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The Surprise Twist in Hume's *Treatise*

STEPHEN M. CAMPBELL

Abstract: *A Treatise of Human Nature* opens with ambitious hopes for the science of man, but Hume eventually launches into a series of skeptical arguments that culminates in a report of radical skeptical despair. This essay is a preliminary exploration of how to interpret this surprising development. I first distinguish two kinds of surprise twist: those that are incompatible with some preceding portion of the work, and those that are not. This suggests two corresponding pictures of Hume. On one picture, he believed the skeptical development to be at odds with something in early *Treatise*; on the other, he took these two portions of Book 1 to be perfectly compatible. After defending the claim that Hume endorsed both of these portions, I sketch two promising interpretations—a “perspectivist,” incompatibilist interpretation and a “post-skeptical,” compatibilist interpretation—and offer some reasons to favor the latter view.

Book 1 of David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* has a surprising development.¹ The work opens on a confident and ambitious note. Hume's aim is to introduce the experimental method into moral subjects, which he believes will mark a significant improvement in the science of man. In the first parts of Book 1, there is an anatomization of the human mind, followed by treatments of various concepts (for example, space and time, knowledge, belief), and Hume appears to think that his arguments meet with success. Yet, the work eventually takes a curious turn. He launches into a series of skeptical arguments that culminates in an almost confessional description of radical skeptical despair in *Treatise* 1.4.7. This “skeptical

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development” (by which I mean the skeptical portions of Book 1, in which Hume argues to skeptical conclusions), and in particular the “skeptical culmination” (the climactic, skeptical display at T 1.4.7.1–8, which is the final portion of the skeptical development), can come as a surprise to the first-time reader for a few reasons.² First, it is not foreshadowed in any obvious way by the Introduction or the earliest portions of Book 1.³ Second, many of the early references to skeptics are disparaging, which can give the impression that Hume is unfriendly to skepticism.⁴ Third, it seems *prima facie* incompatible with the apparently constructive portions of Book 1 that precede it (which I will henceforth refer to as “early *Treatise*”), a point that Hume highlights in the first half of T 1.4.7. Given all this, it is plausible that Hume intended to surprise readers with the skeptical development.

This essay is a preliminary exploration of how to interpret this surprise twist in Hume’s *Treatise*. In §1, I distinguish two types of surprise twist: those that are incompatible with some preceding portion of the work, and those that are not (but are surprising nonetheless). In §2, I consider two corresponding pictures of Hume. On one picture, Hume believed the skeptical development to be at odds with something in early *Treatise*; on the other, he took it to be compatible with all preceding portions. (I assume throughout that Hume was either a “compatibilist” or an “incompatibilist,” as opposed to having no settled view. In order to limit the scope of this inquiry, I also work under the assumption that, regarding early *Treatise* and the skeptical development, Hume endorsed only one, both, or neither, as opposed to partially endorsing one or both.) In §3, I shift attention to the issue of whether Hume endorsed the skeptical development or early *Treatise*. I clarify my use of “endorsement,” discuss a presumption regarding authorial endorsement, and present the interpretive possibilities generated by my two working assumptions. In §4, I defend the claim that Hume endorsed both early *Treatise* and the skeptical development, thereby narrowing the interpretive possibilities down to two. In §5 and §6, I sketch two promising interpretations of Hume’s twist—a “perspectivist,” incompatibilist interpretation and a “post-skeptical,” compatibilist interpretation—and offer some reasons to favor the latter view. Whether or not the proposed compatibilist interpretation is ultimately correct, this investigation of Hume’s attitudes toward the skeptical portions of Book 1 and the preceding portions will, I hope prove a fruitful point of entry into one of the most prominent and contested issues in Hume scholarship—the nature of his naturalism and skepticism.

1. Two Sorts of Surprise Twist

As I will employ the term, a portion of a work counts as a “surprise twist” only if (i) the author intended for it to generate surprise in first-time audiences, and (ii) it does, or would, tend to generate surprise in first-time audiences under the

appropriate conditions.⁵ This rough and partial characterization of a surprise twist is in need of further development, but it should afford a precise enough understanding for present purposes.

Consider two types of surprise twist. Some twists are incompatible with some preceding portion of the work, which is typically the very reason why they are surprising. Call these *incompatible twists*. In fictional works, an incompatible twist can occur when inaccurate information presented in the work is later corrected.⁶ In philosophical works, it can occur when an author reaches a conclusion that is at odds with his or her earlier claims in such a way that it is problematic to accept both simultaneously. Such incompatibility is present, for example, when one claim contradicts, undermines the justification for, or contradicts a presupposition of, another. An incompatible twist introduces an internal tension in the work. In contrast, *compatible twists* are surprising though they are perfectly compatible with earlier portions of the work. Whence comes the surprise? I will mention three possibilities. A compatible twist can surprise first-time audiences because it deviates from their preconceptions about the author. The end of Hume's *Dialogues* comes to mind. A compatible twist can prove surprising because it flouts genre conventions. Imagine a book that reads like a science-fiction novel in the first half and a history of Cajun cuisine in the second. Lastly, and especially relevant to the compatibilist interpretation proposed in §6, a compatible twist can surprise first-time audiences because earlier portions of the work led them—or misled them rather—to make certain faulty assumptions about the nature or direction of the work.⁷ Such compatible twists often invite a new hindsight interpretation of the work.

There is much room for error with respect to the existence and nature of surprise twists. An audience, or even the author, might be mistaken about whether a work has a twist. When there is a twist, the audience can be mistaken about its nature (thinking it incompatible when it is compatible, or vice versa) or about the author's beliefs about its nature (thinking the author thought it incompatible when it is compatible, or vice versa). An author can be mistaken about the nature of his or her twist; he or she might overlook some incompatible elements or take the work to have incompatible elements where there are none. An author might also make faulty predictions about audiences' reactions, misjudging the extent to which they will make a correct assessment about the nature of the twist, or the manner in which the twist will generate surprise. There are several possibilities, some of which will be relevant to the case of Hume's surprise twist.

2. Two Pictures of Hume

If Hume viewed the skeptical development as a surprise twist, it is worth asking whether he understood it to be a compatible twist or an incompatible twist. More

generally, we can ask whether he thought the skeptical development is compatible with all that preceded it or incompatible with something preceding it. For the sake of brevity, I will refer to this as the question of whether Hume was a *compatibilist* or an *incompatibilist*. Before examining some motivations for, and examples of, these two interpretive options, a few clarifications are in order.

First, it is crucial to distinguish this interpretive question of whether Hume was a compatibilist or incompatibilist from the separate philosophical question of whether the skeptical development is in fact compatible or incompatible with the earlier portions of the *Treatise*. One might think that Hume was a compatibilist but should have been an incompatibilist, if one thinks the ending of Book 1 is in fact incompatible with some of his earlier claims. In other words, an incompatibilist (with regard to Hume's skeptical development) might think that Hume was a compatibilist. The philosophical question is not my concern here.⁸

Second, in asking whether *Hume* was an incompatibilist or compatibilist, our interest is in Hume *qua* author, as opposed to Hume *qua* narrating "I" of the *Treatise*.⁹ This is a worthwhile distinction. There are some rather obvious points of divergence, as when the narrator expresses surprise or dismay at the work's developments in a way that is suggestive of new discovery (see, for example, T 1.4.2.56, 1.4.7.1; SBN 217–18, 263–64). Considering that Hume worked on his *Treatise* for years, it is doubtful that he maintained such attitudes at the later stages. Also, there may be cases of more substantial divergence in which Hume pretends, *via* narration, to endorse portions of his *Treatise* that he does not; it is necessary to take the possibility of such narrative pretense seriously (see §3.1 and 4). In this exploration of the compatibilist and incompatibilist pictures of Hume, our concern is with Hume the author in the late stages of working on his *Treatise*. I will henceforth refer to this Hume as "Hume."

Third, the compatibilist/incompatibilist distinction turns only on whether Hume thought the skeptical development was compatible or incompatible with preceding sections. The distinction does not presuppose that he intended for it to generate surprise in first-time readers. The claim that he viewed the skeptical development as a surprise twist will not play a significant role until §5.

Finally, a working assumption of this essay is that Hume was either a compatibilist or an incompatibilist. In other words, either he thought that the skeptical development was compatible with all preceding portions of the *Treatise*, or else he thought it was incompatible with some. While I find this assumption quite plausible, there are other options. Perhaps Hume was agnostic on the matter, oscillated between the two positions, or held some further position that deviates from this dichotomy. For the purposes of this essay, I will assume not. Even if this assumption is false, it should be worthwhile to investigate whether and how Hume could have been a compatibilist or incompatibilist.

