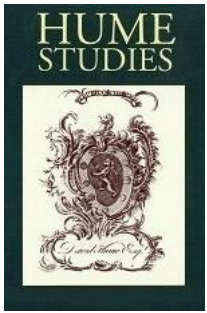

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Abstract: Hume's response to his dramatic encounter with skepticism in the *Treatise* is well known: his skepticism dissipates when he socializes with others in the comparatively amusing sphere of common life. As many commentators have noted, however, this "response" to skepticism is really no response at all. In this paper, I show that the charge that Hume provides a non-response to skepticism at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) is misplaced, for what is standardly interpreted as Hume's skepticism in the preceding paragraph is not skepticism. Instead, I argue, it is the condition of "madness," a disordered mental state in which "every loose fiction" enjoys the same status as a "serious conviction" (T 1.3.10.9; SBN 123). Hume's alleged response to skepticism at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) would indeed be unsatisfying, if he were responding to skepticism. As a response to madness, it is perfectly adequate.

Hume's response to his very personal (and personally troubling) encounter with skepticism is well known: "I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour's amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find it in my heart to enter into them any farther" (T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269).[1] As many commentators have noted, this "response" to skepticism is deeply unsatisfying (or worse, it is really no response at all). For example, Brian Ribeiro writes, "Having dinner and watching some TV no more 'cures' or 'solves' the skeptical problem than the drugs given to those with herpes 'cure' their ailment. . . . [T]he problem of skepticism is like incurable herpes: We will have some acute episodes,

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followed by the abatement of symptoms, followed by new flare-ups, with the cycle repeated *ad nauseam*."[2] Karánn Durland also finds Hume's response to skepticism in this passage unsatisfying, observing that Hume "quickly returns to his former activities, and he offers no satisfying explanation of what entitles him to carry on. He seems content merely to describe how his melancholy dissipates."[3] Thus, Durland underscores "the absence of any clear and straightforward story of what permits Hume to reject his extreme skepticism" (67). In doing so, she calls attention to the important difference between how Hume does, as a matter of fact, reject skepticism at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) and whether he is entitled to reject it: "That nature often overrides our extreme doubts is not itself justification for thinking that the doubts should be ignored" (Durland, 75). In other words, simply describing how the clouds of skepticism eventually lift when he re-engages in common life does not entitle Hume to consider the problem resolved.

In this paper, I aim to show that the widespread charge that Hume provides a non-response to skepticism at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) is misplaced, for what is standardly interpreted as Hume's skepticism in the preceding paragraph (T 1.4.7.8; SBN 268–69) is not skepticism. Instead, I argue, it is the condition of "madness," a disordered mental state briefly canvassed earlier in the *Treatise*. The direct upshot of my interpretive proposal is that it dispenses with the unsatisfactory-response-to-skepticism charge concerning T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) insofar as it is not a response to skepticism, but to madness. In denying that T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) is a response to skepticism, I do not rule out the possibility that Hume responds (or attempts to respond) to skepticism in the few remaining paragraphs of T 1.4.7 following this passage. I focus on T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) because it immediately follows and clearly responds to the dramatic episode at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69), which is widely interpreted as Hume's skeptical crisis.

Another source of support for the "madness" reading, which I explore after examining the more direct support for this alternative interpretation of T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69), lies in the structural unity of the text of *Treatise* 1.4 prior to and including the dramatic passage in question. Near the end of *Treatise* Book 1, Hume explicitly states that his ambition in writing it is to contribute to the advancement of human knowledge by "giving in some particulars a different turn to the speculations of philosophers, and pointing out to them more distinctly those subjects, where alone they can expect assurance and conviction" (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 273). Reading T 1.4.1.1–1.4.7.8 (SBN 180–269) through the lens of this stated goal allows us to see this stretch of text as, in essence, a unified cautionary tale: persistently engaging, as Hume's philosophical predecessors have, in intensive, "abstruse" speculations about the natures of external objects, substance, secondary qualities, the soul's immateriality, and personal identity—many of which, Hume shows, lead to skeptical conclusions—finally leads one to madness (in Hume's sense). These metaphysical topics are, I maintain, instances of the "reflections very

refin'd and metaphysical" cited in T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) as the cause of Hume's overwrought, "heated" brain. Hume's description of his heated disposition in this passage corresponds, in turn, to the "extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits" that defines madness.

Hume's ambition to give a "different turn" to philosophers' investigations, an aspiration restated more famously and dramatically in the closing lines of the first *Enquiry* (EHU 12.34; SBN 165), supports the idea that his breakdown at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) is the undesirable consequence of an overindulgence in metaphysics.[4] Contrary to Hume's assessment, the bulk of *Treatise* 1.4 does not consist in an unstructured, "miscellaneous way of reasoning" (T 1.4.6.23; SBN 263); it is a cautionary tale designed to change the questions philosophers are pursuing. If the dogged pursuit of traditional questions in metaphysics culminates in madness, then philosophers are better off changing the focus of their inquiries. In this way, the structure of T 1.4 through T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) as a unified cautionary tale supports the madness reading.[5]

Sections 1 and 2 of this paper outline the contrast between the standard skeptical reading of T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) and the alternative "madness" reading that I propose. Section 3 considers the significance of Hume's failure to deliver on a promised explanation of the difference between "serious convictions" and "poetical enthusiasms," and offers further support for the madness reading. Having established the direct upshot of this reading by the end of section 3, section 4 turns to consider some indirect support for the madness reading (outlined above), namely, the structural unity of T 1.4 through the dramatic passage as a cautionary tale intended to incite a major reform in philosophy (hence the "method" in Hume's "madness"). I conclude, in section 5, with a brief summary of results and consider a possible objection to my account.

1. The Skeptical Reading

T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) is widely interpreted as chronicling Hume's descent into a full-blown skeptical crisis.[6] Stephen Campbell is a clear proponent of this interpretation, for he describes the passage as a "skeptical storm" exhibiting Hume's "skeptical darkness and despair," and characterizes the succeeding passage at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) as Hume's breaking free from "debilitating skeptical despair" and being cured of his "skeptical malady" (Campbell, 119–20). Other recent interpreters who explicitly refer to Hume's "skeptical crisis" in this passage include Robert Fogelin, Mark Collier, and Henry Allison.[7]

The inclination to interpret Hume as being in the throes of a skeptical breakdown at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) is not without justification, for the episode seems to be foreshadowed in the first paragraph of T 1.4.7. There, plagued by the memory of "past errors and perplexities," Hume laments the "wretched condition" and

"disorder" of his cognitive faculties and "the impossibility of amending or correcting" these faculties, which "makes [him] resolve to perish on the barren rock, on which [he is] at present" (T 1.4.7.1; SBN 263–64). Such sentiments seem to be echoed at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69), when Hume finds himself unpleasantly struck by the "manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason" and in "the most deplorable condition imaginable, inviron'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty." In what follows, I explore why one might be tempted to think that what is principally at issue at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69)—and appears to be foreshadowed at T 1.4.7.1 (SBN 263–64)—is skepticism.

The skeptical reading just outlined generally presupposes that the skepticism at issue in this passage is of an extreme sort. Commentators alternatively characterize it as "radical," "extreme," or "Pyrrhonian."[8] It is the skepticism that Hume characterizes in the *Treatise* as "total" and in the first *Enquiry* as "excessive."[9] Several commentators have argued that Hume's conception of Pyrrhonism is not historically accurate, with some suggesting that Hume neither read Sextus Empiricus nor any of the accurate second-hand accounts of Sextus's thought that would have been available to Hume during his lifetime.[10] As Julia Annas bluntly concludes, "Hume's characterisations of both Pyrrhonism and Academic skepticism, then, are wrong."[11] For present purposes, I may sidestep this debate over historical accuracy, for when commentators characterize the skepticism allegedly on display at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) as "Pyrrhonian" they appear to refer to Hume's own understanding of Pyrrhonian skepticism, however historically unfaithful it may be to Sextus's sense of the term.[12] Thus, I now turn to Hume's conception of Pyrrhonian skepticism, with an eye toward understanding why so many commentators interpret T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) as an exhibition of Hume's skepticism.

Hume identifies the conclusion of the argument for "total skepticism" that he presents at T 1.4.1.5–6 (SBN 181–83) as "a total extinction of belief and evidence." He alternatively characterizes this conclusion as an utter subversion of belief and opinion, or "a total suspence of judgment." A total skeptic, for Hume, is a person who maintains that "our judgment is not in *any* thing possest of *any* measures of truth and falshood" (T 1.4.1.6–8; SBN 183–84). In a similar vein, according to Hume's discussion of "Pyrrhonism, or excessive skepticism" in the first *Enquiry*, the excessive skeptic is one who "destroy(s) all assurance and conviction" (EHU 12.22; SBN 159). If we compare this understanding of Pyrrhonian skepticism to Hume's confessional episode at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69), it becomes clear why this passage has been widely interpreted as an episode of extreme skepticism.

