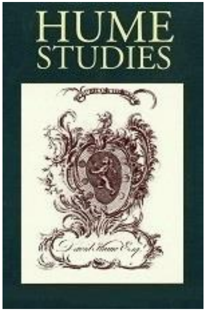

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Hume's Purely Practical Response to Philosophical Skepticism

NATHAN I. SASSER

Abstract: In this paper, I argue that Hume's response to his skeptical problem is purely practical. First, I argue that Hume's terminology of "philosophy" is the textual key to identifying his evaluations of beliefs from that standpoint which is normative for the sciences. Second, I reexamine the crisis of *Treatise* 1.4.7 (SBN 263–274) in the light of "philosophy." Hume faces a "life-or-philosophy" dilemma: due to his skeptical arguments, practically indispensable core beliefs of common life and science are not philosophically acceptable. The Title Principle is not a philosophical norm but rather subordinates philosophical norms to practical interests. Third, I explain Hume's practical justification for a moderate pursuit of philosophy. He has purely practical reasons for ignoring the skeptical demands of philosophy, and purely practical reasons for following philosophy in his constructive scientific research.

Introduction

In recent years several scholars have debated whether Hume's response to skepticism in *Treatise* 1.4.7 is a practical solution, an epistemic solution, or both. Especially in the wake of Michael Ridge's "Epistemology Moralized" (2003), many readily admit that Hume emphasizes the agreeability and usefulness of forming beliefs in accordance with what Don Garrett has dubbed the Title Principle.[1] In the

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Nathan I. Sasser, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Humanities Department, Greenville Technical College, P.O. Box 5616, Greenville, SC 29606.
Email: Nathan.Sasser@gvltec.edu

midst of his complex response to the skeptical dilemma, Hume says that "Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us" (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270).[2] In Hume's main skeptical arguments, reason is not lively and does not mix itself with some propensity. So these skeptical arguments have no title to operate upon us. According to one important line of interpretation, Hume is giving a practical and epistemic solution to his skeptical difficulties: beliefs formed in accordance with the Title Principle are epistemologically justified just because they are useful or agreeable to ourselves or others (that is, practically justified).[3] On this practical-epistemic reading, epistemic justification is in some sense dependent upon practical justification. While the practical-epistemic reading makes excellent sense out of much of the textual data, Hsueh Qu argues that it collapses the distinction between epistemic and moral justification—a distinction which is well-grounded in the *Treatise*.[4] Garrett, on the other hand, argues that in *Treatise* 1.4.7, Hume's defense of the epistemic justification of beliefs formed in accordance with the Title Principle is purely epistemic.[5] It does not rest on agreeability and usefulness but on the alethic considerations of truth and probable truth; the practical benefits of following the Title Principle are real but epistemologically incidental. This sort of reading explains how Hume moves on with science and avoids conflating morality with epistemology. However, it does not give a satisfying explanation of why Hume lays so much stress on practical rather than alethic considerations in the latter half of *Treatise* 1.4.7.

In this paper, I argue that Hume's response to his skeptical problem is neither practical-epistemic nor purely epistemic, but purely practical. First, I suggest that we momentarily suspend questions about his "epistemology" and first attend to the terms in which he himself evaluates beliefs. I argue that Hume's terminology of "philosophy" is the textual key to identifying his evaluations of beliefs from that standpoint which is normative for the sciences.[6] Second, I reexamine the crisis of *Treatise* 1.4.7 (SBN 263–74) in the light of "philosophy." Hume faces a "life-or-philosophy" dilemma: due to his skeptical arguments, practically indispensable core beliefs of common life and science are not philosophically acceptable.[7] The Title Principle is not a philosophical norm but rather subordinates philosophical norms to practical interests.[8] Third, I explain Hume's practical justification for a moderate pursuit of philosophy. He has purely practical reasons for ignoring the skeptical demands of philosophy, and purely practical reasons for following philosophy in his constructive scientific research.

This purely practical reading of Hume's response to skepticism has at least three advantages over its competitors. First, since it starts from Hume's own terminology of "philosophy" rather than the anachronistic terminology of "epistemology," it is more directly grounded in the text. Second, like the practical-epistemic readings, it makes better sense than the purely epistemic reading out of Hume's emphasis on agreeability and usefulness in *Treatise* 1.4.7. Third, unlike practical-epistemic readings, the purely practical reading maintains his distinction between moral norms and norms that control scientific inquiry.

1. "Philosophy" and the Evaluation of Belief

In this section, I survey Hume's usage of the term "philosophy" and its cognates in the *Treatise* (primarily Book 1) in order to determine its meaning. I find that Hume uses "philosophy" to refer to a normative method for pursuing the special sciences.[9] I also note several of the rules which belong to this normative method.

Humean "philosophy," as I construe it, is consistent with contemporaneous conceptions of philosophy. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was no sharp distinction between philosophy and science.[10] *Scientia* referred to a reasoned, systematic body of knowledge, which was also the goal of philosophy. Thus the two terms were often used interchangeably. Special sciences such as physics and chemistry were placed under the category of natural (or experimental) philosophy. Philosophy was not distinguished by its subject matter, which was expansive enough to include God, humanity, and the natural world, but by its rational, systematic method of inquiry. James Harris writes that in the eighteenth century, "To be a philosopher . . . was to approach a subject, any subject, in a careful, analytical, and inductive manner, and to derive from one's inquiries maximally general explanatory principles."[11] It was possible however for the actual practice of philosophy to fall short of its normative definition. For example, John Locke writes that "Philosophy . . . is nothing but the true Knowledge of Things."[12] In actual practice, the "frivolous use of uncouth, affected, or unintelligible Terms" in "the Sciences" has made philosophy unwelcome in "well-bred Company, and polite Conversation." Locke aspires to remove "some of the Rubbish" that bad philosophy has put "in the way to Knowledge"—thus helping philosophy live up to its own normative ideal.

1.1. Hume Endorses "Philosophy" in the Context of the Sciences

Throughout the *Treatise*, Hume refers to "philosophy" and "the philosophers" in two distinct ways: philosophy in principle and philosophy in actual practice. The distinction between philosophy *de jure* and philosophy *de facto* is apparent in the opening paragraph of the *Treatise*, where he notes that the obvious defects of "the systems of the most eminent philosophers . . .seem to have drawn disgrace upon philosophy itself" (T Intro. 1; SBN xiii). Hume's remarks about actual philosophers and their theories can be laudatory, neutral, or critical. On the one hand, for example, he refers to George Berkeley and to John Locke as each "a great philosopher" in the course of appropriating some of their insights (T 1.1.7.1, 1.2.3.7; SBN 17, 35).

On the other hand, he criticizes ancient and modern philosophers (T 1.4.3–4; SBN 219–31). But to speak positively or critically of particular philosophers or bits of philosophy is entirely different from discussing "philosophy itself," philosophy *de jure*. When Hume talks about "the philosophers" and "philosophy" in principle, he always aligns himself with it and endorses it as dictating the proper way to conduct science.