2.1. Hume as Incompatibilist

Perhaps Hume believed the skeptical development to be incompatible with some preceding portions of the *Treatise*. This is a tempting picture. To see a natural, initial motivation for it, consider a few of the optimistic claims in the Introduction:

Here then is the only expedient, from which we can hope for success in our philosophical researches, to leave the tedious lingring method, which we have hitherto follow'd, and instead of taking now and then a castle or village on the frontier, to march up directly to the capital or center of these sciences, to human nature itself; which being once masters of, we may every where else hope for an easy victory. From this station we may extend our conquests over all those sciences, which more intimately concern human life, and may afterwards proceed at leisure to discover more fully those, which are the objects of pure curiosity. (T Intro. 6; SBN xvi)

Where experiments [from a cautious observation of human life] are judiciously collected and compar'd, we may hope to establish on them a science, which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension. (T Intro. 10; SBN xix)

These passages contrast strikingly with Hume's ventings of skeptical despair at T 1.4.7. In that final section of Book 1, our mental faculties, upon which philosophical pursuits rely, are likened to a "leaky weather-beaten vessel" that Hume thinks impossible to amend or correct (T 1.4.7.1; SBN 263–64). Famously, he even goes so far as to report 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).

This seems a stark contrast. Hume's despair and readiness to see all beliefs as equally (im)probable is a far cry from the bold optimism of the Introduction and his earlier, fervent defense of numerous theses. Why do these conclusions make him "resolve to perish on the barren rock" on which he finds himself rather than to venture upon "that boundless ocean, which runs out into immensity" (T 1.4.7.1; SBN 263–64)? Why would he express despair over these skeptical results if he thought them *compatible* with earlier claims and expressed expectations? This contrast, coupled with the fact that Hume himself appears to treat the skeptical development as irreconcilable with the science of man, makes it quite tempting to suppose that Hume was an incompatibilist.

Accordingly, some scholars have offered incompatibilist interpretations of Hume. John Immerwahr argues that the guiding aim of the *Treatise* is to build the science of man on a firm foundation (specifically, the general and established

properties of the imagination) and, at the same time, to develop a critique of both superstition and dogmatic philosophy.¹⁰ This project meets with partial failure. Despite his successful critique of dogmatism, Hume discovers in T 1.4 that exclusive reliance on the general qualities of the imagination leads to total skepticism, which undermines his hopes for the science of man. Further, the fact that some of our most fundamental and unavoidable beliefs depend upon the imagination's trivial qualities undermines his hopes of critiquing vulgar superstition.¹¹ On this interpretation, Hume was an incompatibilist; he believed that the results of T 1.4 are incompatible with the optimistic claims of the Introduction.

For different reasons, Louis Loeb also suggests that Hume admits to the partial failure of his project in 1.4.¹² Loeb understands Book 1 of the *Treatise* to involve a two-stage progression.¹³ In the first constructive stage, which runs into part 4, Hume is partially engaged in an epistemological project “to systematize or explain his pretheoretical distinctions among belief-forming mechanisms and thereby to sustain those distinctions with reference to a general theory of justification.” In the process, Hume endorses a number of belief-forming mechanisms: perception, memory, intuition, demonstration, causal inference, statistical or probabilistic forms of such inferences, and related forms of probability.¹⁴ But in the second destructive stage, there is a “dramatic reversal” in Hume’s expressed attitude toward the epistemological distinctions he himself has drawn. Indeed, he abandons them on the ground that they cannot be sustained.¹⁵ Thus, on Loeb’s portrayal as well, Hume was an incompatibilist, for he took his initial assessment of certain mechanisms to be undermined by developments in the skeptical culmination.

2.2. Hume as Compatibilist

Alternatively, perhaps Hume believed that the skeptical development is compatible with the preceding portions of the *Treatise*. This is a tempting picture for different reasons. A common, initial motivation for this position lies in the fact that, after the skeptical culmination, Hume appears to identify himself as a kind of skeptic and continues on with his naturalistic project. Books 2 and 3 seem to be a continuation of the earlier parts of Book 1. If the skeptical development is incompatible with the development of the science of man, why does the *Treatise* not end with Book 1? Focusing on these considerations, it is quite natural to interpret Hume as a compatibilist.

Proponents of compatibilist interpretations have the burden of explaining away the apparent incompatibility of the skeptical development and earlier portions. Don Garrett attempts to do this by arguing that Hume’s skepticism is not as radical as many have thought. It involves no endorsement or prescription of

radical epistemic-merit skepticism (that is, the view that assent to propositions in a given domain will lack any epistemic merit) that would be in tension with the earlier results of the *Treatise*.¹⁶ In his recital of skeptical arguments (T 1.4.7.3–7; SBN 265–69), Hume reveals several infirmities of our understanding and presents a dangerous dilemma pertaining to the difficulty of finding a prescriptive standard by which to determine which operations of reason should be approved.¹⁷ There are some hints of rational-support skepticism, the view that assent to propositions in a given domain will lack any rational support.¹⁸ And the recital does culminate in a *psychological report* of a state of total skeptical doubt in which Hume sometimes finds himself. Even so, Garrett claims there is ultimately no incompatibility. Hume reports how the skeptical clouds lift and defends “the Title principle,” which provides a solution to the dangerous dilemma.¹⁹

In contrast, William Edward Morris attempts to explain away the apparent incompatibility by arguing that the skeptical development is not in tension with Hume's own views. The dangerous dilemma, for instance, is a problem for the “conscientious traditional metaphysician” but not for Hume. Of the skeptical culmination, Morris writes:

[Hume] is offering us a dramatic representation of the forlorn state of a conscientious traditional metaphysician, perhaps even that of a “modern philosopher.” Such a person might well be dissatisfied with Hume's account of causation. Interested, obsessed even, with discovering the ultimate nature of reality, he will regard Hume's solutions as no solutions at all. Constantly frustrated, he tries to delve deeper for “original and ultimate principles,” only to discover that the reasons and arguments which meet his standards produce only contrary reasons and arguments and, ultimately, confusion. He finds himself in the dither Hume so vividly describes in I iv 7, as he confronts the dilemma of being forced to choose “betwixt a false reason or none at all.”²⁰

On this interpretation, there is a deep incompatibility revealed in the skeptical development, but it is located in the commitments of the traditional metaphysician, who is “[d]riven by his obsession with these problems, and by the desire to find ultimate solutions to them that meet his epistemic and rational standards.”²¹ There is no reason to suppose that Hume took the skeptical development to be incompatible with his own philosophical project.

These are two examples of interpretations according to which Hume thought the skeptical development was compatible with what preceded it. Unlike the incompatibilist interpretations mentioned in §2.2, these do not lend themselves to viewing the skeptical development as a surprise twist. In §6, I sketch a compatibilist interpretation that does.

3. Compatibilism, Incompatibilism, and Endorsement

Hume was either a compatibilist or an incompatibilist, I am assuming. In other words, either he thought the skeptical development was compatible with all that preceded it or he thought it was incompatible with something preceding it. This distinction cuts across a different set of distinctions that pertain to Hume's endorsement of these portions of the *Treatise*. In the present section, I clarify my use of "endorsement," discuss the presumption that a philosopher endorses his or her claims, and note some possibilities generated by these two sets of distinctions. In §4, I defend the claim that Hume endorsed both early *Treatise* and the skeptical development. If compelling, this constrains the ways in which it is reasonable to interpret Hume's surprise twist.

3.1. Endorsement and the Endorsement Presumption

Following Garrett, we may distinguish between the *embodiment* of a species of skepticism and the *endorsement* of it. To embody theoretical skepticism, for instance, is to take up a positive stance, such as belief, toward a view that there is a lack of rational grounds, warrant, or justification for assenting to propositions of some specified domain. To endorse this brand of skepticism is to take up a higher-order attitude of approval toward the embodiment of it.²² So, if Hume endorsed the results of the skeptical development, then he approved of taking up a positive stance toward them.²³ Similarly, if he endorsed the claims of early *Treatise*, then he approved of taking up a positive stance toward those claims.

"Endorsement," like "belief," admits of a dispositional use, which is how I intend to use the term. To say that Hume endorsed *p*, in this sense, is not to say that Hume maintained an occurrent attitude of approval toward the embodiment of *p* at all times, but only that he was disposed to have such an attitude under some specified set of conditions (for instance, when he was led to think about *p*, or when he was led to reflect on certain arguments having *p* as a conclusion). Hence, it is possible that Hume endorsed skeptical conclusions even if he did not always "feel their force" and sometimes even "forgot his skepticism" (see T 1.4.1.12, 1.4.7.15; SBN 186–87, 273–74). It is also possible that Hume endorsed incompatible claims without ever approving of them at the same moment; this point is relevant to the incompatibilist interpretation discussed in §5.

It is reasonable to presume, in the absence of any countervailing evidence, that a philosophical author endorses what is stated in his or her writings. I will call this the *endorsement presumption*. It is a defeasible, default assumption that the author of a philosophical work endorses its claims (or, more precisely, endorsed them at the final stages of writing). This presumption can be defeated by evidence that authorial endorsement is absent in one or more of the following ways. An author might pretend to endorse a position for the sake of ridiculing it or showcasing its

absurdities; call this *satirical pretense*. An author might pretend to endorse a position with the intention of deceiving his or her audience, for any number of reasons; call this *deception*. It might be explicitly supposed that a certain position or claim is true in order to explore it and work out its implications; call this *supposition*. A dialogical persona might be employed as a mouthpiece for views that the author does not endorse; call this *character pretense*. Lastly, an author might employ a narrator persona who endorses, if only temporarily, claims that the author does not accept; call this *narrative pretense*.

