspension of belief is not a psychological option, so prescribing it is futile. In order to recognize that this was Hume's position in the passage in question, it will be helpful, perhaps necessary, to provide its context, and in doing so establish the first development as well.

Hume's project in T I iv 2, the longest and most complex section of the *Treatise*, was explaining belief in the external world. Three cognitive candidates were considered: sense, reason, and imagination. The first two were quickly dismissed. In spelling out how the mind imaginatively infers that the

relations constituting externality are instantiated, Hume considered both what I shall call native<sup>19</sup> belief in the external world and the hypothesis philosophers produce and endorse upon finding proofs of the falsity of native belief. In ordinary consciousness, Hume claimed, one believes of some impressions of sensation, that is, a subset of one's immediate objects of sense, that they do and therefore can continue to exist when not perceived. They are taken to instantiate the relations which, according to Hume, together constitute externality. This native belief in external objects results from the imagination's response to the coherence and constancy of those impressions of sensation. Constancy is the chief occasion. Impressions exhibit it whenever (a) some immediate sensory object exactly or closely resembles some earlier immediate sensory object and (b) there has been a relatively brief interval when neither object is sensed. The cognizing subject, Hume theorized, takes the two resembling objects to be one and the same, posits the unsensed existence of that single object in the interval in order to preserve its identity over time, and concludes that it is mind-independent because at least once it exists unsensed. Upon completing a very complex account of how this happens, Hume offered arguments that no immediate object of sense in fact exists unperceived.<sup>20</sup> This means that native belief in external objects is false. No immediate object of sense is external. Aware, in Hume's scenario, of the arguments yielding this result, philosophers look for an alternative account of what possesses external existence and how we acquire evidence of that existence. They converge on a hypothesis that affirms both dependent immediate objects of sense and inferred independent external objects. Hume proceeded to argue, first, that there is neither sensory nor causal evidence to support this hypothesis, and, second, that philosophers commit themselves to it only by fallaciously retaining and modifying native belief in bodies. The philosophical hypothesis is, thus, the "monstrous offspring of two contrary principles."<sup>21</sup> Hume claimed, then, that belief in external objects results from one or the other of two fallacies, the native fallacy of the ordinary believer in external objects or the philosophical fallacy of those who attempt to correct the former.

According to Hume, comparisons of ideas, when not interfered with, yield intuitive or demonstrative certainty. Causal beliefs cannot attain such levels of assurance; at best they affirm more than any available evidence can ever confirm. This flaw, though, is compatible with their truth, since they otherwise embody no conceptual or logical error. In contrast, both native and philosophical belief in the external world are deeply and irreparably flawed. When founded on constancy, the former occurs because exact resemblance is conflated with strict numerical identity over time. Its falsity can also be proven, Hume claimed. Though not similarly known to be false, the philosophical hypothesis has no evidential basis and so is parasitic upon the very native belief it rejects and purports to correct. The result of Hume's examination of belief in the external world is skeptical in the sense that were one able to

restrict assent to those propositions for which there is adequate—not conclusive, just adequate—evidence, one would not believe in the external world.

Having argued for these positions, Hume made the comment which distances him from both skepticism-2a and 2b. As in T I iv 1, he considered in T I iv 2 whether skeptical reasoning can actually induce suspension of judgment. On his account, while some humans—philosophers—discover conclusive arguments for the falsity of native belief in the external world, most humans remain oblivious to them. Saved by their ignorance, this nonphilosophical majority is in no danger of suspending judgment. The philosophers are also saved from skepticism-2b, protected by their inability to shed fully their pre-philosophical commitment—their native belief in bodies. They fail to see the ultimate consequences of their own arguments. Of them, Hume wrote,

Philosophers are so far from rejecting the opinion of a continu'd existence upon rejecting that of the independence and continuance of our sensible perceptions, that tho' all sects agree in the latter sentiment, the former, which is, in a manner, its necessary consequence, has been peculiar to a few extravagant sceptics; who after all maintain'd that opinion in words only, and were never able to bring themselves sincerely to believe it.<sup>22</sup>

Ordinary philosophers remain believers in external objects from lack of insight into the evidential situation. A few, however, are more clear-sighted. They stand to ordinary philosophers as the latter stand to ordinary persons. Nonetheless, according to Hume at least, they too are incapable of freeing themselves from the very beliefs whose inadequacy they recognize. They are skeptics in words only. Hume does not explain this claim. However, using our terminology, we may say that, like him, these few philosophers appreciate and use skeptical arguments, so embrace skepticism-1. They call for suspension of belief in bodies, so embrace skepticism 2-a. However, like everyone else, they are not able to sustain either a denial of bodies or genuine suspension of belief in bodies. Neither they nor anyone else can attain skepticism-2b. Counseling it is futile. That is why they are skeptics in words only.

