

*Hume on External Existence: A Sceptical Predicament*

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## Statement of Originality

This is to certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work.

This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes. I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Dominic K. Dimech

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates Hume's philosophy of external existence in relation to, and within the context of, his philosophy of scepticism. In his two main works on metaphysics – *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) and the first *Enquiry* (first ed. 1748) – Hume encounters a predicament pertaining to the unreflective, 'vulgar' attribution of external existence to mental perceptions and the 'philosophical' distinction between perceptions and objects. I argue that we should understand this predicament as follows: the vulgar opinion is our natural and default belief for Hume, but causal reasoning reveals it to be false, and the philosophical alternative is a confabulation that we cannot permanently believe and is devoid of justification. Hume uses the fact that we cannot have a satisfactory account of belief in external existence as a sceptical consideration to motivate his wider philosophical scepticism.

Hume's response to his predicament about external existence is found in the context of his confrontation with other sceptical worries (*Treatise* 1.4.7 and *Enquiry* 12), in which Hume also reflects generally on the nature and implications of scepticism. I argue that we should characterise Hume's position as *residually sceptical*. This means that, while Hume accepts the unanswerability of some sceptical problems, he denies that it is possible to eradicate all belief as a result (and denies that it is practically useful to even try) and instead uses sceptical problems as a motivation to adopt a moderately sceptical position. While we inevitably return to entertaining the vulgar belief, there is no solution to the sceptical predicament; Hume does not endorse the vulgar belief, or the philosophical system, or indeed any alternative system of the external world that might extinguish the predicament. Sceptical doubt, for Hume, does not derail intellectual pursuits, but rather modifies our attitudes in those very pursuits.

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## Abbreviations of References

### Hume's Texts:

- T*            *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2000/1739–40). References are first to the book, part, section, and paragraph numbers of this edition and then to the pagination in the L.A. Selby-Bigge edition, revised by Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1978/1739–40) (referred to as “SBN”).
- Abstract*    *An Abstract of a Book lately Published; Entituled, A Treatise of Human Nature* (2000/1740), in *T*. References are first to the paragraph number in this edition and then to the pagination in the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1978/1739–40) (referred to as “SBN”).
- EHU*            *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford University Press (1999/1748). References are first to the section and paragraph numbers of this edition and then to the pagination in the L.A. Selby-Bigge edition of *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and the Principles of Morals*, revised by Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1975/1748–51) (referred to as “SBN”).

Where a passage or paragraph is cited multiple times, the SBN page references may be omitted. References to an editor's annotation, definition, or note in a historical text will omit the original date of publication (e.g. “Beauchamp (1999)” instead of “Beauchamp (1999/1748)”). When a footnote from Hume's original text cites another section within his text, the relevant section will be noted in a superscript in square brackets.



Other Texts:

*ECHU* Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press (1975/1690). References are to the book, chapter, section, and paragraph numbers.

*PH* Sextus Empiricus. *Outlines of Scepticism*, edited and translated by Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, and Madrid: Cambridge University Press (2000). References are to the book, chapter, and verse numbers.

*PHK* Berkeley, George. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, Part One*, edited by Jonathan Dancy. Oxford Philosophical Texts, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1998/1710). References are to the paragraph numbers.

## 1. Introduction

“By all that has been said the reader will easily perceive, that the philosophy contained in this book is very sceptical, and tends to give us a notion of the imperfections and narrow limits of human understanding.”

- Hume (*Abstract* 27; SBN 657)

### 1.1 The Puzzle of Reading Hume

#### 1.1.1 Reading Hume on External Objects

Hume’s philosophy of objects is inextricably tied to his views on philosophical scepticism. In the *Treatise*, Hume’s main discussion of objects is titled “Of scepticism with regard to the senses” (*T* 1.4.2), and the related discussions on substance (*T* 1.4.3 and *T* 1.4.5), and on the primary/secondary qualities distinction (*T* 1.4.4) appear in the same Part of the *Treatise*, which is titled “Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy”. Section 12 of Hume’s first *Enquiry* is similarly framed as an essay on scepticism (“Of the Sceptical or Academical Philosophy”), and Hume offers there a condensed version of some key arguments from the *Treatise*.

The opening paragraph of *T* 1.4.2 is famous, but an interpretive issue already emerges from it. Hume identifies his topic as the belief in “body” and he explicitly chooses to inquire into the psychological *causes* of that belief, in direct contrast to questioning its truth or falsity:

Nature has not left this to his [the sceptic’s] choice, and has doubtless esteem’d it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations. We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of*

*body?* but 'tis in vain to ask, *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings.

(*T* 1.4.2.1; SBN 187. Original emphasis)

This setting aside of concerns with the evaluation or justification of belief is incongruous with *T* 1.4.2 being a discourse on scepticism. Whether Hume is refuting, endorsing, or moderating scepticism, that is a philosophical notion that pertains to the epistemic assessment of beliefs. This curious feature of the start of *T* 1.4.2 is symptomatic of the difficulty of reading that section. Our starting point for approaching this section, and thus for approaching Hume's philosophy of objects, is to realise that *T* 1.4.2 is a coalescence of a variety of issues pertaining to objects, the senses, the causes of belief, and the evaluation of belief, and that these issues are not clearly demarcated by Hume himself.

Hume is most pronouncedly occupied with justificatory questions in approximately the last quarter of *T* 1.4.2 (paragraphs 44–57). There, Hume deals with the “vulgar system” and “philosophical system” of external objects (*T* 1.4.2.46; SBN 211–12). Roughly, the vulgar system attributes external existence to the direct objects of the mind, which are, in fact, *perceptions* for Hume, either impressions or ideas.<sup>1</sup> The philosophical system, by contrast, distinguishes sharply between perceptions and objects and only attributes external existence to the latter (it is a system of “the double existence of perceptions and objects”, as Hume says at *T* 1.4.2.11 (SBN 21)). The vulgar system is our default, natural belief about external existence. The philosophical system is a special theory developed by those who

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<sup>1</sup> “Perception” is defined by Hume at *Abstract* 5 (SBN 647) as “whatever can be present to the mind, whether we employ our senses, or are actuated with passion, or exercise our thought and reflection.” In the same passage, the impression/idea distinction is summarised as follows: “*Impressions*, therefore, are our lively and strong perceptions; *ideas* are the fainter and weaker” (original emphasis). In the secondary literature, perceptions are commonly described as “mental” entities and as the basic units that the mind operates on (see, for instance, Ainslie (2015, 6), Waldow (2009, 18), Allison (2008, 13), Beebe (2006, 15)). Both impressions and ideas may be either complex or simple, depending on whether they can be distinguished into parts or not (see *T* 1.1.1.1; SBN 2; *T* 1.1.3.4; SBN 10).

realise that the vulgar opinion is false because perceptions do not, in fact, enjoy external existence (*T* 1.4.2.45; SBN 210–11). Hume insists, however, that the philosophical system is a scant improvement – a mere “palliative remedy” (*T* 1.4.2.46; SBN 211) – because the belief in those objects that are beyond the realm of direct experience can never be justified. In *T* 1.4.2, Hume does not consider a viable third option.

Hume’s desire for *any* epistemically satisfactory account of external existence is thwarted. He concludes *T* 1.4.2 with an unforeshadowed expression of sceptical despair and an ambivalent resolution: the vulgar and philosophical systems are both inadequate and we only avoid the ensuing conundrum between them by not thinking about it too much, or, in other words, by “Carelessness and in-attention” (*T* 1.4.2.57; SBN 218). This progression from the vulgar opinion, to the philosophical system, then to an indolent solution, is retained in Hume’s *Enquiry* (*EHU* 12.6–14; SBN 151–154; *EHU* 12.24–25; SBN 161–62). In this text, Hume calls the failure of the philosophical system to improve on the false vulgar view a “sceptical objection to the evidence of sense” (*EHU* 12.16; SBN 155). Hume’s treatment of objects and scepticism in the *Enquiry* raises a number of distinctive puzzles and issues. Only in this text does Hume draw an explicit contrast between extreme and “mitigated” scepticism, the latter of which he endorses (*EHU* 12.24; SBN 161). The nature of this appeal to mitigated scepticism as a response to extreme scepticism remains a puzzle, as well as the way in which extreme scepticism is supposed to *lead* to mitigated scepticism (as Hume claims at *EHU* 12.24–25 (SBN 161–62)).<sup>2</sup>

I refer to Hume’s confrontation with the negative evaluation of the vulgar and philosophical systems of external existence as Hume’s “sceptical predicament concerning external existence” (which I will shorten to “Hume’s predicament” or “the predicament”).