These forms of non-endorsement are not mutually exclusive. One might employ narration in order to mislead readers into thinking that she accepts a position that she is in fact ridiculing; this would be a case of deception, satirical pretense, and narrative pretense. Nor do these five forms exhaust all of the ways in which an author can fail to endorse his or her claims.²⁴ Yet, I believe they are the key ways in which a philosopher might fail to endorse substantial portions of his or her work.

3.2. Some Possibilities

One of my working assumptions is that Hume was either a compatibilist or an incompatibilist (see §2). For the sake of limiting the scope of this inquiry within manageable bounds, I now introduce a second, working assumption: regarding the skeptical development and early *Treatise*, Hume endorsed only one, both, or neither. There is another option. It may be that he endorsed only some aspects of one or both of these portions.²⁵ However, I will assume not. These two assumptions generate eight possibilities, C1–4 and I1–4:

- C: Hume thought the skeptical development and early *Treatise* compatible.
- I: Hume thought the skeptical development and early *Treatise* incompatible.
- 1: Hume endorsed the skeptical development only.
- 2: Hume endorsed early *Treatise* only.
- 3: Hume endorsed both.
- 4: Hume endorsed neither.

At first glance, some of these possibilities appear less probable than others. For instance, given the endorsement presumption, along with the symmetry of early *Treatise* and Books 2 and 3 (see §4.2), C4 and I4 seem improbable. At least, it is far from clear that there is any satisfying explanation of non-endorsement available. Of the remaining possibilities, it is tempting to think that C3 is more probable than C1 or C2. For if there is no conflict between the skeptical development and early *Treatise*, there is less reason to suspect that Hume would endorse one but not the

other. In contrast, I1 and I2 each seem more probable than I3. For if Hume believed the skeptical development and some part of early Book 1 to be incompatible, would it not be rather strange if he endorsed both? It might be thought, then, that the most plausible compatibilist picture has Hume endorsing both early *Treatise* and the skeptical development, while the most plausible incompatibilist picture has him endorsing only one of these portions. In the following section, I will attempt to narrow these eight possibilities down to two by providing a negative defense of the claim that Hume endorsed both.

4. Hume's Endorsement of Early *Treatise* and the Skeptical Development

The apparent incompatibility of the skeptical development and early *Treatise* invites consideration of whether Hume failed to endorse either of these portions of the *Treatise*. To be justified in thinking that he did, we require some plausible story as to the forms of non-endorsement in play. Call such a story a *non-endorsement hypothesis*. The aim of this section is to challenge some prominent non-endorsement hypotheses, thereby offering support for the claim that Hume endorsed both portions.²⁶ This claim is neither obvious nor uncontroversial; numerous scholars have rejected it. This claim is also significant for present purposes, for it implies that only two of the eight possibilities listed in the previous section are viable. Accepting this claim rules out certain ways of interpreting Hume's twist.

4.1. *The Skeptical Development*

A key motivation for suspecting that Hume did not endorse the skeptical development lies in its apparent incompatibility with early *Treatise*, coupled with Hume's eventual return to the pursuit of the science of man. Yet, what plausible story of Hume's non-endorsement of this portion of the *Treatise* can be told? Supposition and character pretense can be ruled out immediately. Hume does not treat the arguments in the skeptical development as mere suppositions, and character pretense is not applicable to the genre of the *Treatise*. Given the apparent absence of any reasons to suspect Hume of deception, I think that possibility can also be safely dismissed. The remaining options—satirical and narrative pretense—require more attention.

According to a “*reductio*” reading, Hume is engaged in quasi-satirical, narrative pretense in the skeptical development. In those passages, Hume is not exploring and lamenting problems for his own position but is instead showcasing difficulties facing the “traditional metaphysician.” Morris provides a nice example of a *reductio* reading.²⁷ If correct, this style of interpretation would provide an attractive resolution to the apparent tension between early *Treatise* and the skeptical

development and explain how Hume can boldly and unproblematically return to his naturalistic pursuits in Books 2 and 3.

Despite its appeal, this non-endorsement hypothesis strikes me as implausible.²⁸ To begin, it is difficult to believe that the narrative structure of Book 1 could be so awkwardly fragmented. The despairing skeptical culmination is presented in the first person. At the section's opening, there is no textual indication that a new voice has come onto the scene. Indeed, the text strongly implies continuity between the voice of T 1.4.7 and that of the earlier sections of T 1.4: "I find myself inclin'd to stop a moment in my present station, and to ponder that voyage, which I have undertaken" (T 1.4.7.1; SBN 263–64). But there is little temptation to think that the "I" of T 1.4 is consistently a traditional metaphysician. It seems that the *reductio* theorist must maintain that the narrative structure in T 1.4 is peculiarly and misleadingly fractured.

The *reductio* reading is also difficult to reconcile with the connection between the earlier and later parts of T 1.4.7, on the assumption that Hume's own voice is represented in the later parts. "Conclusion of this Book" divides into a first, despairing part (paragraphs 1 through 8, the skeptical culmination) and a second, rehabilitative part (paragraphs 9 through 15), and the first flows smoothly into the second. A single, narrating voice describes the onset of his skeptical despair, followed by an account of how he achieves release from it and eventually returns to the philosophical enterprise. Most commentators, including Baier and Morris,²⁹ concur that the second half of T 1.4.7 represents Hume's own voice. But this second half is fundamentally reactive. It is, in large part, an answer to the question of how to cope with the negative results of the skeptical development. If the skeptical development does not apply to Hume, then why would the ensuing discussion apply?³⁰

A final reason to be wary of a *reductio* reading, and for thinking that Hume endorsed the skeptical development, lies in the alteration that it (and the skeptical culmination in particular) marks in his expressed attitudes toward skepticism. Prior to T 1.4.7, there is hardly any place where Hume explicitly identifies with skepticism.³¹ Indeed, many of Hume's initial references to skeptics and skepticism are critical, focusing on those who try to take, or falsely purport to take, skepticism too far. In the Introduction, Hume says that only "the most determin'd scepticism, along with a great degree of indolence" could justify the aversion to abstruse metaphysics (T Intro. 3; SBN xiv–xv). At T 1.4.1, he refers to "sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in *any* thing possess of *any* measures of truth and falshood" and promptly denies that anyone is "ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion" (T 1.4.1.7; SBN 183). At T 1.4.2, he talks of "a few extravagant sceptics" who do not really believe what they claim to believe (T 1.4.2.50; SBN 213–14). Yet, immediately following the skeptical culmination, there are numerous points at which Hume explicitly self-identifies

as a skeptic and prescribes a brand of skepticism. In one of the more striking examples, Hume writes:

In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism
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. (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270)³²

By the close of Book 1, Hume openly embraces a form of skepticism, and this appears to be motivated by the skeptical considerations reviewed earlier. Taken together, these considerations are evidence that Hume was not merely engaged in narrative pretense but did in fact identify with and endorse the claims of the skeptical development.

4.2. *Early Treatise*

A key motivation for suspecting Hume's non-endorsement of early *Treatise* derives from its apparent incompatibility with the skeptical development, coupled with the evidence that he endorsed the skeptical development. But what non-endorsement hypothesis is plausible? Character pretense and explicit supposition do not apply. Nor does deception (on its own, at least) seem probable; if Hume was a skeptic hoping to trick his readers into thinking he was not, why would he include the skeptical development at all? As it was with the skeptical development, so it is here: the most probable story of non-endorsement is some kind of narrative, and perhaps satirical, pretense.

According to a "failure" interpretation of the *Treatise*, prior to the skeptical development we find Hume engaged in narrative pretense. The optimism displayed in the Introduction, for instance, is that of a confident and unsuspecting narrator and does not represent Hume's own voice. To borrow the words of Janet Broughton,

In the Introduction, the "I" announces his intentions innocently: he will apply to human nature itself the methods of investigation that have proved so fruitful in the physical sciences. He confidently expects to be able to discover the principles of human nature by gleaning up evidence from observations of human life. He cannot guess the appalling conclusions that await him. The author, of course, can: the author knows how the book turns out.³³

By the time the narrator reaches T 1.4.7, things have fallen apart. The project to establish a science of man has failed, and the narrator's initial optimism is

undermined. This reading interprets the *Treatise* as having an inquiry-style approach in which the developments of early *Treatise* lay the foundation for, but are undermined by, those exhibited in the skeptical development. It is the latter portion only that Hume endorses. Immerwahr's view is a clear example of a failure interpretation.³⁴ This style of interpretation is appealing insofar as it avoids attributing incompatible commitments to Hume while respecting his apparent endorsement of the skeptical development.

Still, an important challenge for the failure theorist is to tell a convincing story about the presence and status of Books 2 and 3, and it is doubtful whether this challenge can be met. If the *Treatise* meets with failure in Book 1, why does the work not end there? How can, and why would, Hume continue on? Does Hume endorse the results of the later books? Suppose, first, that he does. In that case, the constructive project of the *Treatise* would be only a partial failure. The interpretive story might go something like this: T 1.4.7 marks a crucial turning point, for it is there that the protagonist undergoes a climactic skeptical crisis, comes to terms with the failure of the early *Treatise* enterprise, and arrives at a strategy for proceeding in an unproblematic fashion. On this story, the enlightened narrator's endorsement of Books 2 and 3 reflects Hume's own endorsement.