In making his judgment about extravagant skeptics, skeptics-2a, Hume clearly distinguishes his own position from theirs. Yet he does not go on to exploit the unattainability of skepticism-2b as he did in T I iv 1. Instead, in the penultimate paragraph of T I iv 2, he disavows his initial plan to endorse belief in external objects on the grounds of its inevitability. What has happened? In my opinion, he has come to see in his results evidence of the cognitive incompetence of humans and has embraced skepticism-3 regarding belief in the external world. Holding that both native belief and philosophical belief in an external world are indefensible, but that no one can achieve skeptical suspension of judgment, Hume implicitly concludes that humans, whether philoso-

phers or not, exhibit deep and incurable irrationality. This conclusion yields the disillusionment expressed in the penultimate paragraph.

Hume was right to portray the situation in T I iv 2 regarding unavoidable belief in bodies as far worse than that of T I iv 1. According to the fallibility argument, reason's attempt to provide a secondary check on its inferences should trigger a process of examination which in principle is endless and logically implies the total destruction of belief. In practice, of course, the process falters. This outcome was taken to reveal something about what belief is and how it comes to be. Note, however, that the fallibility argument implies no intrinsic defects in the two kinds of reasoning being subjected to skeptical second-guessing. Those targets were, first, comparisons of ideas, in themselves infallible, though subject to error-causing interference, and second, causal judgments or inductive generalizations some of which can satisfy general rules of reasoning even though they cannot be conclusively proved.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, according to T I iv 2, the processes yielding both native and philosophical belief in the external world are deeply and inherently flawed. In both cases our imagination has fallaciously run amok, producing first a false belief, then a completely unsupported one. Knowing this, how can one endorse them?

The final paragraph of T I iv 2 seems to go even further. It appears to extend skepticism to all operations of the understanding.<sup>24</sup> Hume writes:

This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady, which can never be wholly cur'd, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chace it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it. 'Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or senses; and we but expose them farther when we endeavor to justify them in that manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always encreases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. Carelessness and inattention alone can afford us any remedy.<sup>25</sup>

It is worth attending to Hume's unusual claim, not further explained or defended, that the further we carry our reflections, whether in conformity or *in opposition* to the skeptical doubt, the more it increases. How, one might ask, can opposing skeptical doubt increase it? My answer, offered cautiously since he provides no gloss, explanation, or defense of his assertion, is that in T I iv 2, unlike T I iv 1, Hume finally realized that in dismissing skepticism as logically irrefutable, but psychologically unsustainable, he had painted a portrait of human understanding as cognitively incompetent and so incapable of enlightenment. If both ordinary humans and philosophers are incapable of recognizing the depth of the skeptical challenge to belief in an external world, blocked by an irresistible urge to believe, then, in some sense, the powerful

psychological mechanism that blocks suspension of belief (skepticism-2b) and renders skepticism-2a futile also prevents us from grasping the utter uncertainty of our cognitive situation as regards sensory experience and the external world. Except for Hume and a few others, humans are not just deceived, but self-deceived.

What is one to make of this rather surprising result? One response, perhaps that of those who passionately defend the truth and certainty of common sense, is to regard it as a misguided or shameless attempt to make both ordinary humans and ordinary philosophers appear ridiculous. And indeed, in some passages—especially those concerning philosophers—Hume does seem to express wry amusement at the human cognitive situation as he describes it. In other passages, however, skepticism-3, epistemological disenchantment over our incurable cognitive incompetence, seems instead to evoke a special kind of dismay—philosophical melancholy.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. I Can't Go On. I Shall Go On

Did Hume think that skepticism-3 can be reversed? No. At no point in the *Treatise* subsequent to T I iv 2 did he even attempt to reject the premises upon which it was based. Did he think it can be overcome or surmounted? Yes and no. He twice offered optimistic assessments of its aftermath, but never provided reasons for its being invalidated or transcended. Let us begin with his initial statement on how one's skepticism is to be overcome in the final sentence of T I iv 2. Recall that the passage last quoted concludes with the statement that carelessness and inattention alone can cure the skeptical doubt under consideration. In the next sentence, Hume built on it as follows:

For this reason I rely entirely upon them; and take it for granted, whatever may be the reader's opinion at this present moment, that an hour hence he will be persuaded there is both an external and internal world; and going upon that supposition, I intend to examine some general systems both ancient and modern, which have been propos'd of both.<sup>27</sup>

Hume's confidence that carelessness and inattention will work their magic in this instance seems hopelessly misguided. Even granted that those two peculiar remedies will shortly restore the reader's belief in an external world, why would they promote a willingness to read more of the *Treatise*? Furthermore, how can they explain Hume's own procedure? Since he planned to examine various abstruse philosophical systems, he must have intended to sustain an intense and careful frame of mind, according to him precisely the wrong way to escape skepticism.

Before turning to Hume's less obviously flawed response to skepticism-3 in the aptly titled "Conclusion of this book" (T I iv 7), a few words must be accorded the next four sections of part iv which are portrayed by Hume, however implausibly, as subsequent to or beyond the skeptical crisis of T I iv 2. The first thing to notice is that they are not of a piece. Besides the obvious topical differences, there are differences in linkage and tone. For example, despite their paired titles, "Of the ancient philosophy" and "Of the modern philosophy" have more to do with other sections than with each other.<sup>28</sup> Note, too, that the third and fourth of the intervening sections concern the mind, the second concerns bodies, but the first is devoted to substance, a category of entity allegedly common to both. Finally, although the first pair could plausibly be classified as skeptical or at least negative in overall intent, the same cannot be said of the last two. In section 5, Hume claimed that the doubts and contradictions developed about body do not extend to minds and the mental. The mind is known to exist by reflection or introspection. Of the mental realm, Hume wrote, "What is known concerning it agrees with itself; and what is unknown, we must be contented to leave so."<sup>29</sup> In section 6, besides the denial of experience of a simple self, there is an elaborate positive account of self-ascriptions of identity.<sup>30</sup>

Hume emphatically returned to skepticism in T I iv 7. Before examining it, I want to raise a question the answer to which might help solve the problem, set aside earlier, of why Hume's characterization of his account of causal inference changed from nonskeptical in the *Treatise* to skeptical in the *Enquiries*. In the T I iv 2 passage in which Hume proposed carelessness and inattentiveness as the only remedies to his profound doubts, he twice without explanation extended skepticism to the understanding. Why? Since his investigation of belief in the external world had initially only led to skepticism about sense perception, why was doubt's scope enlarged? The failure of reason, alone or when applied to sensory experience, to discover that external objects exist in no way implies incompetence in its proper sphere. Equally, although the imagination substitutes strict identity for exact resemblance in response to constancy and thereby generates a belief in bodies that is not just unevicenced, but false, this does not imply similar conflation occur when through association it engages in causal reasoning.<sup>31</sup> What, then, connects doubts about the senses to belated doubts about the understanding?

In T I iv 7, Hume offered both arguments for skepticism-3 which might answer this question and a recipe for ending his radical doubts and restoring his role as investigator of human nature. At the beginning of the section Hume portrayed himself as both isolated and forlorn. His attacks on all intellectual disciplines have alienated him from them, yet his investigation of the understanding has destroyed his confidence in its and thus his ability to avoid error. He next set forth his reasons for questioning the competence of the human mind. He began by linking causal inference and belief in external existences to

the same psychological source, imagination, then recalled how causal reasoning about anomalous cases of sensory experience, such as doubled visual images, yields conclusions which falsify native belief in external objects and introduces contradiction into modern philosophy. He concluded that the source is unreliable. His presentation of this crucial argument is neither precise nor detailed. The key to it seems to be that, according to Hume, experience and association together join and enliven ideas to produce beliefs, whether they are beliefs in bodies, causes, past events, or the enduring self. Its centrality permits one to speak of imagination, the source of association, as a principle of belief. Here is what Hume wrote about it in T I iv 7:

No wonder a principle so inconstant and fallacious should lead us into errors, when implicitly follow'd (as it must be) in all its variations. 'Tis this principle, which makes us reason from causes and effects; and 'tis the same principle, which convinces us of the continu'd existence of external objects, when absent from the senses. But tho' these two operations be equally natural and necessary in the human mind, yet in some circumstances they are directly contrary, nor is it possible for us to reason justly and regularly from causes and effects, and at the same time believe the continu'd existence of matter. How then shall we adjust those principles together? Which of them shall we prefer? Or in case we prefer neither of them, but successively assent to both, as is usual among philosophers, with what confidence can we afterwards usurp that glorious title, when we thus knowingly embrace a manifest contradiction?<sup>33</sup>

Hume's use of this argument to promote skepticism-3 may partially explain why at the end of T I iv 2 he had expanded the scope of skepticism beyond belief in the external world to the understanding in general. As portrayed in T I iv 7, imagination underlies the understanding's production of factual beliefs and has been exposed as thoroughly unreliable.