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<sup>2</sup> The topic of Hume’s *mitigated scepticism* in the *Enquiry* is discussed by Qu (2017), Buckle (2001), Wright (1986), and Michaud (1985).

Hume's predicament is to be distinguished from a wider phenomenon in Hume's philosophy, that of his *sceptical crisis*. This refers to Hume's confrontation with sceptical worries that derive from his entire metaphysical and epistemological project.<sup>3</sup> In the *Treatise*, a single section represents a rather sudden and emotionally charged encounter with radical sceptical doubt (*T* 1.4.7, "Conclusion of this book"). In the *Enquiry*, Hume encounters radical scepticism in *EHU* 12, but without the drama and poignancy that characterises *T* 1.4.7.<sup>4</sup> Section 12 of the *Enquiry* has been unjustly neglected in the literature on Hume's scepticism, as Qu (2017) has observed. Differences between *T* 1.4.7 and *EHU* 12 notwithstanding, there are significant textual and philosophical similarities, which will become clearer in the course of this thesis. I will use the term "sceptical crisis" to refer to Hume's encounter with scepticism in both *T* 1.4.7 and *EHU* 12.

In this thesis, I offer a reading of Hume's predicament in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*. Both *T* 1.4.2.44–57 and *EHU* 12.6–14 are of special importance for grasping Hume's views on external objects *vis-à-vis* scepticism because they represent Hume's confrontation with the potency of sceptical doubts pertaining to external existence. The problem that Hume perceives between the vulgar and philosophical systems *just is* his sceptical problem about external objects. Chapter 2 of this thesis will deal with the vulgar belief in the external existence of perceptions and Chapter 3 will deal with the philosophical system of the double existence of internal perceptions and external objects. My argument will consist of two theses corresponding to each of these two beliefs: the philosophical belief is entirely unjustified and psychologically weak, and the vulgar belief is false but psychologically compelling. When Hume lambastes the philosophical system, he shows that it represents a departure from what we naturally believe anyway. Importantly, even those

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<sup>3</sup> By "metaphysical and epistemological project" I refer to all of Book One of the *Treatise* and all of the first *Enquiry*.

<sup>4</sup> Garrett (2015, 214) aptly observes that the *Enquiry* describes, without actually enacting, a sceptical crisis

who advocate the philosophical system cannot sustain the belief in that system in their ordinary lives. The philosophical system is not just epistemically deficient, but it is a psychological confabulation.

An understanding and appreciation of Hume's predicament cannot be separated from a reading of his more general sceptical crisis. Although Hume deals with scepticism in a number of places in *T* 1.4, only *T* 1.4.7 represents a sustained reflection on the topic; the other sections of the *Treatise* simply do not allow us to discern Hume's considered response to sceptical threats. As we will see in Section 1.2, sceptical doubts accumulate over the course of *T* 1.4, so much so that Hume even begins to raise worries about his theory of causation, which was the subject matter of *T* 1.3. For the *Enquiry*, in order to grasp Hume's response to the predicament in *EHU* 12, we have to read that section as a whole, which means understanding the place of his predicament in his wider crisis.

I argue that the position Hume develops in response to his sceptical crisis should be characterised as *residual scepticism*. This means that Hume does not respond to the irrefutability of scepticism by abandoning intellectual pursuits, but by modifying his attitudes and practices pertaining to those pursuits and insisting that others follow suit. I oppose the reading of Hume as offering a more substantive, normative response to sceptical worries (such as has been offered by Qu (2017; 2014), Ainslie (2015), and Garrett (2015; 1997)). I hold that Hume ought to be characterised as a sceptic about external objects in virtue of the fact that the sceptical predicament remains an undefeated sceptical challenge.

For Hume, the psychological compulsion of the vulgar belief means that what we consider external objects are, in fact, perceptions. Hume is sceptical about any attempt to justify a belief in *non-perceptions*. My reading, therefore, has affinity with what has been called the "phenomenalist" interpretation of Hume on objects (advocated by Inukai (2011); discussed by Rocknak (2013, xiii), Grene (1994, 163–64), and Passmore (1968/1951, 80–

90)). There are indeed passages in which Hume uses “object” and “perception” (either “impression” or “idea) interchangeably.<sup>5</sup> It has been thought, however, that an analysis of objects in terms of perceptions deprives Hume of a belief in a shared, public world. This criticism has been expressed by Annette Baier (1991), who says that a phenomenalist reading of Hume would allow only for a commitment to one’s own mind and its perceptions. Baier takes this to be absurd, and she chooses to maintain instead that Hume never lets go of a “peopled” world in his *Treatise* (1991, 111).<sup>6</sup> Miren Boehm (2013) clearly and more recently expresses the same complaint, in the context of arguing against Yumiko Inukai’s (2011) reading. Inukai exploits phenomenalist-sounding passages in Hume’s text to argue that Hume is committed to a perception-only ontology. Inukai describes Hume’s ontology as “radical empiricism”, in order to signify a strict commitment to the existence of the immediate objects of experience and nothing else (this is to be contrasted with explanatory, cognitive, or justificatory empiricisms, which may or may not make the radical ontological claim; see Inukai 2011, 191). Boehm protests:

We may also here briefly highlight some of the radical philosophical implications of “radical empiricism”. The *Treatise* is nothing but a collection of perceptions in *Hume’s* mind. Hume’s science of human nature is, strictly speaking, a “science” of David Hume. But the intelligibility of Hume’s project depends on the presupposition

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. “To give a child an idea of scarlet or orange, of sweet or bitter, I present the objects, or in other words, convey to him these impressions” (*T* 1.1.1.8; SBN 5); “*Secondly*, ’Tis confest, that no object can appear to the senses; or in other words, that no impression can become present to the mind, without being determin’d in its degrees both of quantity and quality” (*T* 1.1.7.4; SBN 19. Original emphasis).

<sup>6</sup> Baier also raises the objection that a strict phenomenalist reading of Hume cannot account for the persistence of individual minds through time and, consequently, could not account for the influence of memories of past regularities in forming causal attitudes, since there would be nothing to store those memories. Baier cites *T* 1.3.8.13 (SBN 103) to support this.

of the *existence* of other, not just *minds*, but human *beings*, who interact with one another in “the common course of the world” [*T* Introduction 10; SBN xix].

(Boehm 2013, 210. Original emphasis)

Baier and Boehm’s complaint pertains to taking Hume to analyse objects in terms of perceptions. Here, I want to describe a preliminary response that displays the motivation for taking Hume to analyse objects in this way. I insist that Hume can and does presuppose the existence of a shared, public world at the same time that he analyses objects in terms of perceptions. Since his project is a science of the human person, Hume pays close attention to our actual beliefs and attitudes. Hume’s conclusion, drawn from his analysis of the vulgar opinion, is that all people, and at almost all times, do not draw a distinction between perceptions and non-perceptions (see *T* 1.4.2.14; SBN 193). The vulgar treat some of their perceptions as internal, fleeting realities, but others as external, continuing objects. While Hume does not employ the language of a phenomenalist in some passages in the *Treatise*, we do not have to see the existence of these passages as a deplorable error on Hume’s part, and we do not have to read them as telling decisively against Hume being sceptical about non-perceptions. They are, rather, manifestations of the vulgar tendency to not cognise perceptions *as such* and to treat some of them as external objects.

Baier and Boehm press on the fact that Hume does not take his project to be an entirely personal and private investigation. I agree, since Hume overwhelmingly takes his results to have significance for others and for the shared world that he and others occupy. I suggest that Hume simultaneously takes the objects of philosophical investigation to be perceptions and presupposes that there is a shared, public world. Hume directly declares that the objects he wants to investigate are perceptions when he states that he wants to remain silent on the question of the *causes* of perception. Hume distinguishes between impressions



of sensation and impressions of reflection, the latter encompassing “passions, desires, and emotions”, and which causally derive from other ideas, such as pleasure and pain (*T* 1.1.2.1; SBN 8). On the origins of sensory impressions, Hume says:

[They] arise in the soul originally, from unknown causes. [...] The examination of our sensations belongs more to anatomists and natural philosophers than to moral; and therefore shall not at present be enter'd upon.