Unfortunately, this partial-success view has problems. It is far from clear that the narrator's approach in Books 2 and 3 differs from his approach in Book 1 in a way that could render this asymmetry in Hume's endorsement intelligible. Despite the shift in subject matter, the general tone and style of Books 2 and 3 strongly resemble that of the early parts of Book 1. In both places, we find the narrator constructing arguments, making bold assertions, railing against the pretensions of other philosophers, relying on "experiments," and making frequent use of phrases like "'tis certain" and "'tis undeniable." Furthermore, much of Books 2 and 3 builds upon groundwork laid in early Book 1. Book 2 opens with a rehearsal of the Book 1 distinction between impressions and ideas, along with further subdivisions. Various aspects of Book 2 depend upon the associationist mechanisms introduced and discussed in Book 1,³⁵ and Book 3 (particularly the third part) draws on Book 2. These two features, style consistency and content dependence, are evidence that Books 2 and 3 are, in an important sense, a continuation of early Book 1. It is therefore difficult to believe that Hume endorsed the results of the later books without endorsing those of the earlier. A second, related problem for the partial-success reading is that, if the skeptical arguments discussed in T 1.4.7 are sweeping enough to undermine the constructive results of Book 1, it is plausible that they undermine the conclusions of the later books as well. Based on these considerations, I submit that, if Hume was engaged in mere narrative pretense in early *Treatise* and did not endorse its results, he did not endorse the claims of Books 2 and 3 either. This rules out the partial-success version of the failure interpretation.

Suppose now that Hume did not endorse Books 2 and 3. This suggests a total-failure reading on which the skeptical development effectively undermines all of the “constructive” results of the *Treatise*. While this interpretation does justice to the apparent symmetry of early *Treatise* and Books 2 and 3, it has problems as well. It has the noteworthy drawback of implying that Hume failed to endorse the *bulk* of his *Treatise*. Why would the man have expended such energy elaborating views to which he was not committed? His desire to establish the skeptical development is not sufficient to explain this, for many portions of the *Treatise* (most obviously, Books 2 and 3) play no role in motivating the skeptical development. The total-failure view also fits awkwardly with certain facts. If this form of interpretation were correct, it would be surprising that Hume did not give more emphasis to skepticism in the *Abstract*; as it happens, explicit discussion of it is largely condensed into a single paragraph (T *Abs.* 27; SBN 657). If the total-failure view were correct, it would also be surprising that Hume republished many of the same unendorsed arguments in his *Enquiries*. These considerations make the total-failure view look rather implausible. Lastly, the total-failure interpretation seems to ignore the optimism displayed immediately following the skeptical culmination. Near the end of T 1.4.7, Hume expresses hope that he may “contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge” and “bring [the science of man] a little more into fashion” (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272–73). In a particularly striking moment of post-skeptical optimism, Hume encourages readers to share in his hopes for the science of man:

Nor shou’d we despair of attaining this end, because of the many chimerical systems, which have successively arisen and decay’d away among men, wou’d we consider the shortness of that period, wherein these questions have been the subjects of enquiry and reasoning. Two thousand years with such long interruptions, and under such mighty discouragements are a small space of time to give any tolerable perfection to the sciences; and perhaps we are still in too early an age of the world to discover any principles, which will bear the examination of the latest posterity. (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272–73)

It is difficult to reconcile such lofty hopes with acknowledged failure. In sum, the failure interpretation has problems on both of the versions I have considered. It is plausible that Hume was not engaged in narrative pretense but did in fact endorse the claims of early *Treatise*.

Based on the considerations presented in this section, and in the absence of some plausible non-endorsement hypothesis, it is reasonable to conclude that Hume endorsed both early *Treatise* and the skeptical development. In the remainder of this essay, I will sketch and assess two interpretations of the *Treatise* that conform to this conclusion and my two working assumptions.

5. Incompatibilism and Perspectivism

Suppose that Hume was an incompatibilist, understood the skeptical development to be an incompatible surprise twist, and endorsed both early *Treatise* and the skeptical development. Then, I3 (the most surprising of the incompatibilist options sketched in §3) is the only viable incompatibilist option. A perspectivist reading of the sort proposed by Robert Fogelin is, I believe, the most promising interpretation of this form.³⁶ The aim of this section is to sketch a perspectivist, incompatibilist interpretation of the *Treatise* and to note one worry about this style of interpretation.

5.1. The Treatise as a Perspectivist Work

If Hume's own self-representation in T 1.4.7 and elsewhere is to be trusted, it is probable that he did not occurrently endorse what he took to be incompatible portions of his work *simultaneously*. Instead, he oscillated between different, conflicting states of occurrent belief and endorsement—different “perspectives,” if you will. Accordingly, Fogelin has interpreted Hume as having a somewhat fragmented, conflicted self and notes three perspectives that he appears to have occupied. There is the *gentlemanly Hume*, who plays backgammon, concerns himself with the affairs of common life, and feels distant and distrustful of the philosophical enterprise. There is the *wise Hume*, the cautious inquirer engaged in the project of constructing a science of man. And there is the *Pyrrhonian Hume*, who is aware of and compelled by certain skeptical arguments and finds himself in a state of despair.³⁷ In this section, I will follow Fogelin's lead, speaking in terms of these three Humes. To view the *Treatise* as a “perspectivist” work, as I intend this phrase, is to accept this fragmented picture of Hume and to think that more than one of Hume's perspectives is represented in the work.

Since we are supposing that Hume was an incompatibilist, the perspectivist picture of Hume invites the question of whether he perceived this incompatibility from the wise perspective, the Pyrrhonian perspective, or both. (The opinion of the philosophy-averse, gentlemanly Hume need not concern us here.) It seems clear that the Pyrrhonian Hume would be an incompatibilist, endorsing the results of the skeptical development and taking them to be incompatible with those of early *Treatise*. This perceived incompatibility serves to explain the doubt-stricken Hume's hesitance to resume the philosophical journey. Since the Pyrrhonian Hume “emerges from” and is therefore, in some sense, an extension of the wise Hume,³⁸ establishing that the Pyrrhonian Hume is an incompatibilist seems sufficient to establish that the wise Hume is one as well, insofar as he is an incompatibilist when led to reflect on skeptical topics.³⁹

T 1.4.7 is of special significance to a perspectivist interpretation. It contains the climax of Hume's incompatible, skeptical twist, where the Pyrrhonian Hume

is brought most vividly to life and Hume's inner conflict is displayed. It is there that Hume discusses how the Pyrrhonian dimension of his philosophical persona interacts with the gentlemanly and wise dimensions and attempts to explain and justify his continuance of the development of the science of man. In what follows, I offer what I believe to be the most plausible perspectivist reading of T 1.4.7.

5.2. An Incompatibilist, Perspectivist Reading of T 1.4.7

The close of T 1.4.6 prepares the reader for the transition to Book 2: "'Tis now time to return to a more close examination of our subject, and to proceed in the accurate anatomy of human nature, having fully explain'd the nature of our judgment and understanding" (T 1.4.6.23; SBN 263). These words are immediately followed by a reflective interlude: T 1.4.7. The section divides neatly into two parts. The first eight paragraphs constitute the climactic finale of an incompatible surprise twist in which the Pyrrhonian Hume appears in his most brilliant display and the tension in Hume's commitments is highlighted. In the remaining seven paragraphs, which I will here refer to as the "aftermath," there is an explanation of how Hume lives with this incompatibility and an attempt to vindicate philosophical activity on skeptical grounds.

5.2.1. The Climax of the Twist

At the section's opening, Hume tells us that he is inclined to pause, "ponder that voyage" he has undertaken, and express his reservations. The Pyrrhonian Hume reveals himself to the reader, and this is meant to contrast starkly with the confidence found in early *Treatise*. He speaks of his "despair," "diffidence," "apprehensions," "melancholy," and the "wretched condition, weakness, and disorder" of his faculties (T 1.4.7.1; SBN 263–64). He seems to regret exposing himself to "the enmity of all metaphysicians, logicians, mathematicians, and even theologians" now that, upon turning his eye inward, he finds "nothing but doubt and ignorance" (T 1.4.7.2; SBN 264–65). The first two paragraphs offer a first-personal description of the Pyrrhonian Hume's state of mind—the nature of his emotional responses, the content of his apprehensions and fears.