Next Hume reinforced the expanded doubts by putting a new skeptical twist on his position that no objective basis can be found for our idea of necessary connection. After a brief, dense summary of his doctrine, he wrote:

This deficiency in our ideas is not, indeed, perceiv'd in common life, nor are we sensible, that in the most usual conjunctions of cause and effect we are as ignorant of the ultimate principle, which binds them together, as in the most unusual and extraordinary. But this proceeds merely from an illusion of the imagination; and the question is, how far we ought to yield to these illusions. This question is very difficult, and reduces us to a very dangerous dilemma, whichever way we answer it.

The argument that follows is complex and difficult to grasp. One thing seems clear, however. Earlier, skepticism was held at bay on psychological grounds. Our deep-rooted beliefs were sustained by their naturalness and liveliness, rendering them invulnerable to those skeptical arguments, however legitimate, which challenged their cogency. Hume may even have encouraged the thought that the impotence of seemingly irrefutable skeptical arguments somehow diminished or discredited them and so validated those beliefs. The very dangerous dilemma seems meant to sweep away this defense against skepticism. To assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy is to court contradiction and error. On the other hand, to adhere to the understanding, that is, "to the general and more establish'd properties of the imagination," which presumably means to accept only factual beliefs and inferences which conform to Hume's general rules of inductive reasoning, is to subvert the understanding. This line of thought leads directly to what Hume called the "intense view of these manifest contradictions and imperfections of the human mind."<sup>35</sup> This is portrayed as his own view, since he proceeded to write that the intense view "has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another."<sup>36</sup>

The skepticism-3 Hume here openly has identified as his own is deep, all-encompassing, personal, and anguished.<sup>37</sup> It was not, however, the end of the story. It may have destroyed in Hume any remaining desire to validate the understanding by our inability to sustain our doubts, but it does not and probably cannot overcome that inability. Perhaps because it is intense and thus fatiguing, deep skepticism cannot be sustained. Its hold is broken not only by lively impressions, which distract us, but also by sociability,<sup>38</sup> which presumably inhibits our desire to reason rigorously and ruthlessly. Together they overcome skepticism by inducing carelessness and inattention.

Unlike earlier, Hume here openly and quickly acknowledged that this escape from skepticism in no way validates philosophical inquiry or his project of studying human nature. He reported initially considering philosophy "an abuse of time," and wrote, "If I must be a fool, as all those who reason or believe *certainly* are, my follies shall at least be natural and agreeable."<sup>39</sup> These words express, Hume wrote, "the sentiments of my spleen and indolence."<sup>40</sup> Directly, philosophy can overcome neither. To return to philosophy, one's residual skepticism about philosophy must end and one's indolence must be replaced by a passion strong enough to move one forward. Let us consider the latter first. Late in T I iv 7, Hume summarized his motivational change as follows:

I feel an ambition to arise in me of contributing to the instruction of mankind, and of acquiring a name by my inventions and discoveries. These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition; and

should I endeavour to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I *feel* I shou'd be the loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy.<sup>41</sup>

This highly personal description of the passions which might lead one to undertake the rigors and dangers of philosophical inquiry provides only part of the story and perhaps a minor part at that. Hume next argued that, except for a few—apparently concentrated in England—humans inevitably reason beyond the narrow circle of objects they experience, converse about, and act upon. Will one give free rein to the imagination? This is the way of credulity and superstition, the way followed by most. Some, however, true philosophers, realize that superstition is “often able to disturb us in the conduct of our lives and actions.”<sup>42</sup> They pursue a different way. Sticking closely to the general rules of inductive reasoning, these philosophers content themselves “with assigning new causes and principles to the phenomena, which appear in the visible world.”<sup>43</sup> Hume proceeds to recommend this procedure, anticipating his *EHU* admonition that we “must cultivate true metaphysics with some care, in order to destroy the false and adulterate.”<sup>44</sup>