(*T* 1.1.2.1; SBN 7–8)<sup>7</sup>

Here, Hume assigns different questions to different domains of inquiry. In the middle of *T* 1.3, Hume makes the same point, while placing stress on the fact of human ignorance:

As to those *impressions*, which arise from the *senses*, their ultimate cause is, in my opinion, perfectly inexplicable by human reason, and 'twill always be impossible to decide with certainty, whether they arise immediately from the object, or are produc'd by the creative power of the mind, or are deriv'd from the author of our being. Nor is such a question any way material to our present purpose.

(*T* 1.3.5.2; SBN 84. Original emphasis)

Hume is here suggesting that there very well could be intercourse between external objects and perceptions. He dismisses the relevancy of non-perceptions *qua* objects of philosophical theorising, but he does not hint at his project being an analysis of merely private phenomena.

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<sup>7</sup> Hume is telling us that impressions of reflection are derived in the following way: impressions of sensations give rise to feelings, such as pain and pleasure, and our minds form ideas corresponding to these feelings. These ideas, in turn, produce impressions of reflections, such as desire and aversion. These impressions of reflection can be copied as ideas too.

Hume's sceptical predicament concerns precisely whether the supposition of external existence stands up to scrutiny. The fact that Hume asks this question and struggles to find an answer does not mean that he does not *make* the supposition that there is a shared, public world. The reading of Hume as analysing objects in terms of perceptions and as a sceptic about non-perceptions should not be summarily dismissed. My task will be to defend my reading of the vulgar and philosophical systems more fully. I hold that by approaching the question of Hume's scepticism about objects through the lens of Hume's sceptical predicament, and the ensuing sceptical crisis, we will be able to grasp Hume's outlook on the vulgar and philosophical systems together, as well as the shifting attitudes in Hume's thought.

In the next sub-section, I proceed to an analysis of the philosophical term "scepticism", with the aim of offering a starting point for approaching scepticism in Hume's philosophy. The rest of this section will proceed as follows: a recount of the traditional, disparaging approach to reading Hume's philosophy, and how scholarly attitudes changed and new questions emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Section 1.1.3); an examination of the terms "reason", "reasoning", "imagination" and "knowledge", which play a crucial role in Hume's science of man (Section 1.1.4); and finally, a closer examination of Hume's theory of perception than I have been able to offer in this opening subsection (Section 1.1.5). In Section 1.2, I will turn to the development of Hume's sceptical crisis in his texts. In Section 1.3, I will outline the overall argument of the thesis by stating what each chapter contributes.

### 1.1.2 Philosophical Scepticism

It is difficult to specify the term "scepticism" for a variety of reasons. "Scepticism" is a term that admits of degrees, and its meaning has varied in different times and places over its long history. It is also a socially and morally loaded term, associated with the undermining of

authority, traditional values and the *status quo*. “Scepticism” is also a philosophical notion that is bound up with other notions that themselves evade simple analysis, such as “knowledge”, “certainty”, “warrant”, etc.

Very generally, to be “sceptical” is to suggest or insist that some beliefs or views lack justification, or warrant, or some other similar notion, or that they fall short of some relevant epistemic standard, like counting as knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Hume himself tends to use “scepticism” and “sceptical” with direct reference to human psychological faculties. We can see this in the very titles of *T* 1.4.1 and *T* 1.4.2 (“Of scepticism with regard to reason” and “Of scepticism with regard to the senses”, respectively) as well as *EHU* 4 (“Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding”). In a word, scepticism encapsulates *doubt*, as Anik Waldow (2010, 51, n. 5) has pointed out: “I understand arguments to be skeptical if they are used in order to cast doubt on an established belief or piece of knowledge.” Doubt itself comes in different degrees, since a sceptic may claim that we fail to attain a high standard, such as certainty, or might radically deny that we lack even a minimal level of justification. A sceptic’s claims may also vary in scope, as they may challenge all of our views, most of our views, or perhaps a significant subset of our views. There is no standard way of understanding “scepticism”, even if we restrict our view to a single historical moment. The degree of scepticism under consideration in any given discussion, and in what domain it applies, may easily vary. “Scepticism” is often talked about in philosophical contexts with a presumption of a high degree and a wide scope, and so it is taken to be a sweeping problem or challenge that needs to be overcome.<sup>9</sup> Some sceptical challenges are amongst the most

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<sup>8</sup> See also Greco’s (2008, 4–6) identification of philosophical and historical varieties of scepticism. Garrett (2015, 3) defines “scepticism” widely as the denial or minimisation of “epistemic merit”.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Williams (1996, xii–xiii): “Everyday life is characterized by a kind of natural certainty, expressed in our willingness to claim not just to believe but to actually know all sorts of things [...] However, when we step back from our immediate, everyday concerns and ask whether those beliefs amount to knowledge, we experience a disturbing transformation. We find ourselves driven inexorably to the conclusion that none of our

fundamental of all philosophical issues, such as the problem of the external world (see Stroud 1984) and the problem of induction (see Stove 1973). These two problems are particularly pertinent for understanding Hume's philosophy. The place of the problem of induction in contemporary philosophical discussions is even largely directly due to Hume.<sup>10</sup>

The challenge of reading Hume is sometimes stated in terms of competition between sceptical and non-sceptical readings: varieties of non-sceptical readings would include what have been dubbed "the New Hume" interpretation, the "naturalist" interpretation, and the "realist" interpretation.<sup>11</sup> However, speaking of sceptical and non-sceptical interpretations (and supposing that the so-called New Hume interpretation is not sceptical at all) has a serious downside, since it is undeniable that Hume was a sceptic *in some sense*. Even if proponents of the so-called New Hume do not emphasise it, they always take Hume to be a *mitigated* or *moderate* sceptic (Hume explicitly identifies himself as a mitigated sceptic at *EHU* 12.24 (SBN 161)).<sup>12</sup> Increasingly, the task in Hume scholarship has not been thought of

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ordinary beliefs really do amount to knowledge or that, even if by some standards they do, we will never understand how".

<sup>10</sup> Although Hume's philosophy of (and scepticism concerning) causation has generally taken priority over his views on external objects in scholarly discussions, David Pears (1990, 154), for one, acknowledges that Hume's philosophy of objects present a more pressing issue: "If we are going to understand Hume's system, we must appreciate that he puts belief in body in a far weaker position than belief in causation or belief in personal identity". See also Pears (1990, 183–84).

<sup>11</sup> Richman (2007, 1) says, "defenders of the New Hume hold that Hume's analysis of our everyday beliefs has as one of its conclusions that the beliefs in the existence of external, independent objects and causes objectively so-called meet at least minimal epistemic standards for assent. The New Hume debate is between those who read Hume as a strict epistemic sceptic on these matters and those who support the New Hume interpretation". In the same chapter, Richman offers two other ways that the debate between old and new Humes can be characterised: between the tendency to engage in philosophy and the tendency to be occupied with "common life", and between Hume's critical/philosophical/empiricist project and his "naturalist" project (2007, 2–8). For an exchange about the New Hume versus the old Hume focussing on Hume on causation, see Millican (2007) and Beebe (2007).

Ainslie (2015, 218 ff.) presents a contrast between "sceptical", "naturalist", "dialectic", and his own, "philosophical", interpretations. Garrett (1997) divides his chapter on "Reason and Induction" (p. 76 ff.) into "skeptical" and "nonskeptical" interpretations before providing his own third way. Greenberg (2008) presents an opposition between readings that take scepticism to "undermine" naturalism (he cites Broughton (2008; 2004; 2003) as representative) and readings that take naturalism to undermine scepticism (he cites Garrett (1997) as representative).

The contrast between scepticism and *realism* appears especially in Hakkarainen (2012a; 2012b). Hakkarainen (2012a, 283) says, "One of the essential aspects of this problem [of reading Hume's scepticism and naturalism] is Hume's attitude to what is nowadays called Metaphysical Realism".