The next several paragraphs (T 1.4.7.3–7; SBN 265–68) provide the background story to the Pyrrhonian Hume's generation from the wise Hume's investigations. He reviews some "infirmities" of our understanding that ground his skeptical despair. After moving to the question of how far we ought to yield to certain illusions of the imagination, he claims that we face "a very dangerous dilemma" of choosing either (i) assent to the trivial qualities of the imagination, which leads to error, absurdity, and obscurity such that "we must at last become asham'd of our credulity," or (ii) rejection of the trivial qualities in favor of "the general and more establish'd properties of the imagination," which leads to "total scepticism"

(T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68). After entertaining one possible means of evading this dilemma (“a general maxim, that no refin’d or elaborate reasoning is ever to be receiv’d”) and then rejecting it, the Pyrrhonian Hume makes two things clear. First, these reflections are enough to plunge him into skeptical darkness and despair:

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 . . . [I] begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ’d with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv’d of the use of every member and faculty. (T 1.4.7.8; SBN 268–69)

This passage indicates that such reflections are sufficient to transform the wise Hume into his Pyrrhonian counterpart. Second, he has no philosophical solution to this epistemic quandary:

For my part, I know not what ought to be done in the present case. I can only observe what is commonly done; which is, that this difficulty 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. (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267–68)

This is reminiscent of the strategy mentioned at T 1.4.2.57 (SBN 218): “Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy.” Reason, he tells us, is incapable of dispelling these skeptical clouds (T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269). This implies that the relationship between these two Humean perspectives is asymmetric insofar as reasoning can initiate the transition from the wise Hume to the Pyrrhonian Hume, but not vice versa.

On the present perspectivist reading, this skeptical culmination is the climax of an incompatible surprise twist. It highlights the fact that Hume sometimes occupies a radical skeptical perspective, that this perspective is in conflict with the earlier “wise” perspective, and that Hume sees the former as representing a kind of philosophical terminus.

5.2.2. The Aftermath

The twist is surprising for another reason. Would it not have been natural for the *Treatise* to end with the skeptical culmination? If Hume has arrived at a skeptical dead-end, it is not clear how he can, or why he would, continue on. Yet, Hume has already announced that the project will “proceed in the accurate anatomy

of human nature.” The continuance of the *Treatise* is peculiar, and it seems that the key function of the aftermath (that is, T 1.4.7.9–15) is to render Hume’s continuance intelligible in two ways. First, there is a description—indeed, a kind of exhibition—of how Hume breaks free from debilitating skeptical despair and is eventually able and inclined to return to philosophical activity. Second, there is a skeptical defense of engaging in philosophical activity. These two overlapping elements of the aftermath will be highlighted in what follows.

A perspectivist interpretation of the *Treatise* should identify which standpoints Hume occupies in which parts of the work. In the aftermath, I submit that we find Hume in transformation. At the opening of the aftermath, there is a blending of the Pyrrhonian and gentlemanly Hume, which gradually gives way to a blending of the Pyrrhonian and wise Hume. The aftermath thus bridges the gap between the despairing, Pyrrhonian Hume of early T 1.4.7 and the ambitious, wise Hume of T 2.1.1.

At the opening of the aftermath, having just described the debilitating state of intellectual paralysis in which he finds himself, Hume begins his explanation of how it is possible for the *Treatise* to continue by noting that nature “cures” him of this skeptical malady:

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)

There are two ways in which the skeptical storm lifts. One is for nature simply to “relax his bent of mind” such that he is no longer lost in skeptical darkness. The other is by means of some diversion (e.g., conversing with friends), which effects the transformation to the gentlemanly Hume who is reduced to “indolent belief in the general maxims of the world” and finds his previous speculations “so cold, and strain’d, and ridiculous.” This post-paralysis, gentlemanly Hume still feels “such remains of [his] former disposition” that he is inclined to renounce philosophy altogether. Hume defends his adoption of that standpoint:

I may, nay I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding; and in this blind submission I show most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles. (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 269)

This invocation of skeptical principles, along with the suggestion that “all those who reason or believe any thing *certainly* are [fools],” suggests that the Pyrrhonian Hume is still on the scene. And yet, Hume also claims to be governed “at present”

by “that splenetic humor” that he is describing. For these reasons, it is plausible that T 1.4.7.9–11 (SBN 269–70) exhibits a mixture of the Pyrrhonian and gentlemanly Hume. Immediately following the description of the sentiments of his “spleen and indolence,” Hume makes a series of prescriptions that are presumably “sceptical principles”:

In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism. If we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise. 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)

On the present reading, this yield-to-the-current-of-nature sermon is delivered by Hume when he is indolent, splenetic, and appreciative of the force of skeptical arguments. These skeptical principles vindicate Hume's tendency to shift perspectives.

Beginning at the twelfth paragraph, the disdain for philosophy begins to fade. Hume discusses how his philosophical interests naturally rekindle, due to curiosity, ambition, and a desire for pleasure. This explains how the transition from the gentlemanly Hume to the wise Hume is achieved, and the narrator implies that he is undergoing the alteration himself (“These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition . . .”). The transition from the splenetic temper of the gentlemanly/Pyrrhonian Hume to the constructive outlook of the wise/Pyrrhonian Hume is underway. Whereas the former was “ready to throw all [his] books and papers into the fire,” the latter is attuned to the advantages of philosophical activity. For instance, he observes that, because people are inevitably led to reflect [“'tis almost impossible for the mind of man to rest, like those of beasts, in that narrow circle of objects, which are the subject of daily conversation and action” (T 1.4.7.13; SBN 271–72)], it is better that they gravitate toward philosophy rather than superstition, as the former is more modest, less disturbing to the mind, and less dangerous.

By the fourteenth paragraph, the fading of the gentlemanly Hume and the reemergence of the wise Hume is evident. First, Hume's discussion of the philosophical enterprise is constructive and optimistic in a way that is quite reminiscent of the Introduction, which presumably represents the voice of the wise Hume. For instance, after noting that there are some “honest gentlemen” in England who “have carry'd their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are every day expos'd to their senses,” Hume suggests that many philosophical system-builders could stand to adopt “a share of this gross earthy mixture, . . . which wou'd serve to temper those fiery particles, of which they are compos'd” (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272).

This resembles the Introduction emphasis on keeping our inquiries close to experience (T Intro. 8–10; SBN xvii–xix). Hume goes on to express his hope that he “may contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge” and affirms that “Human Nature is the only science of man.” This also revives themes and attitudes of the Introduction. Second, Hume explicitly flags his changing temper: “the hope of [bringing the science of man a little more into fashion] serves to compose my temper from that spleen, and invigorate it from that indolence, which sometimes prevail upon me” (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 273). He claims to be in an “easy disposition” that makes him ready to enter into philosophical speculations once again. This is an indication that the transformation to the wise Hume is underway.

At the same time, there is still much of the Pyrrhonian Hume at work in these passages. He thinks philosophy is preferable to superstition, in large part, because it is more “agreeable” and its opinions “seldom go so far as to interrupt the course of our natural propensities” (T 1.4.7.13; SBN 271–72). These thoughts relate to the skeptical principles mentioned above. In addition, the expressed hopes for the philosophical enterprise appear to be tempered by his skepticism:

[W]e 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 272–73)

This modesty with respect to truth is best attributed to the Pyrrhonian Hume. For the wise Hume is “apt not only to forget [his] scepticism, but even [his] modesty too” and succumbs to the natural propensity to be “positive and certain in *particular points*,” leading him to make use of such phrases as “’tis undeniable” and “’tis certain” (T 1.4.7.15; SBN 273–74). Finally, the fourteenth paragraph ends with a nod to skepticism:

If the reader finds himself in the same easy disposition, let him follow me in my future speculations. If not, let him follow his inclination, and wait the returns of application and good humour. The conduct of a man, who studies philosophy in this careless manner, is more truly sceptical than that of one, who feeling in himself an inclination to it, is yet so overwhelmed with doubts and scruples, as totally to reject it. A true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction; and will never refuse any innocent satisfaction, which offers itself, upon account of either of them. (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 273)

It is evident in this passage that Hume is still taking the results of the skeptical development quite seriously, so much so that he openly extols the ways of the

“true sceptic.” Indeed, the final paragraph of T 1.4.7 ends with Hume identifying himself as a skeptic. However, if the fragmented, perspectivist picture of Hume is on track, we should expect that, by the opening of Book 2, Hume has come around full circle and once again embodies that wise Hume who has forgotten his previous skepticism.

On the present reading, T 1.4.7 is the venue in which Hume showcases the various perspectives he occupies. The Pyrrhonian Hume is exhibited, and Hume illustrates his transition to the gentlemanly/Pyrrhonian Hume and then to the wise/Pyrrhonian Hume. It is there that Hume highlights a surprising incompatibility in his commitments—in particular, those of the Pyrrhonian Hume and the wise Hume. Though the tension between these perspectives is philosophically irresolvable, he attempts to show his readers that it is a livable tension and that, even from a skeptical perspective, there is much to be said for engaging in philosophical activity. The skeptic in Hume condones his continuance of the *Treatise*, even if he cannot accept its conclusions.

5.3. A Reservation

While a perspectivist interpretation along these lines may be the most promising form of incompatibilist interpretation, given the assumptions in play, I do have one reservation. On the perspectivist reading of T 1.4.7 offered above, the final paragraphs represent a blending of the wise Hume and the Pyrrhonian Hume. This is rather odd for these are supposed to be perspectives in irresolvable conflict. The fact that they merge smoothly into a unified voice casts doubt, in my mind, on this fragmented portrait of Hume and suggests the possibility that Hume thought his skeptical and naturalistic commitments could be reconciled. This invites consideration of a compatibilist interpretation.