But what of skepticism? Should not one's desire to philosophize, whether spurred by personal ambition, the prospect of pleasure, or disgust with superstition and opaque theorizing, be countered and eliminated by a vivid recollection of skepticism-3? It might seem so, but at the end of T I iv 7 Hume found a way to block or deactivate that recollection. Not that he admitted a mistake in any of the skeptical arguments he had employed or came to see an inconsistency in reasoning for the purpose of discrediting reason.<sup>45</sup> Hume, that is, detected no flaw in the evidence for skepticism-3. Instead, in the closing paragraphs of T I iv 7 he held that skeptical arguments should instill in one a cautious attitude regarding themselves. He wrote:

The conduct of a man, who studies philosophy in this careless manner, is more truly sceptical than that of one, who feeling in himself an inclination to it, is yet so over-whelm'd with doubts and scruples, as totally to reject it. A true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction; and will never refuse any innocent satisfaction, which offers itself, upon account of either of them.<sup>46</sup>

Indolence, which helps one escape skepticism-3, initially yields the “Why bother?” attitude regarding philosophy expressed in the “If I must be a fool” passage quoted above. Even when another passion conquers indolence, one's recollection of the arguments leading to that skeptical crisis might yield scruples about all rigorous reasoning and thus about one's plan to pursue a science of human nature. To restore that plan, the would-be student of human nature

must overcome those scruples. To do so one must develop a general doubt about one's own skeptical arguments, an unwillingness to take them as conclusive even though they seem unanswerable. Only thus can determined skepticism give way to diffident skepticism.<sup>47</sup>

If this transition is intelligible, one can address the integration problem by supposing that Hume began the *Treatise* as an experimental inquirer confident in his abilities to discover the main principles of human understanding. Arguments subsequently deemed skeptical (such as those of part iii relating to causal inference) were initially seen only as important tools for eliminating rationalistic alternatives to his associationist account of factual reasoning. If he considered it at all, the fallibility argument of T I iv 1, a genuine instance of skepticism-1, was regarded in the same vein. Suspension of belief was not an option. On this scenario Hume did not anticipate his own skeptical crisis—the intense view of T I iv 2 and III iii 6. By the end of Book I, however, the arguments constituting skepticism-1 had become serpents whose bites had induced in their handler a despairing sense of the utter incompetence of the human mind. When this intense view subsided, the chastened Hume, rather like a character from a Beckett play, had to find a totally new reason to proceed. Specifically, he had to find both a reason to disregard the deep skeptical argument for cognitive incompetence and a motive to continue philosophizing. Diffidence about abstruse skeptical doubts made philosophical inquiry once again an intellectual option, while passions such as curiosity, benevolence, ambition, and disgust with superstition and metaphysical nonsense provided the motive to pursue that option. Consistent or not, and that is the key issue in terms of the integration problem, the decision to go on was also, of course, a decision to retain the prior philosophizing about belief processes even though it had generated the skeptical crisis. Further, in going on, the student of human nature no longer sees skeptical arguments merely as tools to be used when needed, then set aside, and skepticism only as a misguided Pyrrhonian attempt to uproot powerful causes of belief. He sees in skepticism, what I have called skepticism-3, both his own position, that is, the logical outcome of sustained and rigorous philosophizing, and an obstacle to be overcome.

If, with this in mind, we now recall how Hume in the Introduction to the *Treatise* opposed his philosophizing to indolence and skepticism, two thoughts occur. The first concerns his puzzling statement that “nothing but the most determined skepticism, along with a great degree of indolence, can justify this aversion to metaphysics.” Since Hume there classified his own philosophizing as metaphysics, the careful reader may wonder why Hume, about to embark on metaphysical inquiry, suggested that an aversion to metaphysics was justified, and so ask how determined skepticism and indolence could ever provide that justification. Solutions to these puzzles are now at hand. If, as is possible, even probable, Hume wrote the Introduction after completing Book I, he would have recalled that the attitude I have labeled skepticism-3 was the pri-

mary philosophical outcome of his investigation of the understanding in Book I. That result fully justified an aversion to all inquiry involving abstruse reasoning and, therefore, to metaphysics, so that one determined to stand by the skeptical results of the abstruse reasoning exhibited in the first book of the *Treatise* would be fully justified in rejecting any and all attempts to establish a science of human nature. Hume would have recalled, too, that when the despair of the intense view ceased, he remained enervated by resistance to all abstruse inquiry. His indolence, too, could be called justified since it was the emotional effect of discovering our fundamental cognitive failings.