<sup>12</sup> Wright (1991, esp. 154, 159–61) exemplifies such an approach. Wright reads Hume as a sceptic about the adequacy of what our ideas can directly represent, and this suffices to establish a sweeping scepticism about the

as deciding whether scepticism or naturalism wins out, but of accurately characterising the way in which Hume's philosophy accommodates both. For instance, Ainslie (2015) and De Pierris (2015) both offer wide-ranging and influential studies of Hume's philosophy that claim his naturalism and scepticism *must* be understood as complementary.

To characterise Hume as a sceptic does not necessarily mean to take him to dogmatically deny the truth of a belief or claim. This is related to a general philosophical lesson to be gleaned from scepticism. The ancient Greek sceptic Sextus Empiricus, in his *Outlines of Scepticism*, foregrounds the way in which scepticism involves a lack of any settled opinion, explicitly contrasting suspension of belief (*epochê*) with both affirmation and denial. Relatedly, the notion of *equipollence* plays a central role in Sextus's explication of scepticism, by which he means that, for any opinion, evidence can be found both for it and against it. According to Sextus, such equipollence ought to inspire us to suspend belief, and doing so results in a state of tranquillity (*ataraxia*). Sextus summarises the situation when he says:

Scepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to the suspension of judgement and afterwards to tranquillity.

(PH 1.4.8)

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philosophies of his predecessors. But, according to Wright, Hume *himself* did not claim that we need our ideas to be adequate in this way, because our natural, imaginative tendencies ground our most fundamental beliefs perfectly well. Penelhum (1975) also perceives the inadequacy of the 'either/or' approach to reading Hume on scepticism and naturalism (1975, 17–18). Penelhum observes: "Hume is manifestly some sort of sceptic. [The question is] What sort?" (1975, 22).

Just as Sextus intends to suspend belief, Hume repeatedly emphasises that we could never have a justified belief in the existence of the non-perceptual objects that the philosophical system posits, and he does not affirm that such things definitely do not exist. Similarly, Hume does not intend to affirm that the beliefs that he expresses doubt about in his sceptical crisis are definitely false.

Realising that scepticism involves suspension of belief is helpful in order to sharpen our understanding of scepticism. We should also observe, however, that Hume diverges from the ancient sceptical tradition in significant ways, especially by his insistence that extreme scepticism cannot be a way of life. Hume even presents the fact that we continue to hold beliefs in the face of sceptical arguments as a *refutation* of Pyrrhonism (*EHU* 12.23; *SBN* 159–60; see also *T* 1.4.1.7; *SBN* 183; *T* 1.4.7.9–10; *SBN* 269–270). We will see in Chapter 4, that Pyrrhonism provides a foil for Hume’s own moderately sceptical position. Despite his blatant rejection of Pyrrhonism, some interpreters maintain that Hume ought to be characterised as a Pyrrhonist (Baxter (2008); Maia Neto (1991); Popkin (1951)). These commentators maintain that, while Hume thought that the eradication of all belief was impossible, he was still a radical sceptic on the question of the justification of belief.

I believe that characterising Hume as a Pyrrhonist is unhelpful and likely to distort our grasp of his views. Hume’s sceptical crisis reveals that he thinks suspending belief on a multitude of topics would lead to feelings of despair and unrest, whereas the Pyrrhonists held that suspension of belief led to tranquillity (see *PH* 1.7.25–30). Furthermore, Hume’s final, moderately sceptical position does not match the Pyrrhonian outlook. Hume thinks scepticism has to be moderated before it can have any practical benefits. Hume stresses this point in his explication of mitigated scepticism in *EHU* 12.<sup>13</sup> Hume advocates assiduousness and

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<sup>13</sup> The fact that Hume thinks an appropriate degree of scepticism ought to be accepted and *lived with* also distinguishes him from the typical modern treatment of scepticism as a challenge that must be defeated. Descartes, in his epochal treatment of scepticism, utilised sceptical doubts for a dialectical purpose – to show

epistemic modesty as part of his mitigated scepticism, but the Pyrrhonists did not advocate such attitudes; indeed, the Pyrrhonists intended to suspend belief no matter what the topic was, but Hume *qua* moderate sceptic clearly thinks there are some topics we should avoid and others in which we are not doomed to utter failure. A further point of difference between Hume and Pyrrhonism pertains to scepticism about the senses. Hume's treatment of the vulgar and philosophical systems concerns mind-dependency, but the Pyrrhonists never articulated doubt in such terms, because the problem of knowing an *external world* emerges from Descartes's philosophy (as argued by Burnyeat (1982)). The difference between Hume and Pyrrhonism on scepticism with regard to the senses will be taken up again in Section 2.3.

### 1.1.3 Scepticism and Naturalism

In this sub-section, I discuss the general challenge of reading Hume's scepticism, while also citing issues that are fundamental to the explication of my own interpretation. In this sub-section I will focus on the *Treatise*, since this work has traditionally, even if unjustly, been identified as Hume's fullest expression of his own views (as explained in detail by Buckle (2001, 3–26)).

The early critics of Hume's *Treatise* charged the text with espousing a dangerous brand of scepticism that threatened religion and human endeavour in both natural and moral philosophy. According to Biro (2009), the sceptical arguments in Book One of the *Treatise* were, for two centuries after it was published, “not seen as directed against various philosophical *accounts* of our knowledge of the world and of ourselves [...] but against *the very possibility* of such knowledge” (2009, 44. Added emphasis). There are a variety of elements of Hume's philosophy that might be considered to push in this direction. Even if we

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what he took to be the only way of *defeating* those doubts. Descartes was not the first modern sceptic but he offered a novel sceptical challenge in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (see Descartes 1996/164, 12–15), as argued at length by Burnyeat (1982), and acknowledged by Williams (1996, 1–2) and Stroud (1984, 1, n. 1). See Popkin (2003) for a history of scepticism beginning with Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498).

put aside the fact that much of his philosophy is sceptical of received wisdom, there are a number of arguments that can temptingly be read as establishing dire sceptical conclusions.

The standard reading of Hume was not just that he was a sceptic about this or that topic, but that he was a sceptic *tout court*. This was the predominant view until at least the seminal scholarship of Norman Kemp Smith (1872–1958), who published two *Mind* articles on Hume in 1905 and produced a book-length treatment on him in 1941 (republished in 2005 with an introduction by Don Garrett). Kemp Smith claimed that the lasting influence of the traditional, caustic reading of Hume was due to the influence of Thomas Reid (2002/1785; 1997/1764; 1969/1788) and James Beattie’s (1777) criticisms, as well as T.H. Green’s (1874) introduction to what became a standard edition of Hume’s *Treatise*. According to these authors, Hume *extended* the empiricist philosophical project that was supposedly common to John Locke (1632–1704) and Bishop George Berkeley (1685–1753) and brought it to its rightful conclusion.<sup>14</sup> Hume’s early critics read him as showing that empiricism implies radical scepticism, and that Hume represents a *reduction ad absurdum* of that philosophical approach (Kemp Smith (2005/1941, 3); see also Norton (2000, 112) and Penelhum (1975, 17–18)). Berkeley argued against the conceivability of a material world (i.e. a world of things that are, in their nature, not mental items or perceptions). Hume was similarly read as denying the conceivability of such a world. Hume’s critics portrayed him as absurd by exploiting the fact that the natural world of everyday experience is ordinarily taken to be a material world. They read Hume as saying that he believes the world is populated with the perceptions that belong to his own mind. It was only a further complication, and a point for further invective, that Hume rejected the belief *in his self*, according to their reading of *T* 1.4.6 (“Of personal identity”). Reid expresses his contempt towards Hume when he says sardonically:

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<sup>14</sup> I am sympathetic to the view that talk of “empiricism” and “rationalism” can be counterproductive for understanding the history of early modern philosophy (see Anstey & Vanzo 2016, 96–98; Loeb 1981; Norton 1981). However, in recounting how Hume was *traditionally* read, it is useful to use these terms, since the rationalism/empiricism distinction is intimately tied to that reading.



It seems to be a peculiar strain of humour in this author, to set out in his introduction by promising, with a grave face, no less than a complete system of the sciences, upon a foundation entirely new – to wit, that of human nature – when the intention of the whole work is to shew [sic], that there is neither human nature nor science in the world. It may perhaps be unreasonable to complain of this conduct in an author who neither believes his own existence nor that of his reader.