6. Compatibilism, Skepticism, and Post-Skepticism

Suppose now that Hume was a compatibilist and viewed the skeptical development as a compatible surprise twist. Suppose also that he endorsed both early *Treatise* and the skeptical development, as argued in §4. Then, C3 is the only viable compatibilist option. The aim of this section is to sketch a “post-skeptical” interpretation of the *Treatise* on which Book 1 contains two compatible twists and to provide some additional support for this interpretation.

6.1. The Treatise as a Post-Skeptical Work

There is good reason to believe that Hume considered himself a skeptic. §4.1 offers some defense of the claim that he endorsed the skeptical development. In the Abstract, he calls his philosophy “very sceptical” and claims that “Philosophy

would render us entirely *Pyrrhonian*, were not nature too strong for it" (T *Abs.* 27; SBN 657). He also seems to identify with skepticism in later philosophical work. If Hume did consider himself a skeptic, perhaps he was sensitive to his skepticism in composing the *Treatise* in its entirety. The *Treatise* might be a work that is *post-skeptical* in the following sense: it is an attempt, by one convinced of the strength of certain skeptical arguments, to undertake a philosophical endeavor that is compatible with skepticism.⁴⁰ It might be Hume's guide to doing post-skeptical philosophy.

But if a post-skeptical interpretation is correct, why did Hume not make this known at the outset of the *Treatise*? It is not difficult to see one reason why he might have preferred to postpone laying his cards on the table. Skepticism is hardly an uncontroversial position. Portraying himself as a committed skeptic engaged in a post-skeptical project in the first few pages of his treatise would risk alienating his readers, leading some to dismiss the work without giving his arguments a fair hearing. By opening the work with no hint of skepticism, Hume presumably hoped that readers would come to accept his early conclusions, appreciate the constructive dimension of his project, and only later be forced to reckon with the skeptical considerations that he found compelling.⁴¹

If Hume composed his *Treatise* as a post-skeptical work in the specified sense, then T 1.4.7 has special significance. It is there that Hume most explicitly discloses his skeptical commitments and the true nature of his project. It reveals a second surprise twist that invites readers to reevaluate the significance and status of early *Treatise*. It is, in a sense, the belated prologue to the *Treatise*.

6.2. A Compatibilist, Post-Skeptical Reading of T 1.4.7

T 1.4.7 divides neatly into two parts on the present, post-skeptical reading, just as it did on the perspectivist reading. On this interpretation, however, the second part of T 1.4.7 constitutes a second twist. The surprise of the first twist, the skeptical development, lies in the fact that Hume reaches skeptical results that seem incompatible with his earlier claims. The surprise of the second twist consists in the revelation that, contrary to initial appearances, there is no incompatibility and that Hume has been philosophizing as a skeptic from the outset.

6.2.1. The Climax of Twist I

In the first seven paragraphs of T 1.4.7, Hume confesses his hesitance to continue on with his naturalistic project, likening our faculties to a "leaky weather-beaten vessel," and reviews the considerations that give rise to his present sentiments. In the eighth paragraph, he describes the extreme skeptical mood that sometimes affects him, a state in which he is completely disoriented and "ready to reject all belief and reasoning."

This skeptical culmination is the climactic finale of the first surprise twist of the *Treatise*. The project has taken a skeptical turn, which has the marks of being incompatible with what came before and of invalidating the initial hopes for the science of man. Hume accomplishes a few things in this section. First, he alerts the reader to his skeptical commitments and some of the considerations grounding them. His allegiance to skepticism is evidenced, in part, by the fact that he knows of no philosophical solution to the skeptical quandaries he presents (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 268), though it is all the more apparent in the latter part of T 1.4.7, where Hume self-identifies as a skeptic and makes a series of “sceptical” prescriptions. Second, in defending a skeptical standpoint, Hume prepares the way for his explanation of how a post-skeptical philosophical treatise is possible and can be endorsed. Third, through his description of the despairing skeptical mood that sometimes befalls him, Hume leads his readers to think that the skeptical development is an incompatible twist—or, at least, that he thinks it is. The misdirection is, I believe, best explained by Hume’s desire to heighten the surprise of the second twist.

6.2.2. *Twist II*

The first twist leaves much unresolved. How could one compelled by skeptical arguments compose a work of this nature, and how could he convince himself on any particular point? And even if he could manage to shake the skeptical doubts and produce such a work, why bother? The second part of T 1.4.7 gives Hume’s answers and introduces a second surprise.

In response to the first psychological question, Hume illustrates the two steps by which the move from paralyzed skeptic to philosophical inquirer is achieved, at least in his own experience. The story of Hume’s transformation is much as it was described in the perspectivist reading of §5.2, though his skeptical commitments are now interpreted as an ineliminable aspect of his philosophical persona. In paragraphs nine and ten, Hume discusses the first step. Nature “cures [him] of this philosophical melancholy and delirium” by distracting him with “the common affairs of life.” He dines, he converses, and he resolves “never more to renounce the pleasures of life for the sake of reasoning and philosophy.” The memory of his previous skeptical mood causes him to dismiss philosophical activity as painful and fruitless. In paragraphs twelve through fifteen, he discusses and illustrates the second step. His philosophical interest rekindles. This is partly due to a curiosity about “all those subjects, about which [he has] met with so many disputes in the course of [his] reading and conversation,” partly due to “an ambition . . . of contributing to the instruction of mankind, and of acquiring a name by [his] inventions and discoveries,” and partly due to a conviction that he would be “a loser in point of pleasure” by neglecting his philosophical impulses (T 1.4.7.12; SBN 270–71). Once this philosophical interest returns, we need only “indulge our inclination in the

most elaborate philosophical researches” and “yield to that propensity, which inclines us to be positive and certain in *particular points*, according to the light, in which we survey them in any *particular instant*” (T 1.4.7.15; SBN 273–74). This accounts for the psychological possibility of a post-skeptical return to philosophy.

Moving now to the question of why one should bother with philosophy in the face of skepticism, there appear to be two strands in Hume’s response. As we saw on the perspectivist reading, one strand is a skeptical defense of doing philosophy whenever one is so inclined. For Hume, skeptical principles endorse yielding to “the current of nature” and blindly submitting to one’s senses and understanding (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 269). This involves following one’s inclinations, whether in avoiding philosophy, in pursuing it, or in believing whatever strikes one as compelling at that moment. Hence, Hume is critical of those who allow skeptical doubts to override their inclination to philosophize:

The conduct of a man, who studies philosophy in this careless manner [i.e. following his inclination], is more truly sceptical than that of one, who feeling in himself an inclination to it, is yet so over-whelm’d with doubts and scruples, as totally to reject it. A true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction; and will never refuse any innocent satisfaction, which offers itself, upon account of either of them. (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 273)

For Hume, the true skeptic will not hesitate to embark on a philosophical journey whenever the inclination is present.

On the post-skeptical interpretation, there is a crucial, second strand in which Hume defends a certain kind of philosophical activity, and this is a key point of divergence from the perspectivist interpretation. One source of puzzlement over the fact that a skeptic would bother with philosophical pursuits stems from the assumption that skepticism is necessarily incompatible with and destructive of philosophical pursuits. Hume challenges this assumption by suggesting the possibility of a distinctively post-skeptical approach to philosophy that springs from, and is compatible with, the skepticism with which he identifies. In the final sections of T 1.4.7, Hume offers us some hints as to what this involves. After discussing some down-to-earth honest gentlemen in England, he writes:

I wish we cou’d communicate to our founders of systems, a share of this gross earthy mixture, as an ingredient, which they commonly stand much in need of, and which wou’d serve to temper those fiery particles, of which they are compos’d. 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. But were these hypotheses once remov'd, 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)

The goal of post-skeptical philosophy, it appears, is to establish a system of views "satisfactory to the human mind," suited to "common practice and experience," and "steady" in the sense that it can stand up to "the test of the most critical examination," regardless of whether it is true. That this is Hume's own end in doing philosophy is strongly implied by his identification with it in the passage immediately following: "*Nor shou'd we despair of attaining this end*, because of the many chimerical systems, which have successively arisen and decay'd away among men" (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272–73; my emphasis). It seems that Hume valued and endorsed the constructive conclusions of his *Treatise*, not as certain truths, but only as "steady principles" that might "bear the examination of the latest posterity."⁴² His endorsement was therefore qualified, mitigated by his skepticism. Like a "true sceptic," Hume endorsed his philosophical conclusions (including the doubts to which they gave rise) in a diffident, non-dogmatic, skeptical spirit. This helps to explain Hume's disclaimer regarding those times when he yields to "that propensity, which inclines [him] to be positive and certain in *particular points*":

On such an occasion we are apt not only to forget our scepticism, but even our modesty too; and make use of such terms as these, '*tis evident, 'tis certain, 'tis undeniable*; which a due deference to the public ought, perhaps, to prevent. I may have fallen into this fault after the example of others; but I here enter a *caveat* against any objections, which may be offer'd on that head; and declare that such expressions were extorted from me by the present view of the object, and imply no dogmatical spirit, nor conceited idea of my own judgment, which are sentiments that I am sensible can become no body, and a sceptic still less than any other. (T 1.4.7.15; SBN 274)⁴³

In this passage, Hume is attempting to circumvent the objection that, in early *Treatise*, he has violated his own skeptical prescriptions. Though he may have occasionally "fallen into this fault" of forgetting his skepticism, being fully convinced of certain philosophical conclusions, and using inappropriately bold language, it would be a mistake to assume that his endorsement of any conclusion in early *Treatise* was dogmatic. Such sentiments, he notes, are unbecoming of a skeptic. In that final sentence of Book 1, Hume self-identifies as a skeptic and implies that his claims in early *Treatise* were made as a skeptic.