In the episode, Hume dramatically announces that he is "ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another" (T 1.4.7.8; SBN 268–69). First, it is important to note how this pronouncement appears to incorporate two senses of skepticism, one concerning the cessation of belief (an issue of suspending judgment) and another concerning

a lack of positive epistemic status (an issue of our inability to order our beliefs according to their likelihood of being true).[13] Hume's readiness to reject all belief and reasoning captures the former sense, while his inability to view any belief as more probable than another illustrates the latter. These two senses of skepticism correspond to what Don Garrett, following Fogelin, identifies as "extreme practicing skepticism" and "extreme theoretical skepticism."[14] In extreme (as opposed to moderate) form, practicing skepticism consists in the annihilation of all belief, and theoretical skepticism is the denial of any degree of epistemic value (Garrett, *Hume*, 217).

The full significance of distinguishing these two senses of skepticism seemingly captured in Hume's dramatic pronouncement will become clear in due course; for the moment, taking each of these senses in turn allows us to see how this passage encourages the skeptical reading. With respect to extreme practicing skepticism, Hume's readiness to reject belief and reasoning wholesale strongly supports the idea that belief has been totally subverted and that he is engaged in a total suspension of judgment. The rapid-fire series of questions by which he is "confounded" and the feeling of being "utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty" suggest that Hume displays more than a mere readiness to become an extreme practicing skeptic; he *is* one (or, at least, he embodies one). Hume is, as Garrett observes, "temporarily reduced (through a physiological intermediary) to extreme practicing skepticism" (*Hume*, 227). As Fogelin writes, "the crisis is genuine, unavoidable, and destructive of the entire project of developing his science of human nature" (130).[15] With respect to extreme theoretical skepticism, Hume's inability to find any one of his beliefs to be more probable or likely than another can be seen as a consequence of a lack of any measures of truth and falsehood, one of the defining features of a total skeptic, on Hume's account. As Kevin Meeker suggests, if no belief is epistemically justified, then for any proposition *A*, it follows that *A* and *not-A* "have the same probability, namely: (virtually) zero."[16] Thus, when Hume finds his beliefs to be equally probable, it is in this sense of all beliefs having near-zero probability.[17]

Given Hume's conception of Pyrrhonian skepticism as an utter subversion of belief, total suspense of judgment, complete lack of any measures of truth and falsehood, and destruction of assurance and conviction, the dramatic episode at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) certainly seems to encourage the idea that Hume is mired in a skeptical crisis. Indeed, I suspect that the notable similarities between Hume's conception of Pyrrhonian skepticism and his account of his psychological impasse at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) have led to the widespread assumption among commentators that this is undoubtedly what is going on in this passage. Despite these similarities, a closer consideration of Hume's discussion of "madness" earlier in the *Treatise* suggests that what is principally at issue in the later dramatic episode

is madness, not skepticism. In the interest of substantiating this claim, I turn to Hume's account of madness.

2. "Madness or Folly"

Hume introduces the topic of madness by distinguishing between "a lively imagination" (which is "of all talents the most proper to procure belief and authority") and "madness or folly," observing that the former "very often degenerates into" the latter "and bears it a great resemblance in its operations" (T 1.3.10.8–9; SBN 123). The specific operation at issue in this context is the enlivening of ideas, which is the foundation of Hume's theory of belief. According to this theory, belief is "a more vivid and intense conception of an idea, proceeding from its relation to a present impression" (T 1.3.8.11; SBN 103).[18] The source of a given idea's vivacity is a present impression of the senses or memory that leads us to conceive of the idea and, in general, ideas become enlivened—and consequently become beliefs—on account of a present impression conjoined with one's memory of previously experienced constant conjunctions of the objects or events that the ideas represent. So, when Hume claims that madness greatly resembles a lively imagination in its operations, he means that madness also causes the enlivening of ideas and subsequent generation of beliefs. Although these two varieties of the imagination have the same end result, the source of the idea enlivening matters crucially.

In the case of proper belief formation, "a present impression and a customary transition" from impression to associated idea is the source of the idea's enlivening. According to Hume, the vivacity bestowed on ideas in this case is derived from "the particular situations or connexions of the objects of these ideas" (T 1.3.10.10; SBN 630). In contrast, in the case of madness, "a present impression and a customary transition are now no longer necessary to enliven our ideas. Every chimera of the brain is as vivid and intense as any of those inferences, which we formerly dignify'd with the name of conclusions concerning matters of fact" (T 1.3.10.9; SBN 123). The reason for this is that the source of idea enlivening in the case of madness is "the present temper and disposition of the person" (T 1.3.10.10; SBN 630). As Hume explains, the mental disposition of one who is mad is marked by an "extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits" that causes a formerly lively imagination to rise to such a fever pitch of vivacity that it "disorders all its powers and faculties" (T 1.3.10.9; SBN 123). Thus, it is the hyper-vivacious imagination of one who is mad, and not some previously observed connections between the objects of her ideas, that is the source of idea enlivening.

While ideas that are vivified in virtue of a customary conjunction with a present impression qualify as beliefs, those that are vivified by one's "present temper and disposition" are, Hume claims, "the mere phantom of belief or persuasion" (T 1.3.10.10; SBN 630). Hume refers to the genuine beliefs that are the products of

a lively imagination as "conclusions of the judgment," as opposed to the phantom beliefs yielded by a hyper-vivacious imagination, which are mere "loose fiction[s] or idea[s]" (T 1.3.10.9; SBN 123). So, despite the fact that an appropriately lively imagination and an excessively lively, or "mad" imagination both result in the enlivening of ideas, the fact that the ideas enlivened in the case of madness are artificially enlivened by one's own mental disposition makes a critical difference. If a lively imagination is, as Hume maintains, "of all talents the most proper to procure belief and authority," it is fair to say that the excessively lively imagination of the madman is a distinctly improper source of belief and authority.

It is easy to overlook the fact that Hume touches on the significance of madness in the very first paragraph of *Treatise* Book 1, when he attempts to clarify the difference between impressions and ideas: "Thus in sleep, in a fever, in *madness*, or in any very violent emotions of soul, our ideas may approach to our impressions" (T 1.1.1.1; SBN 2, emphasis added). Hume later describes the function of belief in precisely the same language: "The effect, then, of belief is to raise up a simple idea to an equality with our impressions, and bestow on it a like influence on the passions. This effect it can only have by making an idea approach an impression in force and vivacity" (T 1.3.10.3; SBN 119). In cases of proper belief formation, ideas become impression-like by means of a transfer of vivacity from a present impression; in the case of madness, however, it is instead the "violent emotions of soul" that supply the vivacity necessary for raising ideas to the level of impressions. This explains why, when one is mad, "every loose fiction or idea" appears worthy of the designation 'belief.' Hume's foreshadowing of this point in the first paragraph of Book 1 is easy to miss, but his awareness of the significance of madness so early in the *Treatise* is worth noting in light of later developments.

With Hume's account of madness in view, we are in a position to appreciate its significance for his dramatic breakdown at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69). Hume describes his mental disposition in no uncertain terms in this passage: he claims that he feels overwrought and afflicted with a "heated" brain, which evokes the "extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits" that is a distinguishing mark of madness. Moreover, he confesses to feeling "utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty," directly echoing his description of madness as an imagination that "acquires such a vivacity as disorders all its powers and faculties" (T 1.3.10.9; SBN 123). Further still, in the condition of madness, "there is no means of distinguishing betwixt truth and falshood," which presents a plausible reason why Hume, in the later dramatic passage, can "look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another." There are different ways of interpreting what Hume means here, and the difference is of great consequence.

As noted above in section 1, on the skeptical reading, no belief being more probable or likely than any other means that they are all of near-zero probability (on account of a total skeptic having no "measures of truth and falshood"). On

the madness reading that I propose, no belief is more probable or likely than any other because they are all of exceedingly high probability (on account of the indiscriminate enlivening and vivacity of all ideas—from "loose fictions" to "serious convictions"). Hume's self-described heated brain and overwrought disposition, and the effect that such a disposition has on his conception of his ideas, strongly supports the latter interpretation. When madness dissipates, loose fictions and chimeras lose the force and vivacity that had caused them to exist on a doxastic par with conclusions concerning matters of fact and impressions of the senses and memory. In contrast, impressions of the senses and memory and conclusions concerning matters of fact maintain their vivacity (and, hence, status as beliefs) in the absence of madness because the source of their vivacity does not lie in the mental disposition of their owner. When Hume claims that the condition of madness involves the inability to distinguish truth from falsehood, he means that one cannot distinguish artificially enlivened chimeras from naturally enlivened ideas, as the text indicates: "there is no means of distinguishing betwixt truth and falshood; but every loose fiction or idea, having the same influence as the impressions of the memory, or the conclusions of the judgment, is receiv'd on the same footing" (T 1.3.10.9; SBN 123).