(Reid 1997/1764, 20)

Reid apprehended Hume's scepticism as undermining the necessary prerequisites to even begin carrying out any philosophical project. He perceived the results of Hume's philosophy to be destructive to the point that no positive philosophical project was left standing.

While Reid's calumny should not be totally excused, Hume has, in some ways, himself to blame for such an astringent reception. Hume's flirtations with scepticism in the *Treatise* come very close to a bona fide courtship. Reid's just-quoted complaint is of Hume's apparent and shocking denial of the existence of the self, of his insistence that there is nothing he can directly identify in experience *as* his self, nothing more than an ever-changing flow of mental experience (see *T* 1.4.6.3; SBN 252). Hume's argument concerning inferences from past experience to the future (*T* 1.3.6.4–11; SBN 88–92; *EHU* 4.16–23; SBN 32–39) can be read as establishing that such inferences are always devoid of justification. In light of this argument, De Pierris (2015), Millican (2012; 2007; 2002) and Fogelin (2009; 1985), have all read Hume as a sceptic about induction (even as they acknowledge that Hume does not thereby *refrain* from inductive reasoning).<sup>15</sup> This is not to mention that Hume's sceptical

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<sup>15</sup> There are significant differences between the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* versions of the argument. Millican (2002, 110–11) prefers the *Enquiry* version since it covers some ground that the *Treatise* neglects. In classic statements of the problem of induction (as in Stove 1973), the emphasis is on the demonstration/probability distinction, which is the focus of the *Treatise* version.

crisis at *T* 1.4.7 contains numerous instances of Hume conceding that sceptical challenges are unanswerable.

The challenge of interpreting Hume is that, despite his apparent scepticism, it is hard to deny that he develops a positive philosophical program in his works, one that he has the highest hopes for at times. Biro (2009, 45) comments that the potential inconsistency resulting from Hume's scepticism was, for a long time, either not noticed or simply dismissed by discounting the passages where Hume speaks positively of philosophy. Reid, we have just seen, sees it as a sad irony that Hume begins the *Treatise* by announcing a new, ambitious investigation. The "Introduction" to the *Treatise* puts the positive elements of Hume's philosophy on clear display, as Hume claims here that his bold new project will "not be inferior in certainty" to the Newtonian natural philosophy (*T* Introduction 10; SBN xvi). Hume thinks the "expedient" for dissolving seemingly endless philosophical disputes is to observe the following "evident" truth about all bodies of knowledge and to fashion our investigations accordingly: all sciences are conducted by human persons, and therefore, "are judg'd of by their powers and faculties" (*T* Introduction 4; SBN xv). Understanding these faculties, Hume thinks, would give us untold insight into all of the sciences. Moreover, in some sciences, the human person is the direct object of investigation anyway, and so the need to examine human nature here is even more imperative (*T* Introduction 5; SBN xv). Hume says that the purpose of logic is to explain the human faculty of reason, that "Morals and criticism" concern human sentiments, and that politics concerns how humans unite and depend on each other in society (*ibid.*). Hume evidently hopes to apply to a broad range of topics the method of looking directly to the human person to resolve perennial debates between philosophers. Hume says, rather evocatively, that we ought 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" (*T* Introduction 6; SBN xvi).

Kemp Smith's scholarship (2005/1941; 1905a; 1905b) emerges on the scene as the first sustained attempt to explain Hume's ambitious, positive philosophical program. Kemp Smith emphasised the positive aspects to Hume's philosophy by offering a new picture of his historical influences. He argued that Francis Hutcheson (1694–1747) and Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) were the principal influences on Hume's thought. Just as those two privileged observation of the natural world in order to establish positive results, so too did Hume advance a robust philosophical system by investigating natural causes. Don Garrett glosses Kemp Smith's reading of Hume as establishing *the subordination thesis*, which is simply that "reason is subordinate to feeling" (2005, xxxi). Kemp Smith leans on a line that appears in Book Two of the *Treatise* to support the centrality of such subordination for Hume: "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (*T* 2.3.3.4; SBN 415; Kemp Smith (2005/1941, 11); Kemp Smith (1905a, 156)). As the "slave" of the passions, the faculty of reason functions as a mere auxiliary in our psychological lives and for philosophy; it is "the passions" that hold explanatory import and are of utmost practical importance for human psychology, rather than rational choice that proceeds via stepwise reasoning (Hume's treatment of "reason" will be examined in more detail in Section 1.1.4). Kemp Smith intended "the passions" to have a wider meaning than just the direct and indirect passions that are investigated in Book Two of the *Treatise* (see *T* 2.1.1.4; SBN 276). In his 1941 book, Kemp Smith says "passion" is Hume's most overarching term for "the instincts, propensities, feelings, emotions and sentiments, as well as for the passions ordinarily so called" (2005/1941, 11). For Kemp Smith, the priority of passion over reason was the unifying theme of all of Hume's philosophy.

Kemp Smith argued that Hume could not have been sceptical because he did not set out to offer an evaluation of important beliefs, but rather to analyse their origins (or *genesis*). Hume's pursuit of the subordination thesis is supposed to be indicative of this. Kemp Smith

illustrated his approach to Hume on scepticism with direct reference to Hume's theory of external objects.<sup>16</sup> For Kemp Smith, while Hume accepted Berkeley's arguments for the unknowability of the external world, he denied the "relevancy" of Berkeley's idealistic ontology (2005/1941, 85; 1905a, 151). Kemp Smith held that Hume gave a *genetic* account of the belief in an objective, material world in which the faculty of reason was not the determining factor, but in no way did he suggest that it was an epistemically deficient belief, because the causes or sources of belief should be considered distinct from the reasons for or against them. Hume would have agreed that those who wanted to *argue* their way to a belief in the external world were doomed to fail, but only he himself sufficiently realised that our human nature is responsible for such a belief anyway (1905a, 151–52). The opening paragraph of *T* 1.4.2 was used by Kemp Smith to support this reading (2005/1941, 87–88; 1905a, 152). That paragraph contrasts the question of the source of the belief in *body* with the question of whether that belief is in fact true, and also states that it would be "vain" to pursue the latter. Hume can very well endorse the double meaning of the word "vain" here: asking the evaluative question about the belief in body is both *futile* and *self-obsessed*, since we are demanding justification for a belief that we can neither choose to hold nor discard. The suggestion of those who have traditionally emphasised *naturalism* over scepticism in Hume's philosophy is that this dismissal encapsulates Hume's attitude towards scepticism in general, or at least towards radical or unqualified forms of it.<sup>17</sup>

For Kemp Smith, Hume employs the following pattern of argument: reason fails to confirm a belief or a class of beliefs, and this reveals that reason is not the source of those beliefs but that *some other faculty* is, since the fact that we hold them is undeniable

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<sup>16</sup> In Kemp Smith (2005/1941), Hume's theory of the external world is the second topic that falls under the heading "Current Misunderstandings of Hume's Teaching" (2005/1941, 85–88).

<sup>17</sup> "Naturalism" sometimes contrasts with scepticism not just in terms of being a positive doctrine or epistemological outlook, but as being a different *project* that Hume engages in (that is, the project of examining the psychological genesis of beliefs, not their evaluations). Such an identification is made by Durland (2011, 68–69) and Richman (2007, 3).

(2005/1941, 11–12). Hume may *seem* sceptical because of his emphasis on the subsidiary role of reason, but sufficient attention to the text reveals that he accepts no blanket sceptical conclusion.

As much as Kemp Smith's reading offered a sustained and serious attempt to reconcile Hume's positive program with his apparent scepticism, it also raised new questions that remain central to Hume scholarship. Kemp Smith's Hume was not a crude sceptic, but, even if Hume did not primarily intend to establish radical scepticism, there is still a question to be asked about his epistemic attitude towards our beliefs, and how he can justify or support such an attitude. Did Hume provide a justification for our beliefs – perhaps an entirely novel one – or did he just hold that reason need not play a role in such justification, without offering a positive answer himself? Pinning down Kemp Smith's view on Hume's attitude towards the justification of belief is not easy, since he scatters references to justification throughout his work (see Loeb (2009) for discussion). One answer that Kemp Smith offers in his 1941 book is that, for Hume, nature is *providential*. This means that our beliefs, as the normal products of natural inputs on the mind, do not mislead (2005/1941, 445, 492–94; see also Garrett 2005, xxxiv). This point is similarly made by Qu (2017, 9, 13) and Buckle (2001, 194, 203) in the context of discussing Hume's *Enquiry* (see *EHU* 5.21; 54–55).<sup>18</sup> However, the challenge remains to specify *what it is about nature* that makes our beliefs justified. We shall see, when we turn to an examination of Hume's sceptical crisis, that Hume explicitly considers that the beliefs that we are compelled by nature to have are not immune from sceptical doubt.