To begin with, Hume's very pursuit of the "science of man" entails his endorsement of—his submission to—philosophy as a normative method. Hume can describe the project of the *Treatise* either as "An attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects" (subtitle) or as "the application of experimental philosophy to moral subjects" (T Intro. 7; SBN xvi–xvii). If these two descriptions are synonymous, then "philosophy" is a "method of reasoning." Furthermore, the relationship of philosophy to the particular arts and sciences is like the relationship of a king to his subjects: its "sovereign authority ought every where to be acknowledg'd" (T 1.4.5.34; SBN 250). Hume couples "philosophy and the sciences" in the first sentence of the *Treatise* (T Intro. 1; SBN xiii). Just as he can speak of "science" in the singular as well as of its particular branches, "the sciences," (for example, the science of man), so also Hume can speak of "philosophy" and its particular branches, such as natural philosophy and moral philosophy.[13] He can variously describe his project both as a branch of science ("the science of man") and as a branch of philosophy (specifically, "moral philosophy") (T Intro. 10; SBN xviii–xix).[14] He refers to the pursuit of the special sciences as "philosophical researches" (T Intro. 6; SBN xvi). I take it that "philosophy" and "science" are often coextensive if not synonymous terms for Hume. "Philosophy" in general refers to a method of scientific inquiry governed by a set of normative principles.[15] The particular branches of philosophy (or science) apply this method to different subject matter. Insofar as he participates in the sciences at all, Hume acknowledges the "sovereign authority" of philosophy, and endorses its norms.

Hume's major point in the "Introduction" to the *Treatise* is to defend philosophy as a method and to announce his commitment to it in the development of the science of man. Many people, says Hume, claim that "the present imperfect condition of the sciences" constitutes grounds for rejecting philosophy altogether (T Intro. 1–3; SBN xiii–xv). But Hume says he is doubling down on "abstruse," painstaking reasoning in "the philosophy I am going to unfold" (T Intro. 3; SBN xiv–xv).

His renewed commitment to the normative method of philosophy (that is, of science) has three aspects. First, he hopes to reform the special sciences by starting with an investigation of the human mind itself, which has foundational significance for them all (T Intro. 4, 7; SBN xv, xvi–xvii). Second, Hume aims to reform the foundational science of man through a methodological commitment to the authority of observation: "the only solid foundation we can give to [the science of man] must be laid on experience and observation" (T Intro. 7; SBN xvi–xvii).

Third, Hume lays down methodological strictures concerning the formulation of general laws. On the one hand, "we must endeavor to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes" (T Intro. 8; SBN xvii). But on the other hand, "any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical" (T Intro. 8; SBN xvii). The most general causal principles we can ever hope to discover will still express metaphysically contingent relationships. When "we have arriv'd at the utmost extent of human reason" we still "can give no reason for our most general and most refin'd principles, besides our experience of their reality" (T Intro. 9; SBN xvii–xviii).

Hume never retracts his endorsement of philosophy as normative for the sciences. Philosophy is not one method among others for pursuing the special sciences; it is the only proper method. The only alternative method of positive belief-formation and theory construction that Hume mentions is superstition (T 1.4.7.13; SBN 271–72), and this he categorically rejects.[16]

1.2. "Philosophy" Is Governed by Doxastic Norms

Throughout Book 1 of the *Treatise* Hume indicates many normative principles that govern philosophy. These principles all govern our doxastic activities, those activities related to belief-formation. My aim in this subsection is to draw attention to the many important texts where these doxastic norms are directly described in terms of "philosophy." These passages corroborate my claim that "philosophy" is the terminological key to identifying Hume's normative judgments in the context of scientific inquiry. I do not however aim to catalogue every such norm that Hume implicitly or explicitly endorses, or give a comprehensive account of his methodology.

As we have seen, from the first sentence of the "Introduction," "philosophy" and its methodological norms are in view. In this context Hume lays down the authority of observation and rules out the postulation of objective necessary connections. He also says that to accept propositions without sufficient evidence, to deduce invalid consequences, or to espouse incoherent theories all draw "disgrace upon philosophy," presumably because these actions violate its norms (T Intro. 1; SBN xiii).

The faculty of reason is essential to philosophy. Philosophy brings questions "before the tribunal of human reason" (T Intro. 1; SBN xiii). To reject all refined and elaborate reasoning is to "cut off entirely all science and philosophy" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68). Philosophers disapprove of maxims which are contrary to reason (T 1.3.9.19; SBN 117).[17]

Treatise 1.3.13, "Of unphilosophical probability," describes four kinds of probabilistic belief-formation processes that do not obtain the sanction of the philosophers (T 1.3.13.1; SBN 143). These unphilosophical forms of probability are contrasted with the probabilistic belief-forming processes which "are receiv'd by philosophers, and allow'd to be reasonable foundations of belief and opinion" (T 1.3.13.1; SBN 143). These approved forms of probability are those "which are deriv'd from an *imperfect* experience and from *contrary* causes," as well as probability arising from analogy (T 1.3.12.25; SBN 142). The "Rules by which to judge of causes and effects" (T 1.3.15; SBN 173—176) also belong to Hume's "philosophy." The fourth rule "is the source of most of our philosophical reasonings" (T 1.3.15.4; SBN 173). In contrast to the baroque systems of "Our scholastic head-pieces and logicians," Hume gives this compact set of rules "to direct our judgment, in philosophy," both moral and natural (T 1.3.15.11; SBN 175).

In a passage of programmatic significance, Hume distinguishes between principles of the imagination which "are receiv'd by philosophy" and those which are "rejected" by philosophy" (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225–26). Philosophy approves of those principles of the imagination which are "permanent, irresistible, and universal," and disapproves of those which are "changeable, weak, and irregular" (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225–26). In the next paragraph Hume characterizes philosophically approved principles as "solid, permanent, and consistent" (T 1.4.4.2; SBN 226). He gives as an example of an approved principle "the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes" (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225–26). He gives as an example of a "trivial propensity of the imagination" which philosophy condemns the propensity to project internal emotions on external objects (T 1.4.3.11; SBN 224–25).

Hume identifies several more or less miscellaneous norms of philosophy simply in passing. It is the duty of philosophers to clarify obscure ideas (T 1.3.1.7; SBN 72–73).[18] Philosophers ought to define their terms as clearly and precisely as possible—but no more than is possible (T 1.3.7.7; SBN 628–29).[19] Philosophers should be slow to accept new hypotheses (T 1.3.9.1; SBN 106–107).[20] They disapprove of beliefs which have been formed through education, that is, through the mere brute force of repetition (T 1.3.9.19, 1.3.10.1; SBN 117, 118).[21] True philosophy does not predicate qualities of objects with which those qualities are incompatible (T 1.3.14.31; SBN 169–70).[22] True philosophy involves correcting our propensity to conceptual confusion (T 1.4.6.6; SBN 253–55).[23] True philosophers do not successively assent to contradictory principles (T 1.4.7.4; SBN 265–66).[24]

While Hume is often explicit about what the norms of philosophy are, he does not explicitly reflect on the concept of philosophical normativity; that is, he does not explicitly take up the question of what makes those norms and not others the correct philosophical norms. It is clear, however, that the norms of philosophy are distinct from prudential and moral norms. An action is prudent if it advances our own long-term self-interest. Morally, Hume approves of qualities which are immediately agreeable or useful to their possessors or to others (T 3.3.1.30, EPM 9.1; SBN 590–91, 268).[25] Philosophy does not evaluate beliefs or belief-forming processes on the basis of their agreeability or utility, either for oneself or others.[26] In fact, Hume says that in "philosophical debates" it is highly "blameable" to reject a claim because of its allegedly "dangerous," immoral, or irreligious consequences (T 2.3.2.3; SBN 409).[27] So philosophical justification is not, for Hume, dependent upon agreeability and utility.