The second thought is that the puzzling Introduction passage can now be seen as having a double meaning. To a new reader of the *Treatise*, one restricted to the context of the Introduction, it presents Hume as an intrepid investigator of human nature and skepticism as an obstacle in his path. It suggests that he will sweep it aside in order to achieve progress in philosophy. Read again, this time in the aftermath of T I iv 2 and III iii 6, it conveys a vastly different impression. We now know that the author of the *Treatise* aspires to be the supremely intrepid inquirer. Despite being justified, Hume held, both determined skepticism and indolence can be overcome.<sup>48</sup> Not, of course, by philosophy, that is, by direct arguments in favor of engaging in abstruse or metaphysical reasoning. Instead, doubt—about doubts—and passion come to the rescue. Perhaps because skepticism-3 is itself the fruit of abstruse reasoning, it can be turned against itself, making fruitful philosophical inquiry once again conceivable. Thus Hume intends to philosophize about human nature as a diffident skeptic, who carries on his abstruse inquiries, which he regards as discredited during periods of rigorous doubting, only by having doubts about those doubts. As for indolence, a combination of personal and social passions overcome it by motivating a renewed search for truth. By these means the skeptical inquirer into human nature can go forward with his original project.

Appropriately for a philosopher who is decidedly of two minds about skepticism and philosophy, Hume's comment in the "Introduction" both hints at and conceals this new meaning.

## NOTES

A shorter version of this paper was presented at the 25th International Hume Conference in Stirling, Scotland. I wish to thank Wade Robison for his useful comments. Since my interest in Hume and in skepticism are due to his teaching and writings, I would like to dedicate this essay to Professor Richard H. Popkin.

1. In making this claim, I ignore occurrences of "scepticism" and related terms in passages in the Appendix to the *Treatise* that were to be inserted in parts i, ii, or iii of Book I. My interest is in the first manifestation of Humean skepticism in the

*Treatise*. Hence, I have no need to attend to comments pertaining to skepticism that were not included in Books I and II upon their first appearance in print. I wish to thank Donald Ainslee for calling my attention to the need for the present disclaimer.

2. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (hereafter T), ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), Introduction, pp. xiv–xv. (Subsequent page references to the *Treatise* are to this edition.)

3. Many readers, especially other philosophers, have characterized arguments in parts i through iii as skeptical in nature or intent, but my concern is with how Hume regarded them. At the very least, Hume did not so label them.

4. If, as is highly probable, Hume intended to refute Bayle's skepticism about space and bodies, as presented in the article on Zeno of Elea in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, then part ii provides an instance of Hume opposing skepticism with a metaphysical argument. To be sure, near the end of part ii he questions our ability to arrive at accurate knowledge of the exact number of minuscule parts comprised by two- and three-dimensional extensions, but he does so to counter objections to his own theory of unextended points. There is a significant contrast between Hume's positive treatment of the composition of extension in T I ii, and his brief skeptical comment on it in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (hereafter EHU). On the latter, see sect. XII, pt. ii of EHU in Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975; subsequent page references to the *Enquiries* are to this edition). Note well the footnote on p. 158.

5. EHU 38.

6. T I iii 13, pp. 146–150.

7. T I iii 13, p. 150.

8. T I iii 15, p. 175. One wonders how Hume's discussions of general rules in T I iii 13 and 15 relate to the question of the status of the causal maxim, whatever begins to exist has a cause. Hume in T I iii 3 had denied it is either an intuitive or demonstrative truth. He did not deny its truth. Should one then treat it as the most general of the general rules relating to causation? Should one regard it as the most spectacular case in which our tendency to overgeneralize leads us to formulate general rules of inquiry?

9. The question is exceedingly difficult because one must go beyond merely comparing the two texts to ask, first, whether and, if so, how Hume's deep philosophical assumptions may have changed from completion of the manuscript of Books I and II of T to completion of the manuscript of EHU, and, second, what his intentions were in publishing the two books?

10. One might introduce descriptive names for the types of skepticism, beginning with, say, "dialectical skepticism" for what I have called skepticism-1. The numbers have the advantage of marking distinct types of skepticism and suggesting an order among them.