Thus, instead of interpreting T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) as an expression of Hume's skepticism—specifically, extreme practicing and extreme theoretical skepticism—the madness reading invites us to recognize that Hume's ideas are enlivened by his over-heated, mad imagination and all of his opinions appear believable because, based on his account of madness, ideas that are mere "chimera(s) of the brain" are just as vivid and intense (and therefore, in accordance with Hume's account of belief, *as believable*) as the ideas involved in legitimate causal inferences. While the Pyrrhonian skeptic destroys all assurance and conviction, suspending judgment and extinguishing belief, Hume's condition of madness causes an indiscriminate enlivening of all of his ideas, resulting in the diametrically opposed state of believing too many things. As Garrett points out, "Hume's psychology makes it nearly impossible to hold a belief with a given degree of strength without, upon reflection, also holding with a similar degree of strength that that belief is true or probably true—thereby attributing to it a fundamental epistemic value" (*Hume*, 232). For David Owen, the connection between the force and vivacity of a belief and our estimation of its probable truth is, in Hume's psychology, even more direct: "the conviction we have concerning a known proposition is a conviction that it is true, and the assent we give to a belief is assent to it as true. The degree of assent, or amount of force and vivacity, *just is* what we consider to be the likelihood of the belief's being true."[19] Because holding beliefs at all is a function of the force and vivacity of ideas, it follows from Hume's psychology and account of belief that very vivacious ideas will be held to be very probably true. Thus, while the skeptic suspends judgment, exhibiting the destruction of assurance and conviction, the

madman has, in effect, too many beliefs in the sense that too many ideas are designated as strongly held beliefs having a correspondingly high degree of probable truth. A subset of these ideas—namely, those whose force and vivacity derives solely from one's heated mental disposition—does not deserve such designation.

For all that I have said thus far, one might object that I have failed to recognize the compatibility of madness and extreme theoretical skepticism and therefore have not shown that the madness reading and the skeptical reading are genuinely competing interpretations of T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69).[20] Consider Garrett's gloss of Fogelin's conception of theoretical skepticism: "*Theoretical skepticism* is a positive stance toward the view that there is a lack of 'rational grounds, warrant, or justification' for assenting to the propositions of a specified domain" ("Small Tincture," 70). Extreme theoretical skepticism, then, is "the view that assent to any proposition within [a given domain] is *utterly* without rational ground, warrant, or justification" (as opposed to possessing less justification than we ordinarily suppose) ("Small Tincture," 72). The notion of taking up a positive stance toward a view of one's beliefs implies a hierarchy between beliefs, in which "higher-level" beliefs constitute attitudes toward one's "lower-level" beliefs. So, one might object, because extreme theoretical skepticism operates at the higher-level, then even if all of Hume's lower-level beliefs are exceedingly lively, he could still be in a position to take up a positive stance toward the view that there is an utter lack of rational grounds, warrant, or justification for assenting to these ideas. In this way, madness and extreme theoretical skepticism are compatible, and need not represent competing interpretations of T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69), as I have been supposing.

This objection rightfully draws attention to the significance of higher-level versus lower-level beliefs, and to the fact that extreme theoretical skepticism operates at the former level. Nevertheless, there are two problematic issues with the objection. First, it ignores the inextricable relationship on Hume's account (briefly noted above) between holding a belief and holding that that belief is probably true. Holding beliefs—a function of the force and vivacity of one's ideas—pertains to the lower-level, while holding that one's beliefs are probably true pertains to the higher-level (in virtue of the reflection involved in attributing such epistemic value to one's beliefs). But, as Garrett shows, one is bound up with the other in Hume's psychology—it is nearly impossible to hold the exceedingly lively lower-level beliefs without holding them as being highly probably true. While there may in fact be a lack of appropriate grounds or justification for believing them to be highly probably true, the inextricable relationship between the lower- and higher-levels of belief in this context makes it implausible that, as the objection in question holds, Hume is in a position at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) to take up "a positive stance toward the view that" such a lack of appropriate grounds or justification exists. Although we readers of Hume's episode may be in such a position, Hume in the midst of the episode—that is, holding exceedingly lively lower-level beliefs—is not.

The second issue with the objection is that, while a case may be made that there is a relationship between extreme theoretical skepticism and madness in the dramatic passage in question (T 1.4.7.8; SBN 268–69), they are not compatible conditions. The relationship between extreme theoretical skepticism and madness is, at most, one of causality, but not compatibility. To see this, we must attend carefully to the now-familiar critical sentence contained in that passage: "The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason 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." Hume's intense view of the contradictions and imperfections in human reason that he has discovered in T 1.4 offers a possible illustration of the higher-level/lower-level distinction among beliefs which the objection in question emphasizes, with the contradictions and imperfections in reason (e.g., reasoning "justly and regularly" from causes and effects and believing in the continued existence of objects when absent from the senses—two "principles" to which we cannot assent without contradiction) representing lower-level beliefs and the "*intense* view" indicating a higher-level reviewing of those beliefs. On my account, it is this reviewing of lower-level beliefs that is responsible for heating Hume's brain, "(such) that [he is] ready to reject all belief and reasoning," and cannot find any opinion to be more probable than any other. At most, extreme theoretical skepticism causes Hume's madness, and it is from this perspective of madness that he finds himself ready to reject belief and unable to order his beliefs according to their likelihood of being true. In other words, the brain-heating "extraordinary ferment of blood and spirits"—rather than a reviewing of lower-level beliefs—directly renders Hume ready to reject belief and unable to order his beliefs according to degrees of probable truth.

Although I admit the possibility of such a causal relationship between extreme theoretical skepticism and madness in the passage, I maintain that they are incompatible positions and, therefore, that the skeptical reading and the madness reading represent genuinely competing interpretations of it. As we have seen, in the condition of madness, "every loose fiction or idea, having the same influence as the impressions of the memory, or the conclusions of the judgment, is receiv'd on the same footing, and operates with equal force on the passions" (T 1.3.10.9; SBN 123). From this perspective, the madman is not in a position to have a positive stance toward the view that his ideas are utterly without appropriate grounds or justification (as the extreme theoretical skeptic is); as I shall argue in the next section, one cannot self-diagnose madness when afflicted with the condition. For now, it suffices to see that extreme theoretical skepticism involves a significant reflective act that madness lacks, namely, a higher-level reviewing of lower-level beliefs and a resulting attitude towards those beliefs that indicates an ability to "stand back" from them.

Because extreme theoretical skepticism and madness can be seen to bear a close causal relationship at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69), it is unsurprising that Hume's readiness to reject belief and his inability to order his beliefs according to degrees of probable truth is widely interpreted as skepticism. While extreme theoretical skepticism and madness may both be present in the dramatic passage, the key issue is how to interpret Hume's readiness to reject belief and his inability to order his beliefs according to probable truth; it is on this issue, I have been arguing, that the skeptical reading and the madness reading offer genuinely competing interpretations.

Finally, on the madness reading, Hume's readiness to reject belief and reasoning does not signal a suspension of judgment (as, I have argued, it does on the skeptical reading). Instead, it is an expression of frustration at his overwrought condition—akin to "throwing in the towel"—as opposed to something he is actually able to accomplish. After all, Hume would be incapable of rejecting belief if, in the condition of madness, his ideas are exceedingly vivid and, as Garrett observes, for Hume it is nearly impossible to hold a belief with a given degree of strength without also holding with a similar degree of strength that the belief is true or probably true. This reveals the way in which, unlike the skeptical reading, the madness reading assumes a literal interpretation of the "ready to" qualifier in Hume's readiness to reject all belief, a claim I shall return to later in the next section. First, I consider why Hume does not himself recognize the connection that I have been pressing between his account of madness and his dramatic breakdown.

3. A Promissory Note Unfulfilled

If, as Hume claims, being in a condition of madness generates counterfeit beliefs and, as I claim, Hume is afflicted with madness at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69), it seems that he could have pointed out that the only reason all of his ideas appear believable is that they are enlivened by his overwrought, overheated psychological condition. In essence, the key move would have been for Hume to establish that he is mad, which would not seem overly difficult in light of the aforementioned striking similarities between his description of madness at T 1.3.10.9–10 (SBN 123, 630–31) and his description of his mental state at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69). He could then have concluded that, appearances notwithstanding, he is not in the throes of a skeptical crisis and is therefore not offering a "response" to skepticism in the succeeding paragraph.