So, it remains difficult to discern whether Hume's key arguments establish *genetic* conclusions that detail how we acquire beliefs and/or what their contents are, or whether they

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<sup>18</sup> See also *T* 1.4.1.1; SBN 180: "Our reason must be consider'd as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect".

establish *evaluative* conclusions that touch on the justification of beliefs. In particular, this tension is driven by Hume's arguments concerning the nature and status of "reason". Hume explicitly discusses the limited role of reason in our belief in necessary connections (i.e. the belief that every event is necessitated by a cause; see *T* 1.3.3), causal inferences (at *T* 1.3.6, esp. 1.3.6.11) and the belief in body (at *T* 1.4.2). Furthermore, Hume's definition of belief as a lively *manner* of conceiving an idea subjugates reason since it makes no reference to it.<sup>19</sup> It is easy to read arguments against reason's role in our beliefs as attacks on evidence that would favourably count towards a positive epistemic valuation of our beliefs. While Kemp Smith's reading centres around the place of reason in Hume's philosophy, the interpretive challenge still persists.

The very structure of Book One of the *Treatise* suggests that Hume's primary interest was a genetic project. Hume is concerned with ideas, such as of space, time, and cause and effect. Hume sets out to investigate the psychological origins of these ideas – as displayed most clearly in the Introduction to the *Treatise* – and he does not declare that he intends to draw evaluative implications from his investigations. So, while Richman (2007, 5) presents the different, broad camps of Hume interpretation as divided over whether they think a genetic or evaluative project is more fundamental to Hume's personal philosophical goals, I think Hume clearly begins with a genetic project but then goes on to encounter serious sceptical doubts *in the course of* his work. Even though Hume does not begin the *Treatise* as a project of epistemic evaluation, this does not in itself rule out sceptical approaches to Hume's philosophy. From the beginning, therefore, I depart from a naïve psychology-only approach to Hume's philosophy, which Millican (2007, 169, 181–86) rightly criticises under the label of reading Hume as engaged in "not epistemology, but cognitive science". I also

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<sup>19</sup> See *T* 1.3.7.5–8; SBN 96–98; *T* 1.3.8.11; SBN 103; *T* 1.3.8.15; SBN 105; *T* 1.3.9.2; SBN 107; *T* 1.4.1.8–10; SBN 183–85).

depart from the equally one-sided approach offered by Fogelin (2009b), whereby Hume's genetic project is just another form of sceptical argument (Fogelin understands that revealing a belief to be produced outside of reason *just is* to discredit it; see 2009b, 210–13).

I will conclude this sub-section by looking at some of Hume's own usages of the terms "scepticism" and "sceptical". Hume does not employ these terms uniformly, but he clearly thinks there are extreme and moderate varieties of scepticism. As a preliminary, we should look at the scepticism that Hume explicitly denounces in *T* 1.4.1 ("Of scepticism with regard to reason"). Hume presents a sceptical argument in this section but refrains from drawing a sweeping negative conclusion from it. Hume addresses the question of, "... whether I be really one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in *any* thing possest of *any* measures of truth and falsehood" (*T* 1.4.1.7; SBN 183. Original emphasis). We might be tempted to read "who hold that all is uncertain ..." as a characterisation of all sceptics. However, a more palatable reading would be to see Hume as distancing himself from a *version* of scepticism here. Hume is declaring that he is not one of those extreme sceptics who believes that *all* our beliefs are totally lacking in justification. Hume characterises his own view as sceptical in several places (*Abstract* 27; SBN 657; *T* 1.4.7.11; SBN 270; *EHU* 12.24–25; SBN 161–62). So we cannot read too much into Hume's rejection of a singular version of scepticism.

In *EHU* 12, Hume draws a distinction between *antecedent* and *consequent* scepticism, which turns on whether an attitude of doubt is adopted *before* (antecedent) or *after* (consequent) some particular discoveries about the human person or human reason (*EHU* 12.3–5; SBN 149–51). Problematically, it seems that this distinction, based on the *origins* of sceptical attitudes, does not help us address the conceptual question that Hume asks at the start of that section, namely, "What is meant by a sceptic?" (*EHU* 12.2; SBN 149). Hume criticises the position of *radical* antecedent scepticism before gesturing towards a more

moderate version of it. All Hume has to say by way of description of the radical version is that it is “an universal doubt [sic], not only of all our former opinions and principles, but also of our very faculties” (*EHU* 12.3; SBN 149). Hume’s description of moderate antecedent scepticism at *EHU* 12.4 (SBN 150) does not contain any clues as to how Hume understands “scepticism”. The paragraph reads as a catalogue of methodological recommendations: “preserving a proper impartiality ... weaning our mind from all those prejudices ... To begin with clear and self-evident principles ...” (*EHU* 12.4; SBN 150).

Later in *EHU* 12, however, Hume offers a general description of “scepticism” as involving “doubt and hesitation”. The reference to “hesitation” suggests that an idea can be characterised as sceptical because it prompts attitudes of hesitancy and reservation. In order to grasp this, we have to turn to Hume’s treatment of one version of consequent scepticism in *EHU* 12, namely, that which concerns “*abstract reasonings*” (*EHU* 12.17; SBN 155. Original emphasis). At *EHU* 12.18–20 (SBN 156–158), Hume puts forward a consideration that might push us towards scepticism, which is the “absurdity of ... bold determinations of the abstract sciences” (*EHU* 12.19; SBN 157). Hume finds it absurd that physical extension could be infinitely divisible, yet he maintains that we are led to this conclusion from sound geometrical reasoning. Hume does not provide such reasoning, but he describes it. Specifically, he describes as “convincing and satisfactory” the proposition that the angle of contact between a circle and a tangent is infinitely less than any angle between two straight lines, and he adds that the angle between other curves and a tangent may even be infinitely smaller than that between a circle and a tangent (*EHU* 12.18; SBN 156–57). Hume has less to say about the infinite divisibility of time (*EHU* 12.19; SBN 157). He describes the passing of an infinite number of real parts of time as an evident “contradiction” (*ibid.*). Remarkably, however, Hume does not cease the discussion here. He decides that the notion that our ideas



of space and time could be inherently contradictory is so unpalatable that it actually *weakens* the case for scepticism:

How any clear, distinct idea can contain circumstances, contradictory to itself, or to any other clear, distinct idea, is absolutely incomprehensible [...] So that nothing can be more *sceptical, or more full of doubt and hesitation*, than this scepticism itself, which arises from some of the paradoxical conclusions of geometry or the science of quantity.

(*EHU* 12.20; SBN 158. Added emphasis)

The description “full of doubt and hesitation” is vague, but Hume’s overall point is plain enough: the presence of contradictions in clear ideas is not a convincing reason for scepticism precisely because we have trouble coming to terms with such contradictoriness. The reference to “doubt and hesitation” suggests that Hume thinks of scepticism as broadly encompassing attitudes of hesitancy, caution, and reservation.<sup>20</sup> Vitaly, such attitudes come in degrees. *Moderate* versions of such attitudes are endorsed by Hume. As we will see fully in Chapter 4 (especially sections 4.2.2 and 4.3.2), Hume characterises his moderate sceptical position as encompassing “modesty and reserve” (*EHU* 12.24; SBN 161) in philosophical endeavours. Hume sees his scepticism as being an expedient to philosophical progress, rather than an inhibition. Accordingly, when Hume describes the philosophy of the *Treatise* as

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<sup>20</sup> We should also observe at this point a difference between Hume’s treatment of the vulgar opinion and of the philosophical system: the philosophical system is unjustified, but the vulgar opinion is knowably *false*. Holding that a belief is false is not typically characterised as a sceptical attitude, since one would not suspend belief about it. However, the falsity of the vulgar belief is at least a negative epistemic assessment for Hume, and he consistently relates this negative assessment to his scepticism about the philosophical system of double existence. So I follow Hume’s own presentation of his views on external existence by describing his verdicts on the vulgar opinion *and* philosophical system as “sceptical”.