This second twist of the *Treatise* reveals that, contrary to initial appearances, the skeptical development is actually a *compatible* twist and that the *Treatise* is a post-skeptical work. Hume did much to facilitate a sense of surprise. He stifled explicit endorsement of skepticism throughout the early portions of Book 1. He allowed himself to speak of his conclusions as “evident” and “certain.” And, in the climactic skeptical culmination, he can easily appear to treat the skeptical conclusions as being incompatible with the results of early *Treatise*. It is only natural for a first-time reader to assume that the skeptical development is in deep tension with Hume’s naturalistic project. Yet, if the present, post-skeptical reading is correct, Hume purposefully misled readers to make this assumption with the intention of undermining it at the close of Book 1.

6.3. Further Support

Two pieces of supporting evidence for the post-skeptical interpretation are worth mentioning. First, there are some striking similarities between the Introduction and the second half of T 1.4.7, both in content and in tone. Consider a passage from Hume’s Introduction in which he remarks upon the unpopularity of abstruse reasoning:

We have so often lost our labour in such researches, that we commonly reject them without hesitation, and resolve, if we must for ever be a prey to errors and delusions, that they shall at least be natural and entertaining. (T Intro. 3; SBN xiv)

This dismissive attitude resembles the sentiments of spleen and indolence discussed in T 1.4.7, which lead Hume to ask why he must “torture” himself with “so painful an application” and to ultimately conclude, “No: If I must be a fool, as all those who reason or believe any thing *certainly* are, my follies shall at least be natural and agreeable” (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 270). Yet, in both places, Hume then steps up to defend philosophy from the criticisms of the indolent. In the Introduction, Hume reminds us that truth, if attainable by humans at all, “must lie very deep and abstruse; and to hope we shall arrive at it without pains, while the greatest geniuses have fail’d with the utmost pains, must certainly be esteem’d sufficiently vain and presumptuous” (T Intro. 3; SBN xiv–xv). In T 1.4.7, Hume escapes his own indolent mood, regains his “ambition . . . of contributing to the instruction of mankind,” and reminds us that the advancement of knowledge requires time:

Two thousand years with such long interruptions, and under such mighty discouragements are a small space of time to give any tolerable perfection to the sciences; and perhaps we are still in too early an age of the world

to discover any principles, which will bear the examination of the latest posterity. (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 273)

Hume goes on to express hope that he may “contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge” and “bring [the science of man] a little more into fashion” (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 273).⁴⁴ As in the Introduction, Hume implies that the speculations of philosophers have often been misguided and suggests that a proper pursuit of the science of man will lead to progress. Since the views and optimism expressed in T 1.4.7 are undeniably post-skeptical, the parallels between the Introduction and T 1.4.7 are telling. They provide some reason for thinking that the views and optimism of the Introduction are post-skeptical as well.

A second piece of support for the post-skeptical interpretation lies in the parallels between T 1.4.7 and the discussion of mitigated skepticism in the first *Enquiry*. According to the post-skeptical interpretation, T 1.4.7 is where Hume explicitly introduces a distinctive, post-skeptical approach to philosophy and reveals that the *Treatise* exemplifies that approach. Unfortunately, Hume tells us very little about the approach in the *Treatise*, though he does specify its goal (namely, steady principles that can withstand critical examination) and implies that it involves non-dogmatic, diffident endorsement of philosophical convictions and doubts. Still, there are some illuminating similarities between T 1.4.7 of the *Treatise* and Section 12 of the first *Enquiry*. First, there are structural parallels that give us some reason to expect similarity in content. In each place, Hume first displays a series of skeptical arguments, treating them as philosophically indestructible.⁴⁵ He next explains that “nature” and “instinct” free us from skepticism’s grip.⁴⁶ He then proceeds, as one appreciative of the force of skeptical arguments, to discuss how there can still be philosophical progress.⁴⁷ Second, there are parallels in content. In particular, the first species of mitigated skepticism involves a non-dogmatic, diffident endorsement of one’s conclusions (EHU 12.24; SBN 161–62). In addition, Hume’s positive appraisal of “durable principles” in the *Enquiry* is reminiscent of his discussion of “steady principles” in the *Treatise* (EHU 12.23; SBN 159–60). These parallels lend support to the post-skeptical interpretation because it is relatively clear that mitigated skepticism, as Hume conceives of it, is a post-skeptical approach to philosophy. Hume is quite explicit that this style of philosophizing tends to result from “Pyrrhonian doubts and scruples,” and he endorses it as “durable and useful.” He also recognizes that those who lack “a small tincture of Pyrrhonism” tend to do philosophy in a different way—dogmatically, impulsively, and allowing themselves to indulge in “distant and high enquiries” far removed from common life. The fact that mitigated skepticism is a post-skeptical philosophical approach endorsed by Hume and that there are notable similarities between EHU 12 and T 1.4.7 is further evidence that Hume was gesturing toward a post-skeptical approach at the end of Book 1 of the *Treatise*. That, in turn, is evidence that the *Treatise* is itself a post-skeptical work.

7. Conclusion

My aim has been to explore, in a very preliminary way, the idea that Hume viewed the skeptical development of his *Treatise* as a surprise twist. Working under the assumption that Hume was either a compatibilist or an incompatibilist and the simplifying assumption that, regarding early *Treatise* and the skeptical development, Hume endorsed only one, both, or neither, I have offered a negative defense of the claim that he endorsed both of these portions. This led to an investigation of two lines of interpretation: one that is perspectivist and incompatibilist, another that is post-skeptical and compatibilist. For reasons given in §5.3 and 6.3, the post-skeptical interpretation of the *Treatise* strikes me as the more promising option. If an interpretation of this form is correct, it is clear that the *Treatise* did “fail” in one significant way. Hume intended for T 1.4.7 to surprise his readers with the revelation that his skepticism is perfectly compatible with his pursuit of the science of man and that the *Treatise* is a post-skeptical work. Instead, Hume’s famous “Conclusion of this book” has been a source of perennial dispute.

NOTES

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1 References to Hume’s works conform to the following scheme of abbreviations: [T] *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); [EHU] *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); [SBN] *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) and *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

2 My characterization of the skeptical development (and of “early *Treatise*,” the portions preceding the skeptical development) is intentionally vague so as to leave room for debate over which portions of the *Treatise* qualify as skeptical. On most accounts, the skeptical development will include at least T 1.4.1, 1.4.2, 1.4.4, and the skeptical culmination, but it is controversial where skepticism first appears in the *Treatise*. The discussion and arguments in this essay are largely neutral on this issue, allowing for the possibility that skeptical arguments make their first appearance somewhat early in Book 1 (e.g., at T 1.2.6 or 1.3.6) and that Hume intended that first-time readers’ surprise or puzzlement should extend from that point to the end of Book 1. What is being assumed, however, is that the Introduction is not overtly skeptical and the skeptical culmination is. (Even if Hume incorporated subtle foreshadowing of skepti-

cism in the Introduction, I am assuming that he did not intend first-time readers to pick up on this.)

3 There is the table of contents, of course. But this only alerts readers to the fact that Hume will discuss skeptical topics, not to whether he will ultimately argue for some form of skepticism.

4 See the relevant discussion in §4.1.

5 A few comments are in order. By "first-time audiences," I have in mind individuals with no previous exposure to the work or its content. Perhaps few people today qualify as first-time readers of the *Treatise* in this sense. One is typically exposed to discussions of Hume's ideas and to excerpts of his work prior to doing a cover-to-cover read of the *Treatise*. [Prichard once wrote, "Hume's reputation as the arch skeptic leads all of us, I think, to approach the *Treatise* for the first time with a certain trepidation." H. A. Prichard, *Knowledge and Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 174.] The preceding point helps to explain why the second "success" condition requires a counterfactual element. A work might not tend to generate surprise in first-time readers because it has none. Intuitively, this does not preclude it from having a surprise twist. It is enough that a portion of a work is such that it would tend to generate surprise were it encountered by first-time audiences under the appropriate conditions. Granted, the relevant class of first-time readers or viewers should perhaps be restricted either to individuals close enough to the author's own context, or to the author's intended audience. (Thanks to Ken Walton for suggesting this final point.)

6 Of course, it is questionable whether a surprise twist *via* unreliable *narration* is ever incompatible, for the fact that the narrator earlier *reported not-p* is not incompatible with the fictionality of *p*, nor is it incompatible with the fact that the narrator later reports *p*. Surprising unreliable narration invites us to draw a distinction between what occurs in the fictional world and the narrator's account of what occurs in it.