Of course, such considerations about what Hume could have said (but did not say) raise the question of why he does not avail himself of these avenues of response. The root of the problem, I suggest, is Hume's failure to supply an explanation of the difference between poetical enthusiasms and serious convictions. During his brief discussion of madness, Hume likens madness to poetry (in the sense that

both result in the artificial enlivening of ideas due to one's present temper and disposition) and issues the following promissory note: "We shall afterwards have occasion to remark both the resemblances and differences betwixt a poetical enthusiasm, and a serious conviction" (T 1.3.10.11; SBN 631). David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton note that in the *Treatise* as published Hume fails to follow through on this promise, offering no further explanation of the difference between these concepts ("Annotations to the *Treatise*," T 460). The significance of this, for my purposes, is that in the absence of this explanation Hume is unable to recognize that he is afflicted with madness at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69).

As noted above, a lively imagination requires a present impression and a customary transition to the associated idea of the object or event usually found conjoined with that impression in order to enliven its ideas. Ideas enlivened in this way earn the designation of serious convictions, or beliefs. The excessively lively or "mad" imagination dispenses with the requirement of a present impression and customary transition and enlivens ideas by means of its own vivacity, producing counterfeit beliefs. As we have seen, however, it matters significantly for Hume's account of belief not just that ideas become enlivened, but also how.

The fact that the operations of an appropriately lively imagination and an excessively lively imagination bear such a close resemblance suggests that madness is not a condition that can be self-diagnosed. Because both varieties of imagination yield the same products, namely, enlivened ideas, the madman subsumes all such ideas—chimeras of the brain as well as legitimate inferences regarding matters of fact—under a single category. While there may be no subjective difference in degree perceived among these ideas, there is surely an objective difference in kind, owing to the condition of the imagination that produces them.[21] Because the madman cannot recognize this, however, Hume cannot be blamed for failing to respond to his madness at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) by appealing to the difference between a lively imagination and a mad one or, alternatively, between serious convictions and loose fictions. In his condition, he could not avail himself of these possible responses. Finally, the source of the problem—that is, the impossibility of diagnosing madness in oneself—is "resemblance," a principle of association among ideas that Hume identifies as "the most fertile source of error" in human reasoning (T 1.2.5.21; SBN 61).

Early in the *Treatise*, Hume claims that "wherever the actions of the mind in forming any two ideas are the same or resembling, we are very apt to confound these ideas, and take the one for the other" (T 1.2.5.21; SBN 61). This offers a potential explanation of why Hume fails to fulfill his promise to distinguish serious convictions from poetical enthusiasms, for he explicitly notes the close resemblance between the actions of a mind with a lively imagination and the actions of a mind with a disproportionately lively imagination: "as a lively imagination very often degenerates into madness or folly, and bears it a great resemblance

in its operations; so they influence the judgment after the same manner, and produce belief from the very same principles" (T 1.3.10.9; SBN 123). In general, a close resemblance between mental operations can easily cause a conflation of their respective products, a principle to which Hume appeals several times in the course of *Treatise* Book 1.[22]

Because the mental disposition of a person with a lively imagination closely resembles the disposition of the madman with his hyper-lively imagination, it is easy to conflate both the operations of an appropriately lively imagination and a hyper-lively, mad imagination, and the products of their respective operations, namely, beliefs and counterfeit beliefs. This explains why Hume does not respond to the dramatic episode at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) by noting that he is in the throes of madness, for the fact that an appropriately lively imagination can slide imperceptibly into madness means that in the heat of the "mad" moment, Hume not only does not, but cannot detect his own madness. Although no one can self-diagnose madness while afflicted with the condition, we readers of Hume's episode can recognize what is chiefly at issue in the dramatic passage as Hume's madness and not, as commentators have widely assumed, Hume's skepticism.

Interestingly, like many recent commentators, some of Hume's own contemporary critics also interpreted T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) as a straightforward expression of his skepticism. Garrett points out that, in *A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh*, Hume "complains about the fact that his opponents had quoted this passage to characterize his skepticism despite his plainly labeling it a few pages later as merely the transitory product of 'melancholy and delirium'" ("Small Tincture," 98). Instead of joining these opponents of Hume in interpreting the passage as an expression of *Hume's* skepticism, Garrett instead reads it as "[Hume's] most striking expression of unmitigated practicing skepticism—an ideal example of what, in the *Enquiry*, he will call 'a tincture of Pyrrhonism'" ("Small Tincture," 85). In other words, on Garrett's reading, Hume is not himself an unmitigated (that is, extreme) practicing skeptic; instead, he is merely embodying that position without endorsing it. In a similar vein—embodiment without endorsement—Donald Livingston interprets the passage as expressing the despair of Pyrrhonian doubt, "a peculiar sort of despair prompted by a philosophical reflection that alienates one from the whole of custom."[23] I have argued for the stronger claim that the critical sentence from the notorious passage in question—"The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me . . . that I . . . can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another"—does not express skepticism of any sort, neither Hume's own skepticism nor any other kind of skepticism that Hume might be embodying without endorsing himself. The reason that Hume's alleged response to skepticism at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) is so unsatisfying is that it is not a response to skepticism; it is a response to madness.

When viewed as a response to madness, the passage at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) is perfectly adequate. Hume does not owe us a "response" to madness in the sense of justifying what licenses him to resume his various ways of engaging in common life because the very re-immersion in social activities tempers the overheated imagination that defines madness. In other words, the return to common life *is* a cure for madness, in a way that it is not a cure for skepticism. Hume supports this idea when he claims that "some avocation, and lively impression of my senses . . . obliterate[s] all these chimeras" (T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269). This directly recalls the earlier account of madness, according to which every chimera of the brain is "sometimes [as vivid and intense] as the present impressions of the senses" (T 1.3.10.9; SBN 123). The fact that Hume maintains that the return to common life—in particular, "some avocation, and lively impression of my senses"—obliterates the chimeras suggests that the equality of vivacity and relative probability among chimeras and present sensory impressions that persists in a state of madness is destroyed and one is thereby delivered from madness. To return to a claim with which this paper began, the same cannot be said for skepticism—the re-immersion in common life by no means cures or solves the skeptical problem (Ribeiro, 218).

In Section 1, I noted that the significance of the distinction between two kinds of skepticism—extreme practicing skepticism, concerning the cessation of belief, and extreme theoretical skepticism, concerning beliefs' lack of positive epistemic status—would be addressed in due course. We are now in a position to appreciate the full significance of this distinction. As we have seen, Hume's dramatic episode contains both (i) the claim that he is ready to reject all belief and reasoning and (ii) the claim that he can find no opinion to be more probable or likely than any other. According to the skeptical reading, (i) signals an actual—however temporary—suspension of judgment (reflecting extreme practicing skepticism) and (ii) indicates that all beliefs are of near-zero probability (reflecting extreme theoretical skepticism, in which Hume has no "measures of truth and falshood"). In contrast, on the madness reading, (i) is an expression of frustration and a desire to throw in the doxastic towel, as opposed to an actual suspension of judgment, and (ii) indicates that all beliefs are of exceedingly high probability on account of the artificial enlivening of ideas that causes Hume to have no means of distinguishing impressions of sense and memory and conclusions concerning matters of fact, on one hand, from loose fictions and chimeras, on the other.

Hume's re-immersion in common life at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) solves the problem encountered in (i) on both the skeptical and madness readings, for whether Hume actually does temporarily suspend judgment (as on the skeptical reading) or merely feels ready to do so (as on the madness reading), the return to common life reintroduces beliefs regardless. As Hume expresses it elsewhere, we cannot "forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression" (T 1.4.1.7; SBN 183). However,

the re-immersion in common life solves the problem of having no measures of truth and falsehood encountered in (ii) only on the madness reading, and not on the skeptical reading.