“very sceptical” (*Abstract* 27; SBN 657), he is not suggesting that his own philosophy is totally unpalatable, but that it expresses, and inspires, attitudes of caution and reserve.

#### 1.1.4 Reason, Knowledge, and Imagination

Hume’s sceptical doubts in the *Treatise* version of his crisis are expressed in terms of the failures and shortcomings of human psychological faculties, with special attention given to the *imagination*. Hume’s genetic investigation concerning the belief in body is also couched in terms of which faculty is responsible for that belief, and his answer is the imagination. In this sub-section, I offer the essential background to understanding the relationship between imagination and reason in Hume. Increasingly, commentators have regarded Hume’s view of reason as holding the key to better understanding Hume’s scepticism, precisely because the term “reason” features so prominently in Hume’s core arguments (see Millican 2012).<sup>21</sup>

Hume does not offer his own definition of the term “reason”. The key to grasping Hume’s conception of reason is to understand how he adopts and modifies the Lockean framework (this approach is taken by Schmitt (2014), Allison (2008), Owen (1999), and Garrett (1997)). For many early modern philosophers, reason is one of the mind’s faculties and *reasoning* is this faculty’s “typical activity” (Owen 1999, 1). For Locke specifically, reasoning is an inferential activity, involving the grasping of the relations between ideas via mediating ideas (Garret 1997, 26–27). Reasoning is to be contrasted with the non-inferential activity of *intuition*, which involves an immediate grasp of relations between ideas (Garrett 1997, 87). Reasoning is divided into demonstration (which produces knowledge) and probable reasoning (which produces opinion) (Owen 1999, 34). Hume gives his own

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<sup>21</sup> In this thesis, I will not enter the debate on whether Hume understands *belief* to be an occurrent mental state or a disposition. As Marušić (2010) observes, some commentators perceive Hume to be inconsistent in this regard. This specialised discussion would take me too far afield.

statement of the distinction between knowledge and probability pride of place at the start of *T* 1.3.

Part 3 of Book One of the *Treatise* is called “Of knowledge and probability” and the first section is “Of knowledge”. Hume begins by identifying seven kinds of ideational relations with the intention of assigning some of them to the domain of knowledge and others to probability (Hume had previously described these relations in *T* 1.1.5; see Beebee (2011, 245–50) for discussion). The seven relations are (1) resemblance, (2) contrariety, (3) degrees in any quality, (4) proportion in quantity or number, (5) identity, (6) relations of time and place, and (7) causation. For Hume, only the first four of these can allow for knowledge; he says that only these are “the objects of knowledge and certainty” (*T* 1.3.1.2; SBN 70). But Hume thinks that the first three of these fall under “intuition”, since they strike the mind immediately and do not require further examination. Proportion in quantity or number is different, because, while in a simple case we can use intuition (such as to discern that 100 is greater than 50), in a complex arithmetical calculation, we have to go through the process of demonstration.<sup>22</sup> Algebra and arithmetic, as the sciences that depend upon relations of proportions in quantity and number, are the only fields of inquiry that involve demonstration and, thus, knowledge (*T* 1.3.1.5; SBN 71. See also *EHU* 4.1; SBN 25). The only worry Hume entertains with regard to demonstration is that human beings are fallible and prone to mistakes, and so errors arise in practice (see *T* 1.3.1.6; SBN 71). This is a theme that Hume takes up at length in “Of scepticism with regard to reason” (*T* 1.4.1.1; SBN 180–87). Of the three philosophical relations that fall under the domain of probability, only causation can take us from the existence of one thing to that of another, and this fact provides Hume’s motivation for occupying himself with the topic of cause and effect in *T* 1.3 (see *T* 1.3.2.2; SBN 73–74). Hume generally treats causal reasoning as reliable even if it is not

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<sup>22</sup> Norton & Norton (2000, 446) give the example of working out  $78 \times 69 = 5,382$ .

demonstrative. Hume employs causal reasoning all throughout his philosophy, and such reasoning fuels his sceptical predicament concerning external existence.<sup>23</sup>

Hume broadly inherited his understanding of reason from Locke, but Hume's innovation consists chiefly in his modification of probable reasoning. Garrett (2015, 93) has even suggested that Hume's greatest originality emerges from this modification. Locke himself had already departed from Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, by widening the domain of probable reasoning. According to Schmitt (2014, 3–11), Locke's philosophy represents a significant step in the "erosion" of the importance of the category of knowledge. For Locke, the domain of knowledge encompasses merely intuition, demonstration and, to a small degree, sensation (see *ECHU* 4.3.2–6). Locke compensates this diminution by broadening the domain of, as well as the merits, of probability (Schmitt 2014, 11). By identifying only algebra and arithmetic as domains of demonstrative knowledge, Hume assigns a *very* narrow scope to demonstrative knowledge. Accordingly, Hume goes even further than Locke in widening the scope of probable reasoning, but he does this at the same time that he rejects the need for intervening ideas in probable reasoning altogether. Locke, essentially, models probable reasoning on demonstrative reasoning, since the mind supplies an intermediate idea even in cases of probable reasoning (Schmitt 2014, 136). For Locke, the intervening idea in a demonstration suffices to establish a connection between ideas, but, in probable reasoning, the intervening idea is a *presumption* (Schmitt 2014, 47). Locke directly contrasts the

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<sup>23</sup> In the *Enquiry*, Hume retains the distinction between demonstrative and probable reasoning (see *EHU* 4.18; SBN 35), but he begins his discussion of the "objects of human reason" (*EHU* 4.1; SBN 25) by drawing a distinction between *relations of ideas*, which are "either intuitively or demonstratively certain" (*ibid.*), and *matters of fact*, which can only be contingently true or false (*EHU* 4.2; SBN 25–26). Hume examines the nature of causal reasoning in *EHU* 4 precisely because it is such reasoning that "assures us" of matters of fact (*EHU* 4.3; SBN 26).

*perception* involved in knowledge and the *presumption* involved in judgement (*ECHU* 4.14.4).<sup>24</sup>

Hume's divergence from Locke on probable reason is exemplified in his theory of causal belief formation, in which he directly rejects the need for an intervening idea in moving from a perception of a cause to an idea of its effect.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, Locke had explicitly distinguished reasoning amongst ideas with the mere *association* of ideas (such as at *ECHU* 2.33). Given that Locke had identified reasoning as an inferential activity, Humean causal belief formation is not a version of Lockean reasoning at all. Hume rejects the fundamental inferential character of causal reasoning, but he does not refrain from giving the name "reasoning" to the process by which we come to have causal beliefs. So, while Hume adopts the distinction between demonstrative and probable reasoning, he rejects Locke's fundamental characterisation of the latter.

The faculty that works via the association of ideas for Hume is the imagination. Hume initially introduces the faculty of the imagination at *T* 1.1.3 ("Of the ideas of the memory and imagination"). Hume tells us there that memory and the imagination are both representational faculties, "by which we repeat our impressions" as ideas, but that only in memory do our ideas retain a considerable degree of liveliness or vivacity (*T* 1.1.3.1; SBN 8–9. See also Garrett 2015, 87; Garrett 1997, 20). This is not to suggest that ideas of the imagination entirely lack liveliness or vivacity; on the contrary, many of our most lively and fundamental beliefs are products of the imagination.<sup>26</sup> The point is, the imagination gives us *ideas*, whereas

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<sup>24</sup> Locke also countenances "knowledge" and "judgment" as two *faculties*, by means of which knowledge and opinion are assented to, respectively (Owen 1999, 34. See also *ECHU* 4.14.4).

<sup>25</sup> Schmitt (2014, 146, n. 24), Loeb (2002, 53–59), and Owen (1999, 118–46) all hold that the purpose of the argument of *T* 1.3.6 ("Of the inference from the impression to the idea") is to show that reason is associative for Hume. Even if Hume has some more dire epistemological aim in this argument, as maintained by Millican (2012; 2007; 2002), this is still at least one of the purposes served by the argument.