11. Richard H. Popkin was perhaps the first to investigate in depth Hume's complex relationship to Pyrrhonism. See his "David Hume: His Pyrrhonism and His Critique of Pyrrhonism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1951): 385–407, and "David

Hume and the Pyrrhonian Controversy," *Review of Metaphysics* 6 (1952): 65–81. Both are reprinted in R. A. Watson and J. E. Force, eds., *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (San Diego, Calif.: Austin Hill Press, 1980). 12. Whether Hume was correct in not regarding his result in I iv 1 as a ground for general disenchantment with the cognitive powers of humans and his own philosophical project is a different and difficult question which will be lightly touched upon later in this paper.

13. T I iv 1, p. 183.

14. Should one carefully distinguish Hume, the author of T and EHU, from the supposed referent of "I" as it occurs in those works? No. As in the present case, Hume's "I" and "my" are used to refer to himself. Two other examples: One cannot make sense of the final paragraph of Book One of T [p. 274] unless "I" refers to Hume, the author of the work. Consider, too, Section Eleven of EHU, where a skeptical friend is introduced so that Hume, using "I," can distance himself from the arguments the "friend" presents. No such device would have been needed had the "I" of EHU been referentially empty.

15. T I iv 1, p. 183.

16. T I iii 16, pp. 176–179.

17. T I iv 2, p. 187.

18. T I iv 2, p. 217.

19. Many scholars use "native" to mean innate; this is far from what I mean. I have avoided the expression "naive belief in the external world" because, on Hume's account of how coherence and constancy trigger belief in the externality of some impressions of sensation, the inferring subject either applies concepts such as identity or makes assumptions to resist inconsistency. As for another rival, one need only note that Hume himself warns against the ambiguity of "natural." To me, "native" suggests an initial state common to all humans because based on common or standard conditions and shared processes of thought undisturbed by philosophical reflection or schooling.

20. Hume's explanation of how constancy induces the imagination to produce in us belief in the external existence of some impressions of sensation is developed on pp. 199–210 of T. Next, on 210–211, he rehearses the arguments for the falsity of the belief, which leads into his critique of the philosophical hypothesis on 211–217.

21. T I iv 2, p. 215.

22. T I iv 2, p. 214. I think what Hume means by "a few extravagant sceptics; who after all maintain'd that opinion in words only, and were never able to bring themselves sincerely to believe it" is that the philosophers in question could not bring themselves to reject or suspend judgment regarding the continued existence of their impressions of sensation.

23. Causal conclusions can be disconfirmed. If not disconfirmed, they can be combined with others to form a theory. Whatever their defects they can form a body of knowledge.

24. Hume does not explain why skepticism-3 was extended from the senses to all operations of the understanding. Worth investigating is the possibility that Hume's

treatment of how coherence yields native believe in external objects establishes that the falsity of native belief in bodies undermines causal reasoning. Alternatively, as will be spelled out in more detail below, Hume seems to argue that his results concerning the external world generally discredit the imagination as an epistemological principle and with it all cognitive activities founded on it.

25. T I iv 2, p. 218.

26. See T I iv 7, p. 264, where Hume confesses to a special kind of melancholy about his own intellectual resources and those of other humans.

27. T I iv 2, p. 218.

28. In the former, for example, Hume portrays the philosophical doctrine of substance as analogous to the philosophers' hypothesis regarding the external world. Ordinary humans, he claims, continually engage in thought processes which, though easy and all but unavoidable, conflate distinct but resembling ideas. As humans philosophers are subject to the same psychological processes and initially participate in the same confluences and share, therefore, the same conclusions about simple and identical objects. Upon becoming aware, as philosophers, of the mistakes, they wish to modify or reinterpret the conclusions. Were they aware that there is no reason whatsoever to entertain the initial conclusion once the key ideas are distinguished, the philosophers would attempt no modification or reinterpretation. This degree of insight is lacking, however, so substances, underlying principles of identity and simplicity, are posited though they lie beyond all possible experience and, in the words of sect. 2, have no "primary recommendation" to either reason or imagination. The attack on substance continues not in the next section, but in sect. 5, "Of the immateriality of the soul," and, to a lesser degree, sect. 6, "Of personal identity." "Of the modern philosophy" also goes back to the topic of externality, this time in connection with the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. It has rhetorical, but few conceptual, connections with "Of the antient philosophy."

29. T I iv 5, p. 232

30. Hume's subsequent "Appendix" recantation, which ends on a skeptical note, only emphasizes the positive elements of "Of personal identity." See T Appendix 633-636, esp. 636.