On the madness reading, chimeras, loose fictions, conclusions concerning matters of fact, and impressions of the senses and memory are on a doxastic par, all exceedingly forceful and vivacious ideas of a correspondingly high degree of probable truth. The key difference in this case is that the return to common life upsets this equilibrium—the chimeras fade because common life involves reconnecting with objects of experience as the source of the vivacity of ideas, as opposed to one's heated psychological disposition. As a result, some beliefs *are* now more probable than others, namely, the conclusions concerning matters of fact and impressions of the senses and memory. The madman's temper and disposition changes (hence relaxing the "bent of mind" suffered in madness) and loose fictions and chimeras consequently lose their source of vivacity. What remains are ideas that are enlivened by a customary conjunction with present impressions. Thus, Hume's response at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) does solve the problem of having no means of distinguishing truth from falsehood, as this problem is understood on the madness reading (namely, the inability to distinguish loose fictions from serious convictions). It does not, however, solve this problem as it is understood on the skeptical reading. There, the issue is one of lacking justification for our beliefs, as Meeker makes clear: "Hume's position certainly seems to entail that we have no evidential backing for our beliefs; thus, no belief is *epistemically justified*" ("Hume," 42). The return to common life by no means resolves this problem of epistemic justification.[24]

The preceding comparison of the skeptical and madness readings of T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) highlights the fact that skepticism and madness share a common descriptor: the skeptic has no "measures of truth and falshood" and the madman has "no means of distinguishing betwixt truth and falshood" (T 1.4.7.8, 1.3.10.9; SBN 268–69, 123). I have been arguing that, despite the wording being nearly identical, the meaning of this descriptor is importantly different in each case. In the case of skepticism, it means that beliefs have no positive epistemic status (in the sense of having evidential backing or some degree of probable truth). In the case of madness, it means that one cannot discern the difference between genuine and counterfeit beliefs. This is not an issue of the justification of belief; rather, it concerns whether or not an idea has even earned the designation of "belief." The difference is subtle, but important.

Meeker emphasizes this difference when, in discussing the skeptical argument that Hume rehearses at T 1.4.1.5–6 (SBN 181–83), he distinguishes the evaluation of a belief *per se* from the evaluation of the cognitive faculty that produced the belief ("Hume," 32). This distinction nicely captures the difference between what having no measures of truth and falsehood means for the skeptic, on one hand,

and for the madman, on the other. For the skeptic, it is an issue of evaluating beliefs *per se* (as justified or unjustified) whereas for the madman, it is strictly an issue of evaluating the sources of belief (as proper or improper, depending on whether the belief arises from a lively imagination or a mad, hyper-lively imagination). Appreciating this distinction shows that what is "cured" at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) is madness, not skepticism. The return to common life exposes the loose fictions and chimeras as the fraudulent beliefs that they are, while it does not pretend to resolve the issue of the justification of beliefs whose force and vivacity derives from present impressions and customary conjunctions with associated ideas. To be sure, Hume's alleged response to skepticism at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) would be unsatisfying, if he were responding to skepticism.[25] The direct upshot of the madness reading is that it dispenses with this unsatisfactory-response-to-skepticism charge; it remains to consider some further support for this reading.

4. Hume's "Only Hope"

In the closing paragraphs of Book 1 of the *Treatise*, Hume is explicit about his aspirations in writing this portion of his most famous work: "For my part, my only hope is, that I may contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge, by giving in some particulars a different turn to the speculations of philosophers, and pointing out to them more distinctly those subjects, where alone they can expect assurance and conviction" (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 273). The phrase "assurance and conviction" re-appears in Hume's characterization of the Pyrrhonian skeptic in the first *Enquiry* as one who "seems, for the time at least, to destroy all assurance and conviction" (EHU 12.22; SBN 159). Thus, in hoping to incite "a different turn" to philosophers' investigations, Hume hopes to encourage philosophers to stop pursuing certain questions because, I maintain, he shows in the series of metaphysical topics investigated in T 1.4 that such pursuits lead only to the destruction of assurance and conviction that defines skepticism. In this section, I substantiate this claim and show that, despite appearances (including Hume's own characterization of T 1.4.1–1.4.6 as a "miscellaneous way of reasoning"), there is a structural unity to T 1.4 through T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) that supports the madness reading of this dramatic passage.[26] In essence, T 1.4 contains a cautionary tale that serves Hume's aspiration to change the direction of philosophical inquiry, with the madness on display at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) representing the climax of this tale. In this respect, there is a method in Hume's madness.

My proposed reading of the bulk of T 1.4 as being structured by Hume's presentation of a series of skeptical arguments in metaphysics that terminates in madness challenges Campbell's assertion that T 1.4 contains a "skeptical development" that culminates in a first-personal confession from Hume of extreme skeptical despair. Campbell defines the skeptical development as "the skeptical portions of Book 1,

in which Hume argues to skeptical conclusions," and regards it as including at least T 1.4.1, 1.4.2, 1.4.4 and 1.4.7.1–8 (Campbell, 130). While I agree with Campbell that Hume argues to skeptical conclusions in these sections, I have argued thus far that the skeptical development does not culminate in a confession of extreme skepticism from Hume at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69).

In this section, I challenge another aspect of Campbell's reading in arguing that Hume presents all of the main skeptical arguments at issue in the skeptical development in the same way, namely, by embodying without endorsing the positions considered in the arguments. The point of proceeding in this way is to showcase how the intensive, "abstruse" investigations in metaphysics pursued by Hume's philosophical predecessors only terminate in a destruction of assurance and conviction. In what follows, I marshal evidence for this claim for the topics investigated in the so-called skeptical development (T 1.4.1, 1.4.2, 1.4.4, and 1.4.7.1–8).

The argument for total skepticism presented at T 1.4.1.5–6 (SBN 181–83) is the most obvious instance of an argument that terminates in a suspension of judgment: "a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence." Campbell, following Garrett, distinguishes the embodiment of a philosophical position from the endorsement of it. While the embodiment of a position involves taking up a positive stance (such as belief) toward the position, endorsement of a position involves taking up a higher-order attitude of approval towards the embodiment of it (Campbell, 110). Clearly, endorsement is a stronger position than embodiment. According to Campbell's "endorsement presumption," "[i]t is reasonable to presume, in the absence of any countervailing evidence, that a philosophical author endorses what is stated in his or her writings" (110). In his recent book in defense of a reading of Hume as an extreme skeptic, Kevin Meeker employs essentially the same methodological principle, which he calls the "Primary Interpretive Principle," according to which "if a text appears to assert X, then one is prima facie justified in interpreting the text as asserting X."[27] Campbell lists several ways that the endorsement presumption can be defeated by evidence that authorial endorsement is absent, the most important of which, for my purposes, is "narrative pretense," in which "an author might employ a narrator persona who endorses, if only temporarily, claims that the author does not accept" (Campbell, 110–11). This, I claim, is precisely what Hume does in the argument for total skepticism.

In the passage immediately following Hume's presentation of the argument, he writes: "Shou'd it here be ask'd me, whether I sincerely assent to this argument, which I seem to take such pains to inculcate, and whether I be really one of those skeptics . . . I shou'd reply, that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I, nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion" (T 1.4.1.7; SBN 183). Here, we have strong evidence that authorial endorsement is absent

and, therefore, that Campbell's endorsement presumption and Meeker's primary interpretive principle are not applicable in this case. Hume does not endorse or assert the truth of total skepticism, but embodies it for the sake of showing how the theory of belief that gives rise to total skepticism is wrong: "If belief, therefore, were a simple act of the thought, without any peculiar manner of conception, or the addition of a force and vivacity, it must infallibly destroy itself, and in every case terminate in a total suspence of judgment" (T 1.4.1.8; SBN 184). Because Hume denies the possibility of a total suspense of judgment, it follows that the "simple act of thought" theory must be wrong. Hume explicitly admits that disproving this theory and substantiating his alternative, "manner of conception" account of belief was his intention in presenting the argument for total skepticism. Robert Fogelin is sympathetic to Hume's own characterization of what he accomplishes at T 1.4.1.5–6 (SBN 181–83), summarizing that accomplishment as follows:

> Hume has, to his satisfaction, eliminated a rival intellectualist theory by presenting a skeptical argument that refutes it, and, beyond this, has shown, again to his satisfaction, that the intellectualist standards are the source of this skeptical argument. Using his own theory, he has given an explanation to how this skeptical impasse necessarily arises when rational principles are relentlessly pursued, and has further shown how the operations of our nonrational faculties provide the only way of avoiding this disaster. (Fogelin, 51)

Against this interpretation, Meeker argues, "if Hume did reject the conclusion of I iv 1 [the argument for total skepticism], then it seems that he would have explicitly said so. Since he did not, it appears that we can regard these passages as properly Humean" ("Hume," 36). Meeker especially emphasizes the fact that Hume finds "no error" in the argument for total skepticism in T 1.4.1.8 (SBN 184). However, this overlooks a crucial point. While it is true that Hume does not reject the conclusion of the argument for total skepticism *if* we begin, as he does in his presentation of the argument, from the premise that belief is an act of thought or cogitation, the point is that Hume rejects this fundamental assumption. Thus, while the argument for total skepticism obviously ends in a suspension of judgment, it begins from a view that is not Hume's. These two features (terminating in suspension of judgment but resulting from positions that are not Hume's) are also present in the discussions in T 1.4.2 and 1.4.4, as I now show.