1.3. The Advantages of "Philosophy"

There are advantages to suspending talk of Hume's "epistemic" norms and instead speaking of his philosophical norms. The first and most obvious reason is that the word "epistemology" was not invented until the nineteenth century; "philosophy" is on the face of the text. Second, Hume's "philosophy" seems to do most of the work that interpreters attribute to his epistemology. When interpreters ask, for example, whether Hume regards some belief as epistemologically justified, they are asking whether Hume thinks that a philosopher or scientist, considered as such, ought to hold that belief, or whether it violates the rules of sound theorizing. But Hume already has a consistent terminology for talking about these kinds of judgments. Introducing "epistemology" is unnecessary and runs the risk of importing foreign conceptual baggage.

Third, by talking about "philosophy" we can give an account of Hume's skepticism and doxastic judgments without having to determine the nature of his "epistemology." The only way to identify Hume's account of "epistemic justification" (if he has one) is to look for the concept in his corpus, lurking there under a different name. But since the nature of epistemic justification is a matter of ongoing debate, there is no consensus about what exactly it is we should be looking for in Hume's corpus. The best we can do is to identify in Hume a notion that bears a family resemblance to the cluster of concepts that contemporary philosophers talk about when they talk about epistemic justification. If instead we ask whether or not Hume is a "philosophical" skeptic about core beliefs, we have much more hope of settling the question with direct textual evidence. We may then go back and ask how Hume's philosophical norms relate to our own conceptions of epistemology.

One might question whether we can dispense so easily with talk of Hume's epistemology, for the following reason.[28] The worry is that in the *Treatise*, Hume is introducing a new method of philosophy and therefore needs some criterion by which to show that his method is superior to rivals.[29] He will have to defend his method on the basis of alethic considerations, by showing that his norms of philosophy are the most truth-conducive or most error-avoidant.[30] But this kind of alethic superiority is exactly what interpreters mean when they talk about Hume's epistemology. So talk of Humean epistemology is not otiose after all.

Granting all this for the sake of argument, it is still the case that we can give a fully adequate account of Hume's system simply in terms of truth, falsehood, and the norms of philosophy. We can describe the attainment of truth or the avoidance of falsehood as the goal of "philosophy," and describe alethically-superior doxastic rules as norms of "philosophy." Describing these goals or norms in terms of "epistemology" gives no further conceptual purchase on Hume's system and distracts us from his actual statements.

2. The Skeptical Challenge and the Life-or-Philosophy Dilemma

Hume's skeptical arguments show that philosophy requires the suspension of inferred beliefs (T 1.4.1, 1.4.7.6–7; SBN 180–87, 267–68) and the suspension of belief in continued and distinct objects (T 1.4.2, 1.4.4, 1.4.7.4; SBN 187–218, 225–31, 265–66). The faculty of reason, recursively applied to its own deliverances, generates undermining defeaters for any inferred belief, whether the inference is probabilistic or demonstrative. Reason also generates rebutting defeaters for the belief in continued and distinct existences in both its vulgar form (T 1.4.2.45; SBN 210–11) and in its ostensibly philosophical form (T 1.4.4; SBN 225–31).[31] The rational defeat of Hume's core beliefs forces him, in the first half of "Conclusion of this book," to ask what maxim he should adopt to guide belief formation. Either he must refuse to assent to reason, or else he must give up core beliefs which are practically indispensable for common life (as well as for scientific research). He concludes "For my part, I know not what ought to be done in the present case" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68). Four paragraphs later, Hume adopts the Title Principle as the maxim to guide belief formation, a principle which indulges the occasional rejection of reason, particularly in the case of these skeptical challenges.

There are two possible ways to interpret the normative question Hume asks and then finally answers with the Title Principle. The first interpretation takes Hume as a "particularist" about philosophical justification. The skeptical arguments bring to light a contradiction between his pretheoretical beliefs (i) that philosophy demands that reason ought to be assented to, and (ii) that belief in body and positive inferred beliefs are philosophically justified. Instead of giving up (ii), he searches for an adequate revision of (i), and at last happily lights upon the Title Principle. The Title Principle says that philosophy demands that we assent to reason if and only if it is lively and mixes with some propensity. We are therefore philosophically justified in dissenting from the skeptical arguments of *Treatise* 1.4.1–2 and retaining our core beliefs.[32]

In the rest of this section I defend the second interpretation, which takes Hume as a "methodist" about philosophical justification.[33] Faced with the contradiction between (i) and (ii), he gives up (ii) and retains (i). When Hume wonders "what ought to be done," he is not wondering what philosophy requires of him.

The demands of philosophy are clear: assent to reason and give up your beliefs. He wonders rather what practical principle he should adopt towards philosophy, which will permit him to escape abject agnosticism without plunging him into utter credulity. On the methodist reading, the dangerous dilemma is a life-or-philosophy dilemma: a choice between, on the one hand, retaining the core beliefs which make life and science practically possible, and on the other hand, adhering to the demands of philosophy and reason.

The life-or-philosophy dilemma emerges first in the form of a "manifest contradiction" at the end of Hume's discussion of belief in mind-independent objects (T 1.4.7.4; SBN 265–66). Natural and necessary though non-ratiocinative principles of the imagination lead us to believe in mind-independent objects. Equally natural and necessary principles of the imagination produce an inductive inference that contradicts the belief in mind-independent objects. The contradiction between reason and belief in body forces us to choose between the principles:

> 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? (T 1.4.7.4; SBN 265–66)

By preferring the non-ratiocinative principles which produce belief in external objects, we reject the deliverances of reason (in violation of the norms of philosophy). But by preferring reason we reject belief in external objects—which sabotages common life and scientific research. To vacillate, assenting to reason most of the time but to contrary principles when they produce belief in external objects, is unworthy of "philosophers." So either we must give up our belief in bodies, or violate the demands of philosophy.

The argument for "scepticism with regard to reason" (T 1.4.1; SBN 180–87) generates a "very dangerous dilemma" which again forces us to choose between adhering to reason and retaining our core beliefs (T 1.4.7.6–7; SBN 267–68). If we "reject all the trivial suggestions of the fancy, and adhere to the understanding" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68), then we must suspend all the deliverances of demonstrative and probabilistic reason. Only a trivial propensity prevents us from rationally, recursively diminishing our confidence-levels to nothing. But suspending all of the deliverances of reason is practically unlivable. On the other hand, we could depart from the demands of reason, in one of two different ways. We might "assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy" and reject all of the deliverances of reason (T 1.4.7.6; SBN 267).[34] This option is intellectually outrageous: "if we assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy; beside that these suggestions are often contrary to each other; they lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities, that we must at last become asham'd of our credulity" (T 1.4.7.6; SBN 267). Alternatively, we might "establish it for a general maxim, that no refin'd or elaborate reasoning is ever to be receiv'd" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68). This option saves us from the self-subversion of reason without requiring us to accept every trivial suggestion of the fancy. But it still destroys all science and philosophy, which consist in refined reasoning. It lacks intellectual integrity on other grounds as well. The rejection of refined reasoning is justified by a chain of reasoning that is quite refined, and so the rejection is self-defeating. The maxim is also *ad hoc*: "You proceed upon one singular quality of the imagination [viz., the quality whereby we ignore refined reasoning], and by a parity of reason must embrace them all" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68). The unacceptability of the ban on refined reasoning means that we are again caught between the horns of "a false reason" (which bows to trivial suggestions of the fancy) "or none at all" (the suspension of the self-subverted deliverances of reason) (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68). Hume concludes "For my part, I know not what ought to be done in the present case" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68).