7 M. Night Shyamalan's 1999 film *The Sixth Sense* affords a nice, cinematic example of a compatible twist of this sort. It is the story of a child psychologist counseling a troubled youth who has the ability to see and communicate with ghosts. The film's twist ending (if I may spoil the surprise) consists in the revelation that the psychologist is himself a ghost. This ending comes as a surprise to many first-time viewers partly because there are several scenes in which it is quite natural, though mistaken, to assume that the protagonist is interacting and communicating with living people other than the boy. In fact, nothing that the viewer is shown earlier in the film is incompatible with the twist ending.

8 This is not to say that the philosophical question is irrelevant to the question of whether Hume was a compatibilist or incompatibilist. Charity may require that our answers to the former question constrain our answers to the latter. For this reason (among others), this essay is intended only as a preliminary investigation of Hume's position. In my view, a full investigation must engage with the philosophical question as well.

9 Janet Broughton has emphasized this distinction in "The Inquiry in Hume's *Treatise*," *Philosophical Review* 113 (2004): 537–56, 551. See also Annette Baier's references to Hume's "protagonist" in *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

10 John Immerwahr, "The Failure of Hume's *Treatise*," *Hume Studies* 3 (1977): 57–71, 63.

11 *Ibid.*, 64, 69.

12 Louis Loeb, *Stability and Justification in Hume's Treatise* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002). It is worth mentioning that Loeb later modified his views in a way that appears to abandon incompatibilism. See Louis Loeb, "Stability and Justification in Hume's *Treatise*, Another Look—A Response to Erin Kelly, Frederick Schmitt, and Michael Williams," *Hume Studies* 30 (2004): 339–404.

13 Loeb, *Stability and Justification*, 18–20.

14 *Ibid.*, 32.

15 *Ibid.*, 14–16.

16 Don Garrett, "A Small Tincture of Pyrrhonism': Skepticism and Naturalism in Hume's Science of Man," in *Pyrrhonian Skepticism*, ed. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 68–98, 80, 85–86. See also Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 215.

17 Garrett, "A Small Tincture," 85.

18 *Ibid.*, 80.

19 *Ibid.*, 86–87. See also Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 233–37.

20 William Edward Morris, "Hume's Conclusion," *Philosophical Studies* 99 (2000): 89–110, 107.

21 *Ibid.*, 107–108.

22 Garrett, "A Small Tincture," 78. Garrett offers this characterization of theoretical skepticism at page 70.

23 It should be noted that I am not specifying the nature of skepticism that figures in the skeptical development. I wish to remain neutral on that issue here.

24 There is also hyperbole and metaphor, for instance.

25 Loeb (2002) thinks so, for he argues that Hume fails to endorse only the epistemological aspect of his early *Treatise* project but not the associationist aspect. Loeb, *Stability and Justification*, 29–30. He would therefore reject this working assumption.

26 I do not, however, purport to establish how he endorsed these portions of the *Treatise* or whether he endorsed each in the same way.

27 Cf. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments* and Barbara Winters, "Hume on Reason," *Hume Studies* 5 (1979): 20–35.

28 For some criticisms geared toward Baier's interpretation, see David Owen, "Reason, Reflections, and Reductios," *Hume Studies* 20 (1994): 195–210; Louis Loeb, "A Progress of Sentiments, Reflections on Hume's *Treatise*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54.2 (1994): 467–74; and Michael Ridge, "Epistemology Moralized: David Hume's Practical Epistemology," *Hume Studies* 29 (2003): 165–204, 176–78.

29 Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 57–58; Morris, “Hume’s Conclusion,” 107–109.

30 This line of objection is adapted from one pressed by Louis Loeb in Loeb, “A Progress,” 473.

31 There is at least one exception. Hume tells us that, by their invention and frequent use of terms like “faculty” and “occult quality,” some philosophers “set themselves at ease, and arrive at last, by an illusion, at the same indifference, which the people attain by their stupidity, and *true philosophers by their moderate scepticism*” (T 1.4.3.10; SBN 224; my emphasis). To my knowledge, this is the only place prior to T 1.4.7 where Hume explicitly endorses a kind of skepticism in the *Treatise*.

32 See also T 1.4.7.10 and 1.4.7.14–15; SBN 269–70 and 272–74.

33 Broughton, “The Inquiry,” 551.

34 Perhaps Janet Broughton also subscribes to a failure interpretation in her essay “The Inquiry in Hume’s *Treatise*.” Broughton claims that Hume gives “fuller and stronger reasons for his skeptical conclusion than for his resumption of scientific inquiry,” “gives no reasons at all for his resumption,” and “treats his resumption of scientific inquiry in a detached way, as involving convictions with which he cannot fully identify himself.” *Ibid.*, 550. Broughton might be insinuating that Hume does not endorse the constructive project of the *Treatise*. Alternatively, she may simply think that his endorsement is qualified; if so, her view resembles the compatibilist interpretation that I offer in §6, which was partly inspired by her helpful discussion.

35 The following are some representative sections where this is apparent: T 2.1.4, 2.1.6, 2.1.9–10, 2.3.5, 2.3.7; SBN 282–84, 290–94, 303–16, 422–24, 427–32.

36 Robert Fogelin, “Garrett on the Consistency of Hume’s Philosophy,” *Hume Studies* 24 (1998): 161–69, and “Hume’s Skepticism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton and Jacqueline Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 90–116. See also Richard Popkin, “David Hume: His Pyrrhonism and his Critique of Pyrrhonism,” in *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1980), 103–32.

37 Fogelin, “Garrett on the Consistency,” 163–65.

38 *Ibid.*, 164.

39 It may be that the early disparaging comments about skepticism are attributable to the wise Hume. Fogelin thinks these three perspectives are mutually critical, citing SBN 159 (EHU 12.21–23) as evidence of the wise Hume’s critical attitude toward the Pyrrhonian Hume. *Ibid.*, 165.

40 With a somewhat different motivation and emphasis, David Fate Norton makes a related claim: “Hume can be helpfully understood as what we might call a *post-sceptical* philosopher. That is, Hume’s study of philosophy had convinced him that such important philosophers as Malebranche, Locke, Bayle, and Berkeley had already taken traditional metaphysics and epistemology to their sceptical conclusions. . . . Well aware of the pervasive if often implicit scepticism of his predecessors, Hume concluded that the most important remaining task of philosophy, indeed, perhaps the only plausible remaining task, was to show how, given the apparent triumph of scepticism, we get on

with our lives, including both our intellectual and our moral lives.” David Fate Norton, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 19–199, 113–114.

41 Granted, Hume’s penchant for the dramatic may also factor into the best explanation of why he opted for a twist.

42 For more discussion of what this end might involve, see Michael Williams, “The Unity of Hume’s Project,” *Hume Studies* 30 (2004): 265–96, 284–96.

43 If we understand incompatibilism in a fairly literal manner, Hume must have been an incompatibilist, if only in virtue of the passages in which he prefaces his remarks with phrases like “’tis certain” or “’tis undeniable.” But if we opt for a less literal approach, which I favor, such phrases may be interpreted (much as Hume recommends) as mere rhetorical flourishes that are not essential to the points being made. This allows for claims preceded by such phrases to play a role in leading readers into faulty assumptions about Hume’s endorsement of claims in Book 1 without being incompatible with the skeptical development. I am not inclined to think that such overstatements should be interpreted as instances of narrative pretense, primarily because Hume continues to employ them in Books 2 and 3. (Thanks to Dmitri Gallow, William Dunaway, and an anonymous referee for bringing this issue to my attention.)

44 Immerwahr cites these passages as evidence that the optimism of the Introduction is severely downgraded in the latter portions of T 1.4.7: “In the Introduction Hume had promised to *march up directly to the capital* in establishing the science of man, but by the conclusion Hume is content to bring the science of man *a little more into fashion*.” Immerwahr, “The Failure,” 68. [A similar thought is expressed in Robert Fogelin, *Hume’s Skeptical Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 134–35.] However, in the relevant portion of the Introduction, Hume is not making promises about what he will single-handedly accomplish in his *Treatise* (which, it should be noticed, is modestly subtitled as an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects). Rather, he is trying to motivate his project by proclaiming the general importance of pursuing the science of man, which he thinks is “the only solid foundation for the other sciences” (T Intro 7; SBN xvi–xvii). Hume sees himself as one contributor in a series of contributors (including Locke, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Butler) to this grand, collective enterprise, so it is not at all surprising that he would express hopes to contribute *a little* to the endeavor and “to bring [the science of man] a little more into fashion” (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272–73). That in itself would be no minor achievement. To think these passages from 1.4.7 represent a downgrading of Hume’s Introduction ambitions and optimism is, I believe, to misconstrue the latter.

45 T 1.4.7.1–8 and EHU 12.1–21; SBN 263–69 and 149–59.

46 T 1.4.7.9–10 and EHU 12.21–23; SBN 269–270 and 159–160.

47 T 1.4.7.12–15 and EHU 12.24–34; SBN 270–74 and 161–65.