At the end of his discussion of the belief in body (or external objects) in T 1.4.2, Hume writes: "What then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falshood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief we repose in them?" (T 1.4.2.56; SBN 218). The groundless and extraordinary opinions in question are the contrasting views of the vulgar (the

"popular system") and the philosophers (the "philosophical system") concerning the belief in body. The vulgar are under the "gross illusion" that our resembling perceptions are numerically identical and therefore have a continued existence when we are not perceiving them; the philosophers, while denying such numerical identity and continued existence to perceptions, "have so great a propensity to believe them such, that they arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions, to which they attribute these qualities" (T 1.4.2.56; SBN 218). In other words, philosophers, realizing that perceptions cannot themselves have numerical identity and continued existence, postulate "objects" as distinct from perceptions and attribute the qualities of identity and continued existence to them instead. I am not concerned with the details of each of these positions; for my purposes, it is important to show that T 1.4.2 concludes with a suspension of judgment and that neither of the two competing positions considered in the very lengthy discussion of the belief in body is Hume's position.

Although Hume characterizes the aforementioned rhetorical questions concerning the popular and philosophical beliefs in body as "this skeptical doubt," the position reached at this point is more accurately described as a suspension of judgment given that Hume neither rejects nor endorses either belief. In this sense, there is a destruction of assurance and conviction about the belief in body. Significantly, neither of the belief systems that generates this Pyrrhonian moment is Hume's. In contrasting the views of "the vulgar" and "the philosophers," Hume identifies with neither party. While one might think that Hume would include himself in the latter group, he generally rarely refers to himself when he refers to "philosophers." As William E. Morris observes, "he is referring instead to the philosophical establishment or orthodoxy, with which he almost invariably disagrees."[28] In contrast, Fogelin maintains that "[Hume's] skeptical worries are a consequence of his own philosophizing and . . . his own philosophizing falls under their scope" (83). Accordingly, Hume's discussion of the belief in body "reenacts the mental processes that take us from one standpoint to another," namely, from Hume's implicit faith in the senses to his own skeptical worries about the belief in body (Fogelin, 84). On my account, Hume reenacts the mental processes that take us from the vulgar view to the philosopher's view, neither of which is his own view. Thus, instead of viewing the conclusion of the lengthy, labyrinthine discussion of body in T 1.4.2 as Hume's suspension of judgment—a consequence of his own philosophizing—it is more accurately viewed as the suspension of judgment that results from pitting the ordinary person's belief in body against the philosopher's. This, in turn, can be seen as Hume's attempt to show philosophers that, in investigating the nature of external objects, they cannot expect assurance and conviction.

In T 1.4.4, Hume turns his attention to the nature of secondary qualities, considering two competing accounts. The question at issue is whether secondary

qualities exist in objects or in the mind only; in other words, are secondary qualities properties of external objects, of which we have resembling mental perceptions, or are they only properties of the mind, mental perceptions that resemble nothing "in" the objects? Again, what is important for my purposes is not to engage in a detailed examination of the competing accounts, but to show that the discussion concludes in a suspension of judgment generated from views that are not Hume's. In the last paragraph of T 1.4.4, Hume characterizes the conflict between the two competing positions concerning the nature of secondary qualities as "a direct and total opposition betwixt our reason and our senses" (T 1.4.4.15; SBN 231).

The conflict between our reason and our senses can be summarized as follows. When we reason from cause and effect, we conclude that secondary qualities are qualities of the mind only, resembling nothing in objects, for we otherwise could not account for variations in our impressions of the same object. In other words, if we conceived of our sensory impressions as resembling "effects" of certain properties residing in the objects, then the same object could easily be shown to possess contradictory properties at the same time. However, as Hume shows in an extended, rather abstract, argument, if secondary qualities are qualities of the mind only, then there is nothing that has continued and independent existence; external objects are "utterly annihilate[d]" (T 1.4.4.6; SBN 228). If instead of reason we rely on our senses, then we will believe in the continued and independent existence of body. But, if we do so (as Hume thinks we simply cannot avoid doing), then secondary qualities must be qualities in external objects (because, as indicated above, otherwise external objects do not exist). If they are qualities of external objects, however, then we cannot account for variations in our impressions of such objects. The conflict between our reason and our senses is therefore the following: if secondary qualities exist only in the mind, then objects are annihilated; if secondary qualities exist in objects, then we cannot account for obvious variations in our impressions of these objects. Reason and the senses provide us with conflicting accounts, neither of which is justified; to this extent, T 1.4.4 concludes in a total suspension of judgment.

As in the discussion of the belief in body, the two competing accounts of secondary qualities—"in" objects or "in" the mind—represent the vulgar position and the philosopher's position, respectively. Hume distances himself from the vulgar position when he notes an obvious problem with it deriving from "the variations of those impressions, even while the external object, to all appearance, continues the same" (T 1.4.4.3; SBN 226). Several examples are listed: "A man in a malady feels a disagreeable taste in meats, which before pleas'd him the most"; "That seems bitter to one, which is sweet to another"; "Fire also communicates the sensation of pleasure at one distance, and that of pain at another" (T 1.4.4.3; SBN 226).[29] These examples are intended to show that secondary qualities cannot inhere in external objects, for otherwise we would be forced to affirm that the meat

is both unappetizing and tasty, that the same food is both bitter and sweet, that the fire is both pleasantly warm and painfully hot, and so on. Of all the arguments offered in favor of the opposing position that secondary qualities are only in the mind, Hume admits to finding the argument based on the variability of perception to be the strongest.

At the same time, Hume finds the philosopher's position to be deeply problematic insofar as it effectively annihilates primary qualities and therewith any objects possessing either primary or secondary qualities. Given that "the notion of an independent and continu'd existence . . . has taken such deep root in the imagination, that 'tis impossible ever to eradicate it" (T 1.4.2.51; SBN 214), Hume cannot accept the philosopher's position. Further evidence of Hume distancing himself from the philosopher's position is the fact that he refers to it as the view of "modern philosophers" and to modern philosophy as "that philosophy" (T 1.4.4.3; SBN 226). As Garrett observes, "Hume himself . . . does not ever assert the *truth* of the modern philosophers' conclusion about the unreality of secondary qualities. Instead, he restricts himself to reporting it as *their* conclusion."[30] In a similar interpretive vein, Fogelin writes that, for Hume, "the views of ancient philosophers on these topics [namely, material substance and the primary/secondary quality distinction] are ridiculous; the views of modern philosophers, no better" (97).[31] Thus, the conflict between reason and the senses that Hume summarizes in the final paragraph of T 1.4.4 is another example of a suspension of judgment generated from views that are not his own. In the contest between the view that secondary qualities reside "in" objects and the view that they reside only "in" the mind, one cannot expect assurance and conviction, but only an unresolved "direct and total opposition." All the more reason for philosophers to give a different turn to their speculations.

While I agree with Campbell that Hume argues to skeptical conclusions in T 1.4.1, 1.4.2, and 1.4.4, I have tried to show that, in each case, the skeptical conclusion results from views that Hume embodies under narrative pretense, but does not endorse. Each of these episodes in the so-called skeptical development supports Hume's overarching mission to change the direction of philosophy by showing philosophers where their efforts to attain assurance and conviction have been—and will continue to be—unsatisfied. Campbell also includes T 1.4.7.1–8 as part of the skeptical development, and this stretch of text contains a "dangerous dilemma" that has received significant attention in the literature. My aim in briefly evaluating the dilemma is to show that, along with T 1.4.1, 1.4.2, and 1.4.4, it plays a role in the cautionary tale that unifies the greater part of T 1.4.

According to Hume, the dangerous dilemma forces us to choose between endorsing "every trivial suggestion of the fancy" or adhering, instead, to "the general and more establish'd properties of the imagination." While the former option leads to so many "errors, absurdities, and obscurities" that we become "asham'd of our

credulity," the latter leads to the self-subversion of the understanding outlined in the extended skeptical argument at T 1.4.1.5–6 (SBN 183), whose terminus is the "total extinction of belief and evidence" (T 1.4.7.6–7; SBN 267–68). Hume's claim that the dilemma leaves us forced to choose between "a false reason and none at all" and his confessional conclusion that, "for my part, I know not what ought to be done in the present case" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 268) suggest that this is a suspension of judgment that, unlike those featured in T 1.4.1, 1.4.2, and 1.4.4, is *his own* suspension of judgment.