Philosophy, as Hume construes it, unqualifiedly endorses assent to the deliverances of reason.[35] Hume describes good and bad inductive inferences specifically in terms of what the "philosophers" do and do not sanction (T 1.3.13.1; SBN 143). *Treatise* 1.4.7 (SBN 263–74) bears this point out as well. To whatever extent we cut off "refin'd or elaborate reasoning," to that extent we "cut off entirely all science and philosophy" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68). The philosophers reject education and "trivial propensities of the imagination" like the propensity to project because they conflict with reason (T 1.3.9.19, 1.4.3.11–1.4.4.1; SBN 117, 224–26). In short, philosophy endorses the default principle that reason ought always to receive our assent. So the life-or-reason dilemma is also a life-or-philosophy dilemma.

The Title Principle, which permits us to ignore reason at points, expresses Hume's preference for "life" over "philosophy," when he is forced to choose. The Title Principle is not a philosophical norm; on the contrary, it violates the norms of philosophy. In the first place, the Title Principle recommends that we sometimes assent to reason, and sometimes to the conflicting principles. But to sometimes assent and sometimes dissent from reason is unworthy of the "glorious title" of philosophy (T 1.4.7.4; SBN 265–66). Furthermore, if "You proceed upon one singular quality of the imagination" then "by a parity of reason [you] must embrace all of them" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68). The Title Principle, by contrast, lets us reject reason in favor of trivial propensities in arbitrarily restricted circumstances.

Second, Hume consistently associates strict adherence to philosophy with total suspension of belief. If philosophy sanctioned the Title Principle, philosophy would not lead to suspension of our core beliefs, since the Title Principle permits us to ignore the key rational defeaters. Hume's first response to the "very refin'd and metaphysical" skeptical arguments he has been considering is to "reject all belief and reasoning" and "look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another" (T 1.4.7.8; SBN 268–69). He refers back to this moment as "*philosophical* melancholy and delirium"—a delirium characterized by unyielding commitment to the demands of philosophy and therefore of reason (T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269, emphasis mine). By contrast, it is when, in an anti-philosophical mood of spleen and indolence, he sloughs off these psychologically unsustainable demands that he regains his core beliefs (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 269–70).[36] With "the returns of a serious good-humour'd disposition" Hume goes back to philosophy, though not to its skeptical demands (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270). What changes with his mood is not his view of what philosophy requires (namely, suspension of core beliefs). What changes is the extent to which he is inclined to follow those requirements.

In later writings Hume stresses that philosophy is always on the side of the Pyrrhonian skeptic who prescribes the suspension of core beliefs. Summarizing the *Treatise*, he writes in the Abstract that "Philosophy would render us entirely *Pyrrhonian*, were not nature too strong for it" (T Abs. 27; SBN 657). In the *Letter to a Gentleman* Hume identifies the Pyrrhonian moment in the *Treatise* with his "Philosophical Melancholy and Delusion," the moment of his closest adherence to philosophy's demands (L 21, 23). In the first *Enquiry* he insists that "Pyrrhonism, or the excessive principles of scepticism," cannot be refuted by philosophy but only by action (EHU 12.21; SBN 158–59).[37] The excessive principles of skepticism "may flourish and triumph in the schools; where it is, indeed, difficult, if not impossible, to refute them" (EHU 12.21; SBN 158–59). The skeptic is in his "proper sphere" when he displays "those *philosophical* objections, which arise from more profound researches. Here he seems to have ample matter of triumph" (EHU 12.22; SBN 159). Skeptical objections show that mankind "are not able, by their most diligent enquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundation of these operations, or to remove the objections, which may be raised against them" (EHU 12.23; SBN 159–60). Since philosophy leads to the very Pyrrhonism from which the Title Principle saves us, the Title Principle cannot itself belong to philosophy.[38]

Third, the Title Principle cannot be a philosophical principle because of its relationship to the Inclination Principle. After cycling through melancholic and then splenetic attitudes towards philosophy, he at last comes to the following conclusion:

> Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner. Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us. (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270)

I call the first sentence the Inclination Principle, since it says that we ought to pursue philosophy only from an inclination to do so. The Title Principle immediately follows the statement of the Inclination Principle, and clearly stands in an appositional relation to it. The text demands that we take the "ought" of the Inclination Principle and the "ought" of the Title Principle in the immediately following sentences in the same sense; a shift in meanings would constitute a complete non sequitur. Either both principles, or neither of them, state norms internal to philosophy as a method of inquiry.

But the Inclination Principle cannot be a philosophical ought. It does not state a norm internal to philosophy, but rather a norm about when we should (and should not) follow philosophy itself. If the Inclination Principle were a philosophical norm, then philosophy would require us to sometimes disobey philosophical requirements—which is self-defeating.

An anonymous referee has suggested that the Inclination Principle, construed as a philosophical norm, is not necessarily self-defeating. We can see why not by way of an analogy. A utilitarian might hold that the maximization of happiness is the correct standard for moral action, but not always the correct motive for moral action. Perhaps we will maximize universal happiness most effectively if we simply try to love our families and be good friends, employees, and citizens. We can consistently hold both that (a) you should always *do* what maximizes universal happiness, and (b) you should not *try* to maximize universal happiness. Arguably, the Inclination Principle is a philosophical principle analogous to (b). The effect of not trying (or trying not) to follow philosophy when we feel disinclined to it may be that we will actually adhere to philosophy in spite of ourselves.

This analogy does not hold however. The utilitarian position above crucially distinguishes between what we should do and what we should try to do. It does not say we should do and not do precisely the same thing. But the Inclination Principle is only about when we should and should not actually be philosophers, not about when we should and should not try to be philosophers. The same goes for the Title Principle. Philosophy says, "Reason ought always to be assented to," while the Title Principle says, "It is false that reason ought always to be assented to." To be consistent with the demands of philosophy, the Title Principle would have to say, "Where reason is not lively and does not mix with some propensity, it never can have any title to *motivate* us." Hume does not suggest that we will actually follow philosophy by trying to shirk it when disinclined, or that we will actually assent to reason by trying to ignore it sometimes.

I conclude that the "ought" of neither the Inclination Principle nor of the Title Principle can be a philosophical "ought." Just as the Inclination Principle says, "Only follow philosophy when you feel like it," the Title Principle adds "And in particular, only follow reason, philosophy's chief authoritative faculty, when you feel like it." Both principles express Hume's permissive practical stance towards the unbending demands of philosophy as such.[39]

3. The Practical Justification for a Moderate Pursuit of Philosophy

The Inclination Principle (and its corollary, the Title Principle) in fact express the main lesson of Hume's skeptical crisis. Since philosophy, consistently pursued, demands the suspension of our core beliefs, complete adherence to philosophy is no more practically justified than it is psychologically sustainable. However, the moderate pursuit of philosophy in the context of a mixed way of life affords pleasure and benefit to those who incline towards it. Philosophy provides a safer and more agreeable method of inquiry and belief formation than its main alternative, superstition. By Hume's lights, we morally approve of those characteristics which are agreeable or useful to their possessors or to others. The habit of moderately pursuing philosophy is therefore practically and morally justified.

3.1. The Rejection of Total Adherence to Philosophy

Following philosophy to the point of suspending core beliefs is futile. Nature prevails over argument and we take up our defeated core beliefs again, whether we want to or not.

> Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life . . . my natural propensity, and the course of my animal spirits and passions reduce me to this indolent belief in the general maxims of the world. (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 269–70)[40]

The mere fact that we have a natural and powerful psychological propensity to hold our core beliefs does not by itself practically justify our submission to them.[41] Consider, for example, someone who has a natural and powerful psychological propensity to believe that they can fly from the tops of tall buildings. This belief is ordinarily fatal to humans who act on it. It is practically rational to resist this belief for as long as possible, even if the belief is natural and ultimately irresistible. Hume explicitly says that he is not entirely opposed to resisting his natural inclinations. He simply demands that the benefit of resisting a natural belief outweigh the pain and trouble of the resistance: "Where I strive against my inclination, I shall have a good reason for my resistance" (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 269–70).[42]

But there are no benefits to trying to suspend core beliefs. After his "philosophical melancholy and delirium" subsides, Hume asks rhetorically "Under what obligation do I lie of making such an abuse of time? And to what end can it serve either for the service of mankind, or for my own private interest?" (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 269–70). Faced with the life-or-philosophy dilemma, he resolves "never more to renounce the pleasures of life for the sake of reasoning and philosophy" (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 269–70). In the first *Enquiry* Hume rejects Pyrrhonism on the same practical grounds (EHU 12.23; SBN 159–60). Pyrrhonism demands a psychologically impossible feat. Even if we managed to suspend our beliefs, only harm would result.

3.2. The Return to a Moderate Pursuit of Philosophy

When his "sentiments of spleen and indolence" pass and "a serious good-humour'd disposition" returns, Hume realizes that philosophy sometimes is pleasurable (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270). In the right circumstances he feels "naturally *inclin'd*" to pursue philosophy (T 1.4.7.12; SBN 270–71). By resisting this inclination when it arises, "I *feel* I shou'd be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy" (T 1.4.7.12; SBN 270–71).

Although Hume returns to the pursuit of philosophy, he does not return to the total suspension of his core beliefs which philosophy demands. He instead returns to a positive use of philosophy, deploying this normative method in belief formation and theory construction. "[I] am naturally *inclin'd*," he says, "to carry my view into all those subjects, about which I have met with so many disputes in the course of my reading and conversation" (T 1.4.7.12; SBN 270–71). He goes on to list all of the subjects about which he desires to form theories: moral good and evil, the foundations of government, the causes of the passions, aesthetics, truth and falsehood, reason and folly (T 1.4.7.12; SBN 270–71). One might object that Hume has no right to follow philosophy in his positive theory construction if he will not follow philosophy down the ineluctable path to Pyrrhonism. But Hume can reply that he is practically justified in making a positive use of philosophy, while ignoring its Pyrrhonian demands. He flouts philosophy's parity of reasoning requirement on practical grounds.

Against practical readings like mine, Donald Ainslie argues that if Hume is really an epistemic skeptic, he can have no practical reason to return to philosophy.[43] Ainslie asserts that "when Hume returns to philosophy, he continues to aim at truth."[44] If Hume accepts a negative epistemic verdict on his faculties, then he believes that it is impossible for him to attain knowledge of the truth by way of philosophy.[45] He therefore has no practical reason to continue to philosophize.[46]

But Ainslie does not adequately distinguish between Hume's beliefs at the time he decides to return to philosophy, and his beliefs as he practices philosophy. As Hume considers whether to return to philosophical enquiry, he believes that it can never produce philosophically justified beliefs. Ainslie is correct to point out the *prima facie* irrationality of a skeptic engaging in research. This, I take it, is precisely the force of the "notwithstanding" in Hume's statement that it is "proper we shou'd in general indulge our inclination in the most elaborate philosophical researches, notwithstanding our sceptical principles" (T 1.4.7.15; SBN 273). But Hume also believes that philosophical research will inevitably produce beliefs of which he will be, at least temporarily, subjectively certain. When we engage in enquiry, "assurance . . . always arises from an exact and full survey of an object" (T 1.4.7.15; SBN 274). Pursuing knowledge and seeming to attain it are agreeable and useful activities. When Hume decides to return to philosophizing, he foresees that he will not experience his labors as futile. On the contrary, he will seek and seem to attain truth, and find the whole process very agreeable. So he has good practical reason to return to philosophy, even if, at the time he makes this decision, he believes it will not actually produce justified beliefs.

A similar worry to Ainslie's is that my reading imputes to Hume two logically contradictory and psychologically incompatible beliefs.[47] On the backside of his skeptical crisis, Hume believes that the consistent pursuit of philosophy does not lead to true belief. He also believes that philosophical inquiry into particular questions will afford pleasure. But philosophical inquiry is likely to afford pleasure only if it is likely to lead to true belief. So Hume simultaneously believes that philosophy does and does not lead to true belief. Holding these contradictory beliefs would make Hume a little bit crazy, if it is even psychologically possible to do so.

To answer this worry, I distinguish between occurrent beliefs and doxastic dispositions. My account does not necessarily saddle Hume with logically contradictory, simultaneously-occurring beliefs. It does impute to him the simultaneous possession of contradictory doxastic dispositions. If and when Hume reflects on the outcome of consistent philosophical reasoning, he has an occurrent belief that (a) the consistent pursuit of philosophy does not lead to true belief. If and when Hume reflects on some particular question—for example, "What are the foundations of government?"—he does not have the occurrent belief (a). Instead, he has the more or less explicit belief that (b) a philosophical inquiry into this question might very well lead to truth, thereby affording pleasure. Hume is disposed to assent to (a) when he ponders the second-order question about philosophy, and disposed to assent to (b) when he engages in first-order reflection about the world.

Is it psychologically possible to simultaneously possess these conflicting dispositions? I think it is. In fact, I think that philosophers often have similarly conflicting dispositions. Many of us actually do become (temporarily or permanently) convinced that some of our ordinary beliefs—say, in the reliability of one or all of our cognitive faculties, or in objective moral facts, or whatever—are probably false. When we are asked a second-order question about the reliability of these beliefs in the classroom or at a conference, we answer negatively. But as soon as we walk outside of our classrooms, we revert to making first-order judgments that presuppose the reliability of our faculties or the reality of objective morality. If we meet a student or colleague in the hall who reminds us of our official skepticism, we deny the first-order beliefs again, only to absent-mindedly resume them once more on the commute home. As Hume puts it, it is "usual among philosophers" to "successively assent" to conflicting doxastic principles, and "thus knowingly embrace a manifest contradiction" (T 1.4.7.4; SBN 266).

My account hinges on the fact that Hume's skepticism does not psychologically prevent him from holding beliefs when he returns to philosophical research.[48] He closes Book 1 of the *Treatise* by saying that despite his skeptical principles he will inevitably experience and express certainty about the matters he investigates (T 1.4.7.15; SBN 273–74). When we engage in enquiry, "assurance . . . always arises from an exact and full survey of an object." When we yield to this propensity for assurance, we "are apt not only to forget our scepticism, but even our modesty too."[49]

Hume also gives a practical justification for the return to positive philosophy in the first *Enquiry*. He defends "a more *mitigated* scepticism or Academical philosophy" on the practical grounds that, unlike Pyrrhonism, it is "both durable and useful" (EHU 12.24; SBN 161–62). It is sufficient to reject a fanatical devotion to philosophy (Pyrrhonism) which demands suspension of core beliefs. Academic skepticism does not demand the suicidal suspension of core beliefs (EHU 5.2; SBN 41–42). Academic philosophy, "in almost every instance, must be harmless and innocent" (EHU 5.1; SBN 40–41). This "species of *mitigated* scepticism" is "of advantage to mankind" (EHU 12.25; SBN 162).