31. It might be thought there is conflation in causal inference inasmuch as the idea of necessity, founded on the impression of psychological compulsion felt when performing the associative inference, is applied to the objects about which the inference is being made. This possibility may explain Hume's skeptical argument based on the idea of necessary connection in T I iv 7. In rebuttal one might say, first, that ordinary persons' causal inferences do not presuppose or require any such conflation and, second, that it is philosophers who err in taking a subjective impression to be an objective connection.

32. See T I iv 4, pp. 225-6, and I iv 7, p. 266.

33. T I iv 7, p. 266. The principle of belief and its central role are introduced on 265.

34. T I iv 7, p. 267.

35. T I iv 7, p. 268.

36. T I iv 7, pp. 268–9.

37. See the continuation of the passage on T 269, for evidence of Hume's anguish.

38. Hume, self-described earlier in T I iv 7 as a "strange uncouth monster" who fled the "deformity" of others for solitary reflection, famously invoked dining, playing backgammon, and conversing with friends as ways to destroy skepticism's hold over him. See p. 264.

39. T I iv 7, p. 270.

40. T I iv 7, p. 270. In my opinion, "sentiments of my spleen" here signifies the melancholy that attends skepticism, while "indolence" stands for post-skeptical indifference or antipathy to philosophy.

41. T I iv 7, p. 271.

42. T I iv 7, p. 272. See 271 for how superstition works and why it can affect conduct. See on the same page Hume's comment on those few exceptions to the human tendency toward superstition. Philosophers can go wrong, but as Hume says later in the same paragraph, "Generally speaking, the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous" (T 272).

43. T 271. Later, on 273, Hume contends we should not despair of success in carrying out such inquiries merely because of lack of progress up to the present. He seems to have thought rather frequently about this subject. Compare *Treatise*, Introduction, pp. xvi–xvii, and EHU sect. I, p. 14.

44. EHU sect. I, p. 12. There are many similarities between Hume's defense of true metaphysics in EHU and his skeptical defense of philosophy in T I iv 7. Does the distinction in T between determined and diffident skepticism carry over intact to EHU? No. In the latter Hume employs a distinction between Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism that is absent from the former. Are Pyrrhonian skepticism and Academic skepticism, also called "mitigated skepticism," merely determined and diffident skepticism, respectively, with new labels attached? This, a difficult question, calls for further inquiry.

45. In T I iv 1, Hume had denied that skeptical arguments in general and the argument from fallibility in particular are self-refuting because they presuppose logic in attacking logic. See T I iv 1, pp. 186–187. There, especially in the final sentence, Hume came close to identifying his point of view with skepticism. Note, though, that nature still reigns supreme at the end of T I iv 1, as the present account of the onset of Hume's skepticism dictates it should.

46. T I iv 7, p. 273.

47. Diffidence seems to carry over to Hume's positive philosophizing. To give but two examples, there is, first and famously, Hume's apology at the end of T I iv 7 (p. 274) for his frequent use of such as expressions as "'Tis evident," and, secondly, the following remarkable passage from sect. IX, "Conclusion," in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*: "Yet, I must confess, that this enumeration puts the matter in so strong a light, that I cannot, at present, be more assured of any truth, which I learn from reasoning and argument, than that personal merit consists entirely in the usefulness or agreeableness of qualities to the person himself possessed of them, or to others, who have any intercourse with him. But when I reflect that, though the bulk and figure of the earth have been measured and delineated, though the

motions of the tides have been accounted for the order and economy of the heavenly bodies subjected to their proper laws, and Infinite itself reduced to calculation; yet men still dispute concerning the foundation of their moral duties. When I reflect on this, I say, I fall back into diffidence and skepticism, and suspect that an hypothesis, so obvious, had it been a true one, would, long ere now, have been received by the unanimous suffrage and consent of mankind" (278).

48. At T I iv 7, p. 273, Hume wrote of behalf of the science of human nature, "Twill be sufficient for me, if I can bring it a little more into fashion; and the hope of this serves to compose my temper from that spleen, and invigorate it from that indolence, which sometimes prevail upon me." I propose that Hume connected the spleen with melancholy, providing the latter with a fanciful anatomical site. Further, "melancholy" signifies skepticism-3 in its determined and anguished form. To go on from skepticism-3 to study human nature, one must renew one's faith in one's cognitive powers and restore one's intellectual composure. One must also overcome indolence, loss of desire.