Nevertheless, there are two compelling reasons to think that the dangerous dilemma is not Hume's dilemma and, by extension, that the suspension of judgment that results from it is not Hume's. First, in explaining the "general and more establish'd properties" horn of the dilemma, Hume explicitly cites the argument for total skepticism presented in T 1.4.1: "For I have already shown, that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68). As noted above, Hume makes clear in the paragraphs immediately following his presentation of this skeptical argument that the argument's success hinges upon a theory of belief that he rejects: "If belief, therefore, were a simple act of the thought, without any peculiar manner of conception, or the addition of a force and vivacity, it must infallibly destroy itself, and in every case terminate in a total suspence of judgment" (T 1.4.1.8; SBN 184). As Morris argues,

> it is reasonable to read the problematic passage [T 1.4.1.6; SBN 183]...as one where Hume is adopting the persona of a proponent of the view he is criticizing. But this means that we should understand the "total extinction of belief and evidence" as a skeptical consequence of a view Hume rejects, not as something his own account implies. (105)

The fact that one horn of the dangerous dilemma stems from a view that Hume explicitly rejects suggests that the dangerous dilemma is not a dilemma for Hume.

A second reason for concluding that the dilemma is not Hume's dilemma—and which also sheds light on who the targets of the dilemma are—involves the distinction between trivial and permanent qualities of the imagination drawn in the opening paragraph of T 1.4.4. As Morris observes, the distinction between the "trivial" and "establish'd" qualities of the imagination that defines the alternatives of the dangerous dilemma maps onto the distinction drawn at T 1.4.4.1 (SBN 225) between "changeable, weak, and irregular" and "permanent, irresistible, and universal" principles (Morris, 100). At T 1.4.4.2 (SBN 226), Hume identifies the ancient philosophers—specifically, in their beliefs concerning substance, accident, substantial forms, and occult qualities—as unwitting followers of the "changeable,

weak, and irregular" principles of imagination. The connection between these principles and the "trivial suggestion[s] of the fancy" horn of the dangerous dilemma is straightforward, for Hume criticizes the ancient philosophers for being "guided by every trivial propensity of the imagination" (T 1.4.3.11; SBN 224). According to Hume, modern philosophers claim to avoid the errors of the ancients by erecting their philosophical systems on the foundation of the "permanent, irresistible, and universal" principles. It is not difficult to discern how this category maps onto the "general and more establish'd properties of the imagination" alternative of the dangerous dilemma.

The dangerous dilemma is, in essence, a conflict between the principles of ancient philosophers and modern philosophers, neither of which Hume subscribes to. Indeed, when Hume claims that modern philosophers are (or claim to be) guided by the imagination's permanent principles, he is not including himself among them. As noted above, Hume's criticisms of "modern philosophy" and of "modern philosophers" in general are not meant to apply to his own views. While Morris provides a more comprehensive account of how the so-called modern philosophers are the intended targets of the dangerous dilemma, it is sufficient for my purposes to have given reasons to think that the dilemma is not Hume's dilemma and, therefore, that the suspension of judgment with which it concludes ("I know not what ought to be done") is not Hume's.[32] The dangerous dilemma thus represents another chapter in the cautionary tale, marked by the distinguishing features of a suspension of judgment generated from views that are not Hume's own.[33]

A significant portion of T 1.4 focuses on topics in metaphysics, including the natures of external objects, substance, secondary qualities, and personal identity. The convoluted, abstract kind of thinking involved in such investigations and the suspensions of judgment that Hume shows to result from many of them are, I contend, meant to be included among the "reflections very refin'd and metaphysical" that are identified as the source of his overheated, overwrought disposition at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69). While this passage does mark a culmination, I have tried to show that it is not a *skeptical* culmination. Consider the questions that Hume poses in the climactic passage at issue: "Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? and on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me?" Unlike the skeptical conclusions of the discussions of body, secondary qualities, and the dangerous dilemma, which all feature a suspension of judgment between two clearly competing positions, the series of questions posed at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) is frenzied, unfocused, and raving, without obvious connection to the metaphysical investigations just completed.

By showing that the traditional metaphysical speculations of his philosophical predecessors fail to result in assurance and conviction, and that madness is

the ultimate psychological price of persistent engagement in such investigations, Hume is trying to direct philosophers' future efforts elsewhere. In Books 2 and 3 of the *Treatise*, Hume does just that, helping to explain why, as Ribeiro observes, "Hume does not use the term 'skeptic' *or any related locution*, *even once*, in either Book 2 or Book 3" (Ribeiro, 218). While the madness reading can account for this fact about Books 2 and 3, the skeptical reading has a comparatively difficult time doing so, as Fogelin admits: "I agree that the transition from part 4 of book 1 to the opening part of book 2 is at least as surprising as the transition from part 3 to part 4 in book 1. The sudden appearance of radical skepticism and its sudden disappearance are equally perplexing" (137). Campbell recognizes the same problem: "If Hume has arrived at a skeptical dead-end, it is not clear how he can, or why he would, continue on" (119). The transition from Book 1 to Book 2 need not be perplexing if the method in Hume's "madness" is borne in mind, for it allows us to see Books 2 and 3 as Hume's attempt to effect the very turn in philosophy he aspires to incite by means of his cautionary tale at the end of Book 1.

Unlike the various stages of the skeptical development that feature Hume's embodiment without endorsement of various positions, Hume endorses the turn away from traditional metaphysical speculation in Books 2 and 3. With T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) understood as an episode of madness, and the so-called skeptical development understood as a series of discussions in metaphysics designed to show that such investigations lead us away from assurance and conviction, T 1.4 is properly seen as containing a cautionary tale against overindulging in traditional metaphysics, one whose climax is achieved, rather fittingly, in a fever pitch of madness. It is a tale that serves Hume's explicitly stated "only hope" and main ambition in pursuing a science of human nature.

5. Concluding Remarks

I have attempted to account for the widely recognized deeply unsatisfying nature of Hume's response to skepticism at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) by arguing that Hume is not there responding to skepticism. Contrary to the standard skeptical reading, the passage at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) does not constitute a "skeptical culmination" of a series of skeptical arguments.[34] When this passage is properly viewed as an exhibition of madness, Hume's suggested natural cure of socializing and backgammon is perfectly adequate, and does not constitute a non-response to skepticism, as many commentators have assumed. Whether or not Hume responds (or attempts to respond) to skepticism in the few remaining paragraphs after T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) is a topic that lies beyond the scope of this investigation.

One might object that my claim that the major arguments contained in the skeptical development (using Campbell's conception of this term) terminate in suspensions of judgment contradicts Hume's denial of the very possibility of a total

suspense of judgment: "Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel" (T 1.4.1.7; SBN 183). In light of Hume's claim, one might think that it would be inconsistent for him to derive a suspension of judgment from any argument, even if it were only after embodying without endorsing the positions that lead to such a conclusion. However, such an objection fails to take into account the difference between two varieties of suspending judgment: momentary and enduring, a difference that is crucial for Hume.

Consider the passage in which Hume denies the possibility of "total" skepticism (T 1.4.1.7; SBN 183). As noted above, upon presenting the argument for total skepticism, Hume immediately anticipates the question of whether he endorses the argument and therefore is himself a total skeptic: "I shou'd reply, that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I, nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion." As O. A. Johnson observes, these two qualifying adverbs are important for understanding Hume's rejection of total skepticism:

> Of the two, the adverb "constantly" requires no comment; its meaning is clear. "Sincerely," on the other hand, is bothersome. . . . I suggest that Hume was attempting to convey a different meaning by the word "sincerely" than we normally understand now. What he had in mind is approximately what we have in mind today when we use the word "seriously."[35]

In other words, when Hume rejects the possibility of total skepticism, he is rejecting the idea that one could suspend judgment in any enduring ("constant") way and that one could seriously ("sincerely") attempt to live in that manner. This idea is reinforced in the first *Enquiry* when he writes, "[a]nd though a Pyrrhonian may throw himself or others into a *momentary* amazement and confusion by his profound reasonings; the first and most trivial event in life will put to flight all his doubts and scruples" (EHU 12.23, SBN 159–60, emphasis added). Because Hume's denial of the possibility of suspending judgment targets only the enduring sort, it is not inconsistent for him to be illustrating, for purposes of his cautionary tale in T 1.4, the momentary variety.

NOTES

1 All references to Hume's *Treatise* are given in parentheses to two editions: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Norton and Norton, hereafter cited in the text as "T" followed by Book, part, section, and paragraph number, and *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, cited in the text as "SBN" followed by the page number..