Hume moves the practical defense (and delimitation) of the pursuit of philosophy to section 1, "Of the Different Species of Philosophy."[50] Speculative, abstract philosophy stands in need of practical defense just because it has undeniable liabilities (EHU 1.3–6; SBN 6–9). But Hume follows this acknowledgement with a practical defense of the pursuit of rigorous philosophy, for those who are so inclined, within the context of a mixed way of life (EHU 1.7–13; SBN 9–13).

3.3. The Relative Practical Warrant of Philosophy and Superstition

Hume's subordination of philosophy to practical concerns could very well open the door to all sorts of intellectual bad behavior. A religionist or any other purveyor of absurdities could just as well say that their method of belief formation is as pleasant and useful as any other. In order to justify the pursuit of philosophy, Hume needs to show not only that philosophy has some practical benefit, but that it has more practical benefit than its rivals.[51]

He gives a practical criterion for the doxastic method we ought to prefer in our enquiries outside common life: "we ought only to deliberate concerning the choice of our guide, and ought to prefer that which is safest and most agreeable" (T 1.4.7.13; SBN 271). He divides the entire field of methodological alternatives for belief-formation outside the sphere of common life into two categories: philosophy and superstition. He argues that philosophy is the safest and most agreeable guide (T 1.4.7.13; SBN 271–72).

We may worry that Hume has no right to make claims about the practical consequences of suspending all belief, or of moderately pursuing philosophy, or of following superstition. After all, these sorts of claims are based on inductive reasoning, which is philosophically unjustified. I think Hume would concede that these beliefs are indeed philosophically unjustified. But, as with other causal inferences, he holds them on the practical grounds that "it costs us too much pains to think otherwise" (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270). His beliefs about the practical consequences of belief-forming policies are themselves justified on practical grounds, and on practical grounds only.

Conclusion

The outcome of Hume's skeptical crisis is that our central beliefs are philosophically unjustified. But philosophy itself only has a limited practical and moral warrant. We are practically warranted in ignoring the Pyrrhonian demands of philosophy, and practically warranted in carrying on with common life as well as research in the sciences. Hume's purely practical justification for holding core beliefs maintains a clear distinction between philosophical and practical normativity, yet gives him a good reason for continuing with his constructive scientific projects in the face of radical and irremediable skepticism.

NOTES

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1 Ridge, "Epistemology Moralized," 165–204; Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 234–37.

2 References to the *Treatise* are to Hume, *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 to Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, cited in the text as "SBN" followed by the page number.

3 See especially Ridge, "Epistemology Moralized"; Owen, *Hume's Reason*, 216–22; and Schafer, "Curious Virtues," 1–20. Although these authors agree that utility and agreeability are essential to the epistemic justification of belief, their accounts differ in important ways. Moreover, Schafer thinks that Owen and Ridge subscribe to a purely practical reading of Hume such as I defend below, rather than the sort of practical-epistemic reading that he himself advances. Schafer 4n22. If indeed Owen and Ridge do mean to defend a purely practical reading, then this essay is a fresh defense of their position. But as I read them, Owen and Ridge hold a practical-epistemic view. Ridge says that the Title Principle is "the one clearly normative epistemic principle that he lays down at the end of Book 1" and that it "clearly makes appeal to the immediate agreeableness

of relying on the understanding" (189). Owen describes "sceptical reason" as reason functioning in accordance with the Title Principle, "reason embedded in a sensitive nature with properties that allow it to function in the correct way" (217). Embedded reason (i.e., the Title Principle) is normative for philosophy. But the question still remains, "not what philosophers should do, but whether we should be philosophers" (219). Owen's Hume answers that the pursuit of philosophy is practically justified: it is "positively required for the good life; not just for the pleasure it brings the practitioner, but for the good it can do society" (220). So for both Ridge and Owen, as I understand them, the Title Principle is an epistemic norm; for Owen, it is internal to the practice of philosophy. As such it can rescue the epistemic status of our core beliefs from the skeptical arguments brought against them. On a purely practical reading, by contrast, the Title Principle is not a correct epistemic norm; it is not internal to the practice of philosophy. Our core beliefs are epistemologically unjustified at the end of the day, and only practically justified.

4 Qu, "Hume's Practically Epistemic Conclusions?" 509–23.

5 Garrett, *Hume*, 227–37.

6 My identification of "philosophy" as Hume's terminology for the evaluation of belief from that perspective which is normative for the sciences is controversial. William Edward Morris writes that "Hume typically speaks of 'philosophers' and their 'usual' practices, not to identify with them, but to dissociate himself from a generally accepted position with which he disagrees" (95). Louis E. Loeb divides Book 1 of the *Treatise* into a constructive epistemological phase in Parts 1–3, and a destructive skeptical phase in Part 4. Loeb, *Stability and Justification*, 12–20, especially 16–17. He ascribes to Hume an ambivalent relationship with "the philosophers." In the constructive phase of his project, Hume aligns himself with the epistemic commitments of the philosophers. In the destructive phase, he distances himself from the epistemic commitments of the philosophers. Jack C. Lyons seems to assume that "philosophy" is a set of normative epistemic principles which Hume endorses, but does not lay much emphasis on it. Lyons, "General Rules," especially 274n15, 270–71. Garrett says little about the meaning of "philosophy," just that it is comprised of "natural philosophy" and "moral philosophy." Garrett, *Cognition*, 3–7. He does however say that Hume endorses philosophy, especially vis-à-vis "superstition."

7 By "core belief," I mean a belief that is practically indispensable. Hume's skepticism chiefly targets two core classes of beliefs: beliefs in the conclusions of demonstrative and probabilistic arguments, and beliefs in continued and distinct existences. While we might be able to get along in life or science without some particular members of these classes of beliefs, we cannot get along without the classes as wholes. That is, inferred beliefs and beliefs in body are collectively, though not distributively, core beliefs. Thanks to Don Garrett for helping me clarify this point.

8 At a general level, my reading agrees with Kevin Meeker, who construes the Title Principle as a pragmatic principle and not as an epistemic principle. Meeker, *Hume's Radical Scepticism*, 73–81. We arrive at this conclusion by different routes, however. Perhaps most importantly, I do not share Meeker's view that all actual beliefs are adjudged as equally justified under the Title Principle.

9 In this section, I emphasize that philosophy refers to a normative method of inquiry which governs the special sciences. This might easily give the impression that the norms of philosophy do not apply to common life. But I see no reason to think that Hume applies a different set of norms to belief-formation in the context of common life. The central norms of philosophy prescribe basing beliefs on experience and making good inductive inferences. I take it that Hume applies these standards to beliefs formed outside of the study as well as inside of it. The skeptical defeaters which Hume brings forward in *Treatise* 1.4.1–2 are objections to reasoned and perceptual beliefs in common life as well as in science. Common life faces the same skeptical dilemma as the sciences and benefits from the same practical solution to this dilemma. When I later discuss Hume's "life-or-philosophy" dilemma, I mean that he must choose between letting practical or philosophical justifications determine his belief-formation, whether in the context of common life or in the study.