2 Ribeiro, "Hume's Changing Views," 218.

3 Durland, "Extreme Skepticism and Commitment," 67.

4 All references to Hume's first *Enquiry* are given in parentheses to two editions: *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Beauchamp, hereafter cited in the text as "EHU" followed by section and paragraph number, and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, hereafter cited in the text as "SBN" followed by page numbers.

5 While a significant portion of T 1.4 is devoted to topics in metaphysics, I do not mean to imply that it deals *only* with metaphysical issues. Thanks to an anonymous referee for urging me to clarify this point.

6 In pitting the skeptical reading of T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) against my alternative "madness" reading, I do not mean to suggest that there are only two possible readings of this passage. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to be clearer on this point.) To borrow Stephen Campbell's terminology, other readings of this passage include: a "supposition" reading, according to which Hume would be assuming a position or claim as true in order to draw out its implications; a "deception" reading, according to which Hume would be pretending to endorse a position in order to deceive his readers; a "satirical pretense" reading, according to which Hume feigns endorsement of a position in order to ridicule it; and a "narrative pretense" reading, according to which Hume would be employing a narrator persona who endorses claims that Hume himself rejects. Campbell, "The Surprise Twist in Hume's *Treatise*," 110–11. However, my interest in this paper is restricted to whether or not skepticism is the principal issue in the dramatic passage in question. The aforementioned possible readings are concerned with the issue of Hume's motivation in expressing skepticism at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69); my overall contention is that skepticism is not the principal issue in this passage. To be clear, by "the skeptical reading," I mean to include any reading of T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) as an expression of skepticism, regardless of Hume's motivation for such expression.

7 Fogelin, *Hume's Skeptical Crisis*; Collier, "Two Puzzles in Hume's Epistemology," 307; Allison, "Hume's Philosophical Insouciance," 318.

8 For example, Durland refers to Hume's skepticism at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) as "extreme" or "radical" (65–66, 69); Ribeiro notes from the beginning of his paper that he relies on "a mostly unexplicated conception of (radical, excessive, Pyrrhonian) 'scepticism,' as it functions in Hume's philosophy—for better or worse, Hume often did the same" (233n2); and Campbell characterizes T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) as "an almost confessional description of radical skeptical despair," featuring Hume in an "extreme skeptical mood" ("The Surprise Twist in Hume's *Treatise*," 103, 124).

9 See T 1.4.1.7 (SBN 183) and EHU 12.24 (SBN 161).

10 This debate over historical accuracy is discussed in Palkoska, "Are Humean Beliefs Pyrrhonian Appearances?" 185, and in Garrett, "Small Tincture," 77.

11 Annas, "Hume and Ancient Scepticism," 279.

12 Thanks to an anonymous conference referee for bringing this important point to my attention.

13 Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me to distinguish the sense(s) of skepticism present in this passage. At T 1.4.1.9 (SBN 185), Hume shows that the kind of skepticism with which the argument for total skepticism at T 1.4.1.5–6 (SBN 181–83) is concerned is the cessation of belief: "'Tis therefore demanded, *How it happens, that even after all we retain a degree of belief, which is sufficient for our purpose, either in philosophy or common life?*" As I shall argue, this is not the only kind of skepticism at issue at T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69).

14 Garrett, *Hume*, 227–28.

15 Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this point. On the skeptical reading, Hume is not merely ready to become an extreme practicing skeptic; he *is* one.

16 Meeker, "Hume," 42.

17 In referring to the probability of beliefs (from nearly-zero to exceedingly high), I assume a non-Bayesian notion of probability throughout this paper. Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting that I clarify this point in order to prevent misunderstanding.

18 As Garrett succinctly puts the point, "If lively ideas are present, for Hume, then belief is present" (Garrett, "Small Tincture," 77).

19 Owen, *Hume's Reason*, 178, emphasis added.

20 Thanks to an anonymous *Hume Studies* referee for raising this objection.

21 While we can certainly talk about the differences between serious convictions and poetical enthusiasms in the abstract when we are not mad, the point is that we cannot tell the difference between the two when we ourselves are afflicted with madness. In such a condition, we only recognize one category of ideas, namely, exceedingly vivid and intense ideas.

22 For example, in his discussion of the belief in body, Hume observes: "An easy transition or passage of the imagination, along the ideas of these different and interrupted perceptions, *is almost the same disposition of mind* with that in which we consider one constant and uninterrupted perception. 'Tis therefore very natural for us to mistake the one for the other" (T 1.4.2.35; SBN 204, emphasis added). Hume emphasizes that there are two resemblances at issue here, one between perceptions (a rapid succession of different and interrupted perceptions resembles one constant and uninterrupted perception) and one between the mind's disposition when it surveys a rapid succession of interrupted perceptions and when it surveys an uninterrupted, identical object. On account of resemblance, we conflate both the perceptions themselves and the actions of the mind involved in each case. Hume makes a similar observation about the power of resemblance in his discussion of the belief in personal identity: "That action of the imagination, by which we consider the uninterrupted and invariable object, and that by which we reflect on the succession of related objects, are almost the same to the feeling, nor is there much more effort of thought requir'd in the latter case than in the former" (T 1.4.6.6; SBN 253–54).

23 Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy*, 36.

24 Of course, this does not preclude the possibility that Hume responds to skepticism (specifically concerning the lack of evidential grounds for any of our beliefs) in the

few remaining paragraphs following T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269). In this paper, my purpose is limited to determining if Hume is responding to skepticism at T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269).

25 Unlike Ribeiro and Durland, Ira Singer recognizes, as I do, that T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269) is not intended as a response to skepticism: "So the 'back-gammon passage' does not refute skepticism; and Hume does not *intend* for it to refute skepticism" ("Hume's Extreme Skepticism," 607). Still, the difference between my account and Singer's is that Singer adopts the standard view of T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) as an "involved personal experience of a skeptical crisis" (596). His point in saying that the back-gammon passage is not intended as a response to skepticism is to suggest that this response comes sometime after T 1.4.7.9 (SBN 269), a claim that my account does not deny.

26 Thanks to an anonymous *Hume Studies* referee for helping me to see that it is better to understand the unified structure of T 1.4 (for which I argue in section 4 of this paper) as support for the madness reading, rather than the other way around.

27 Meeker, *Hume's Radical Scepticism*, 5.

28 Morris, "Hume's Conclusion," 100.

29 As Norton and Norton point out, these examples were widely used and found in Malebranche, Berkeley, Locke, and Sextus Empiricus (480).

30 Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 218.

31 Although Fogelin claims that T 1.4.4 concludes "on a Pyrrhonian note of the same tenor as the conclusion of section 2," the difference between my view and his is that, in my view, both T 1.4.2 and T 1.4.4 conclude in Pyrrhonian moments generated from views that are not Hume's own (Fogelin, 99). Fogelin appears to think that this is true of T 1.4.4, but not T 1.4.2.

32 On this point, I go against the general interpretive grain, according to which the dangerous dilemma is indeed a dilemma for Hume. For a *very* comprehensive consideration of the various attempts that commentators have made to resolve the dilemma, see Durland, "Extreme Skepticism and Commitment." There, Durland explores in detail three basic approaches to resolution: a "No-Hume" strategy, according to which Hume endorses nothing in the *Treatise* and therefore a tension between his doubts and commitments never arises; a "Single-Hume" approach that repurposes or isolates either Hume's doubts or his commitments so that he speaks with one consistent voice throughout the *Treatise*; and a "Several-Humes" strategy that sees Hume as speaking in multiple voices, the tension between which is not as damaging as it seems (Durland, 67–68). After surveying the many attempts that have been made using these strategies, Durland concludes that the dangerous dilemma *is* a dilemma for Hume and, moreover, one that cannot finally be resolved: "We can always hope that further examination of the *Treatise* will lead to a more satisfying resolution of the opposing elements in his thinking, but the nature and the depth of the conflict make this appear naive" (90).

33 While I have been pressing for the conclusion that Hume's discussions of various metaphysical questions in T 1.4 conclude in suspensions of judgment that are not his own, it is not essential to the success of my overall argument that they are not Hume's personal suspensions. Even if they are Hume's suspensions, it still remains the case that he wants to show philosophers where they can expect assurance and conviction (to which he gives the negative answer: *not* in traditional investigations in metaphysics).

Nevertheless, I do not think that the suspensions of judgment are Hume's own and I have tried to substantiate this claim. The controversial and more important claim that I am making is that T 1.4.7.8 (SBN 268–69) is an episode of madness, not suspending judgment.

34 Campbell characterizes T 1.4.7.1–8 (but especially paragraph 8) in just this way (125).

35 Johnson, "Hume's 'True' Scepticism," 214.

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