10 See Harris, "Introduction," 6–9; Rutherford, "Innovation and Orthodoxy," 11–13; Schneiders, "Concepts of Philosophy," 28–33; Serjeantson, "Becoming a Philosopher," 23–28.

11 Harris, *Hume*, 19; cf. 18–24.

12 Locke, *Essay*, 10.

13 Cf. Garrett, *Cognition*, 4.

14 More than once he emphasizes that he is not engaged in natural philosophy (T 1.1.2.1, 1.2.5.4, 1.3.8.8; SBN 7–8, 55, 101–102).

15 Hume does not always use the word "philosophy" to directly denote a method. For example, when he talks about "the philosophy I am going to unfold" (T Intro. 3; SBN xiv–xv), he seems mean "the body of doctrine I am about to unfold." However, I take it that the methodological significance of "philosophy" is most basic, and controls other usages of the term. So for example "the philosophy [body of doctrine] that I am about to unfold" is a body of beliefs arrived at by way of the methodological norms of philosophy.

16 As I discuss later, Hume does qualify his endorsement of philosophy in one sense. We are sometimes practically justified in ignoring the demands of philosophy. But insofar as we do deviate from philosophy, we are no longer engaged in the proper conduct of science.

17 "But as education is an artificial and not a natural cause, and as its maxims are frequently contrary to reason, and even to themselves in different times and places, it is never upon that account recogniz'd by philosophers" (T 1.3.9.19; SBN 117).

18 "If its [an idea's] weakness render it obscure, 'tis our business to remedy that defect, as much as possible, by keeping the idea steady and precise; and till we have done so, 'tis in vain to pretend to reasoning and philosophy" (T 1.3.1.7; SBN 72–73).

19 Hume admits that the variety of terms whereby he defines the manner of conceiving those ideas which constitute beliefs may seem "unphilosophical," but in fact he counters that "in philosophy we can go no farther, than assert, that it is something *felt* by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination" (T 1.3.7.7; SBN 628–29). Here Hume is concerned to show that he does

in fact abide by the norms of philosophy, even if at first it may appear otherwise. The particular norm in view is that we ought to give clear and precise definitions to our terms.

20 "A scrupulous hesitation to receive any new hypothesis is so laudable a disposition in philosophers, and so necessary to the examination of truth, that it deserves to be comply'd with, and requires that every argument be produc'd, which may tend to their satisfaction, and every objection remov'd, which may stop them in their reasoning" (T 1.3.9.1; SBN 106–107).

21 "But as education is an artificial and not a natural cause, and as its maxims are frequently contrary to reason, and even to themselves in different times and places, it is never upon that account recogniz'd by philosophers; tho' in reality it be built almost on the same foundation of custom and repetition as our reasonings from causes and effects" (T 1.3.9.19; SBN 117). "But tho' education be disclaim'd by philosophy, as a fallacious ground of assent to any opinion, it prevails nevertheless in the world, and is the cause why all systems are apt to be rejected at first as new and unusual" (T 1.3.10.1; SBN 118).

22 Hume implies this by saying that it is false philosophy which does make such predications.

23 "Our propensity to this mistake is so great from the resemblance above-mention'd, that we fall into it before we are aware; and tho' we incessantly correct ourselves by reflection, and return to a more accurate method of thinking, yet we cannot long sustain our philosophy, or take off this biass from the imagination" (T 1.4.6.6; SBN 253–55).

24 "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?" (T 1.4.7.4; SBN 265–66).

25 References to the second *Enquiry* are to Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals,* ed. Beauchamp, hereafter cited in the text as "EPM" followed by section and paragraph number, and to Hume, *Enquiries concerning the Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, hereafter cited in the text as "SBN" followed by page numbers.

26 Hume does say that the belief-forming processes sanctioned by philosophy are, generally speaking, indispensably useful to human life (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225). But there are exceptions to this general statement: following philosophy consistently leads to a suspension of our practically indispensable beliefs, as his skeptical challenges show. In any case, the fact that philosophically approved belief-forming propensities are useful does not entail that these propensities are philosophically approved *because* they are useful.

27 Qu (509) draws attention to this passage, which reads in full: "There is no method of reasoning more common, and yet none more blameable, than in philosophical debates to endeavour to refute any hypothesis by a pretext of its dangerous consequences to religion and morality. When any opinion leads us into absurdities, 'tis certainly false; but 'tis not certain an opinion is false, because 'tis of dangerous consequence" (T 2.3.2.3; SBN 409). Qu also notes Hume's similar remark that "While a warm imagination is allow'd to enter into philosophy, and hypotheses embrac'd merely for being specious

and agreeable, we can never have any steady principles, nor any sentiments, which will suit with common practice and experience" (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272–73).

28 Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this point.

29 I doubt that Hume sees himself as introducing a new method into the sciences. In my view, Hume sees himself as simply deploying a Baconian method of experimental reasoning. He does not even claim to be the first to apply the experimental method to the science of man: various "late philosophers in *England*" have already begun the work (T Intro. 7; SBN xx–xxi). The only thing new about Hume's project is that he hopes to make greater and faster progress in all the other special sciences by prioritizing the science of man, which is foundational for the rest (T Intro. 6; SBN xx).

30 On my reading, following philosophy does not necessarily or even probably lead to truth, frequently or at all. But the doxastic practices sanctioned by philosophy are more likely to lead to truth than are alternative practices. Hume opens the *Treatise* by expressing diffidence about whether truth is in human reach: "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" (T Intro. 3; SBN xviii–xix, italics mine). He eventually concludes that consistent adherence to philosophy does not lead to true or probably true beliefs, but to suspended judgment: "Philosophy wou'd render us entirely *Pyrrhonian,* were not nature too strong for it" (Abstract 27). If Hume's criterion for philosophical norms were truth-conduciveness, and he found that his norms rendered him Pyrrhonian, he would have to reject his norms as philosophically unacceptable. As a matter of fact, when he does find that philosophical norms lead to global agnosticism, he does not reconsider the normative content of philosophy, but rather his commitment to philosophy (T 1.4.7). Even after he escapes Pyrrhonism by moderating his commitment to philosophy, he does not express confidence that truth is attainable: "we might hope to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for *that, perhaps, is too much to be hop'd for*) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination" (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272, italics mine).

31 An undermining defeater is a belief that gives us a reason not to believe *P*; a rebutting defeater is a belief that gives us a reason to believe not-*P*. When Hume introduces the "opinion of the double existence of perceptions and objects" in T 1.4.2.46 (SBN 211–12), he indicates that it lacks any philosophical justification. But in T 1.4.4 (SBN 225–31), goes further by developing a rebutting defeater to it. First, he gives an argument that leads from the double existence theory to "the modern philosophy" of primary and secondary qualities (T 1.4.4.3–5; SBN 226–27). Then he gives an argument to show that modern philosophy is unintelligible (T 1.4.4.6–15; SBN 227–31. Cf. EHU 12.15; SBN 154–55). Taken together, these two arguments constitute a rational rebutting defeater to the double existence theory. As Hume summarizes: "Thus there is a direct and total opposition betwixt our reason and our senses; or more properly speaking, betwixt those conclusions we form from cause and effect, and those that persuade us of the continu'd and independent existence of body" (T 1.4.4.15; SBN 154–55). Cf. T 1.4.7.4 (SBN 265–66).

32 In a broad sense, all the interpreters who take the Title Principle to be Hume's final epistemic principle could be described as "particularist" interpreters, insofar as their

Hume has (or finds) an epistemic principle that justifies his pretheoretical particular epistemic judgments. These interpreters include Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, 131; Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 280; Garrett, *Cognition*, 234–35; Garrett, *Hume*, 227–37; Morris, "Hume's Conclusion," 109; Owen, *Hume's Reason*, 217; cf. 203n12; Ridge, "Epistemology Moralized," 189; Schmitt, *Hume's Epistemology in the* Treatise, 368–75. None of these interpreters represents Hume's line of thought so simplistically as I have characterized the particularist reading. They do not all regard Hume as pretheoretically committed to the epistemic principle that reason (taken in abstraction from the rest of human nature) ought always to be assented to, even if this is a principle against which he implicitly argues. Baier and Morris think that the skeptical defeat of our core beliefs is part of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against others who might hold this kind of view. Garrett does describe the Title Principle as a reflective revision of the default principle that "reason ought to be assented to" (*Hume*, 230).

33 So far forth, I agree with Janet Broughton that "Hume reaches his skeptical conclusion only because he cedes authority to several broad cognitive norms of clarity, coherence, and evidence. A different philosopher might have questioned the authority of these norms rather than accept such a negative outcome," but Hume "finds them to be in order as they stand, even though full reflection on the nature of the mind in light of these norms forces us to see that our most basic assumptions about the world do not deserve our assent" (547).

34 It seems that, for Hume, accepting all the trivial suggestions of the fancy implies rejecting all or virtually all of the deliverances of reason. This seems to be the implication of Hume's assertion that the rejection of the fancy entails adherence to the understanding. It also seems to be the implication of his previous assertion that the trivial propensities of the imagination are "opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning" (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225–26).

35 The philosophers endorse more than the deliverances of reason; they also endorse the deliverances of other permanent, irresistible, and universal principles of the imagination (T 1.4.4.1–2; SBN 225–26). But when these narrowly natural non-ratiocinative beliefs conflict with the deliverances of reason, the latter defeat the philosophical justification of the former. (*Hume*, 230).

36 When Hume resolves "never more to renounce the pleasures of life for the sake of reasoning and philosophy" (T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269), he is referring back to the moment when, for the sake of adhering to sound reasoning and philosophy, he was ready to renounce all belief.

37 References to the first *Enquiry* are to Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding,* ed. Beauchamp, hereafter cited in the text as "EHU" followed by section and paragraph number, and to Hume, *Enquiries concerning the Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, hereafter cited in the text as "SBN" followed by page numbers.

38 Hume does not merely say that philosophy cannot refute Pyrrhonian skepticism, but that it positively supports Pyrrhonian skepticism by means of objections to our core beliefs. Furthermore, although the texts cited from the first *Enquiry* were published nine years after the *Treatise*, they are terminologically and materially continuous with the texts from the "Abstract" and the "Letter to a Gentleman." These earlier works in turn

purport to give Hume's own explication of his position in the *Treatise*. It is therefore reasonable to look to Hume's later discussions of Pyrrhonism to illuminate the meaning of *Treatise* 1.4.7.

39 An anonymous referee suggests that the Title Principle is a philosophical principle because it is itself the product of philosophical reasoning. But not every product of the philosophical method of inquiry is ipso facto part of the method itself. The point at issue here is whether the Title Principle is one of the norms governing philosophy as a method of inquiry.

40 Many texts support the claim that we are psychologically incapable of suspending our core beliefs for long. After giving the skeptical argument against reason, Hume emphasizes that "nature breaks the force of all sceptical arguments in time, and keeps them from having any considerable influence on the understanding" (T 1.4.1.12; SBN 187; cf. T 1.4.1.7; SBN 183). The same holds true with respect to skeptical arguments about the senses. The skeptic "must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity" (T 1.4.2.1; SBN 187; cf. T 1.4.2.57; SBN 218). Likewise, the dangerous dilemma "is seldom or never thought of; and even where it has once been present to the mind, is quickly forgot, and leaves but a small impression behind it. Very refin'd reflections have little or no influence upon us" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 268). "Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras" (T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269) "I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding" (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 269–70). "Our author . . . upon the whole concludes, that we assent to our faculties, and employ our reason only because we cannot help it. Philosophy would render us entirely *Pyrrhonian*, were not nature too strong for it" (Abs. 27; SBN 657). "The great subverter of *Pyrrhonism* or the excessive principles of scepticism, is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life" (EHU 12.21; SBN 158–59). Pyrrhonism is not "durable" outside the philosopher's closet (EHU 12.23, cf. 12.24; SBN 159–60, cf. 161–62). In the *Letter to a Gentleman* Hume again notes that the Pyrrhonian doctrine is psychologically impossible to live by (L 19–20).

41 Arguably, Hume makes this very point when he says "Very refin'd reflections have little or no influence upon us; and yet we do not, and cannot establish it for a rule, that they ought not to have any influence" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68).

42 By "good reason" Hume means a good practical reason, not a good theoretical reason. The sentence occurs as a response to preceding rhetorical questions about the practical value of torturing his brain "with subtilities and sophistries": "to what end can it serve either for the service of mankind, or for my own private interest?" (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 269–70). On the other hand, good theoretical reasons too obviously support the unnatural suspension of core beliefs.

43 Ainslie, *Hume's True Scepticism*, 226–30.

44 Ibid., 228.

45 Ibid., 230.

46 Garrett makes a similar point when he says, "it is psychologically untenable, in [Hume's] psychology, to take pleasure in the satisfaction of either curiosity ('to know' foundations and principles) or ambition ('of contributing to the instruction of mankind, and of making a name by my inventions and discoveries') without taking one's own discoveries to be true or at least probably true" (*Hume*, 232).

47 Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this problem.

48 The point is controversial. Garrett argues that for Hume, beliefs which we regard as epistemologically unjustified are not stable beliefs at all (*Hume*, 232–33). Ainslie shows that Hume does think that the skeptic will go on to hold stable beliefs which, at least on reflection, he admits are philosophically unjustified. Ainslie argues that Hume could pursue philosophy only insofar as he forgets his allegedly devastating skeptical arguments. So far forth I agree. But, Ainslie adds, throughout Books 2 and 3 of the *Treatise*, Hume recalls the very theories in Book 1 which give rise to his skeptical problems. He concludes that the skeptical arguments could not have been epistemically devastating after all (Ainslie, 229–30). I do not think that the texts Ainslie cites show that Hume simultaneously gives focused attention to his skeptical arguments and retains his confidence in his scientific beliefs.

49 Schafer denies that Hume is a radical epistemic skeptic on the grounds that he appears to endorse various beliefs and principles on epistemic grounds in Book 1 of the *Treatise* and beyond (8). But Hume explicitly warns that his use of terms of epistemic approbation such as "*'tis evident, 'tis certain, 'tis undeniable*" are "extorted from me by the present view of the object" and do not represent his considered judgement, and certainly not his ultimately skeptical principles (T 1.4.7.15; SBN 274). Hume only experiences any degree of confidence by turning his attention away from his skeptical arguments, not by neutralizing them.

50 Cf. Fogelin, *Hume's Skeptical Crisis*, 140–44.

51 Ridge highlights this worry and provides his own answer. Ridge, "Epistemology Moralized," 167, 184–94. On Ridge's view, Hume himself finds reliance upon the understanding (rather than on superstition) immediately agreeable, and this gives him a practical justification for employing it. I am in basic sympathy with Ridge's line of argument.

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