<sup>26</sup> Hume is notoriously vague on the meaning of "force", "vivacity", and "liveliness". He describes the "force and liveliness" of an idea as that quality by which ideas "strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness" (*T* 1.1.1.1; SBN 1). For discussion see Allison (2008, 16–18) and Norton & Norton (2000, 426).

the products of memory border on being impressions themselves. Another key difference between ideas of the imagination and ideas of memory is that the latter more strictly copy the impressions from which they are derived. Memory cannot as freely vary the ideas that it derives from impressions (*T* 1.1.3.2; SBN 9). Memory is the faculty by which past events are recalled, and the order of ideas in a given memory remain the same as the original impressions of that event.<sup>27</sup> The imagination, by contrast, is free with regard to the way it composes complex ideas, since it can take from a variety of cognitive inputs and combine them without restriction. Hume thinks this fact is so important that he even identifies “*the liberty of the imagination to transpose and change its ideas*” as the “second principle” of his philosophy (*T* 1.1.3.4; SBN 10. Original emphasis. See also *T* 1.3.7.7; SBN 628–29; *EHU* 5.10; SBN 47; *EHU* 5.12; SBN 49).<sup>28</sup> The basic sceptical worry that will arise with regard to the imagination is that it is not necessarily sensitive to evidence, since it extrapolates beyond the mental input that the mind receives. I shall have more to say about this in my discussion of *T* 1.4.7 in Section 4.2.

The imagination is strictly free in its capacity to put together ideas, but, as a matter of fact, certain ideas are bound up together so that after one another one follows. Hume says “some universal principles” are needed to provide some coherence to the ideas of the imagination (*T* 1.1.4.1; SBN 10). The qualities of ideas that render them associated are resemblance, contiguity (in time or place), and cause and effect (*ibid.*). Thus, although the imagination is introduced as the faculty that repeats impressions as faint ideas, its most distinctive characteristic is that it operates via association (see also *T* 1.3.9.2; SBN 107).

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<sup>27</sup> We can, of course, arbitrarily alter the content of a memory, but then it ceases to be a memory and is, instead, a product of imagination.

<sup>28</sup> The first principle being the *copy* principle of the origin of ideas (*T* 1.1.1.11–12; SBN 6–7). That this liberty principle is made so explicitly central by Hume is somewhat of a neglected point in the secondary literature. Even Garrett (2015, 46), when he mentions this principle, suggests that another (Hume’s *separability principle*; see *T* 1.1.7.3; SBN 18) might well be considered Hume’s second most important principle.

Hume extols the place of the imagination in human psychology. However, Hume does not use the term “imagination” consistently, so what exactly falls under its scope changes in different contexts. In a footnote to *T* 1.3.9.22 (SBN 117), Hume offers an attempt to clear up the situation. He says there is a broad sense of imagination in which it is only opposed to memory (as is the case when imagination is first introduced in *T* 1.1.3). In this context, the faintness (i.e. the smaller degree of liveliness) of the products of the imagination is distinctive. But there is also a slightly narrower sense of imagination in which it is contrasted with demonstrative and probable reasoning. The ideas that are operated on in such reasoning are not distinguished from products of the imagination by their faintness. When Hume contrasts reason with the imagination he intends to contrast *reasoning* with operations of the imagination that do not involve argumentation (even though they still involve association) (Garrett 1997, 27–28). Reason, thus, falls within the imagination itself *in the broad sense*, and Hume is able to do this because reason is associative for him. So, while one of Hume’s most original views was to see causal inferences as products of the imagination, he sometimes explicitly contrasts reasoning with products of the imagination.

We cannot understand Hume’s doubts concerning the imagination without grasping the place of *custom* or *habit* in his philosophy. Hume describes custom as a “principle ... operating upon the imagination” that enables us to make inferences between objects, since they have no inherent causal connections (*T* 1.3.8.12; SBN 104). The closest Hume comes to defining custom in the *Treatise* is at *T* 1.3.8 when he says: “we call every thing custom, which proceeds from a past repetition, without any new reasoning or conclusion” (*T* 1.3.8.10; SBN 102). In the *Enquiry*, Hume offers a more complete definition of the “principle” of custom:

[...] wherever the repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding; we always say, that this propensity is the effect of *Custom*. By employing that word [...] We only point out a principle of human nature, which is universally acknowledged, and which is well known by its effects.

(*EHU* 5.5; SBN 43. Original emphasis)

So “custom” is the name that people ordinarily give, Hume thinks, to that influence on human nature that is not necessarily driven by reason. Thus, there is a strong affinity between custom and the narrow sense of “imagination” whereby it is contrasted with reason. It is worth observing that in *T* 1.4.2, Hume’s central discussion of external objects, custom is explicitly referred to only in one paragraph (*T* 1.4.2.22) and there the point is to say how a certain aspect of the genetic account of the belief in “body” is *not* due to custom (the belief in “body” will be discussed briefly in the next sub-section and more fully in Section 2.2). The principle of custom, therefore, is not itself directly crucial for understanding Hume’s treatment of objects, but for grasping Hume’s doubts about imagination that feature in his wider sceptical crisis. In both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* versions of Hume’s rehearsal of his sceptical crisis, he emphasises the doubt that arises from realising the orthogonality of custom and reason.

### 1.1.5 Body and Perception

In this sub-section, I examine Hume’s philosophy of perception in order to offer some background for understanding Hume’s philosophy of external existence. I intend this sub-section to serve as an introduction to some issues that I will explicate further in Chapters 2 and 3. Laying some groundwork now will also allow me to utilise terms that are essential to my overall view when I outline my argument in Section 1.3.



The vulgar opinion and philosophical system are both versions of belief in *body*, which is what Hume identifies as the topic of *T* 1.4.2. In the second paragraph of that section, Hume specifies his topic further and delineates two notions that pertain to external existence: *distinct* existence and *continued* existence. Hume is clear that he draws the distinction between distinct and continued existence for expository purposes. He thinks that if any item has distinct existence, then it also has continued existence and *vice versa* (I will use the abbreviation “D&C” throughout this thesis):

We ought to examine apart those two questions, which are commonly confounded together, *viz.* why we attribute a CONTINU’D existence to objects, even when they are not present to the senses; and why we suppose them to have an existence DISTINCT from the mind and perception? Under this last head I comprehend their situation as well as relations, their *external* position as well as the *independence* of their existence and operation. [...] But tho’ the decision of the one question decides the other; yet that we may the more easily discover the principles of human nature, from whence the decision arises, we shall carry along with us this distinction [...].

(*T* 1.4.2.2; SBN 188. Original emphasis)

In outline form:

- “Distinct” existence: the *external position* of an item to a perceiver, and the *independence* of its existence and operation from a perceiver.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Later in *T* 1.4.2, Hume observes that independence has priority over external position: “when we talk of real distinct existences, we have commonly more in our eye their independency than external situation in place, and think an object has a sufficient reality, when its being is uninterrupted, and independent of the incessant revolutions, which we are conscious of in ourselves” (*T* 1.4.2.10; SBN 191). The argument for the falsity of the vulgar is directed against the independency of perceptions (as we will see in Section 2.3). At the same time, however, in his genetic investigation into the vulgar opinion, Hume finds that the mind is first led to an opinion

- “Continued” existence: the existence of an item when it is not present to a perceiver.<sup>30</sup>

It should be noted that Hume’s assumption that an entity enjoys distinct existence if and only if it enjoys continued existence has been objected to in the secondary literature, as we will see in Section 2.2.

The vulgar and philosophical systems are distinguished precisely by whether they attribute D&C existence to perceptions (the vulgar) or non-perceptions (the philosophical system). For Hume, there is nothing that could be an item of experience except a perception. In fact, Hume thinks this is “obvious”, and therefore not requiring any argument. Hume’s view can rightly be called a fundamental *assumption* about experience. Hume thinks that even those who ultimately disagree with him will nonetheless accept this assumption:

We may observe, that ’tis universally allow’d by philosophers, *and is besides pretty obvious of itself*, that nothing is really ever present with the mind but its perceptions or impressions and ideas, and that external objects become known to us only by those perceptions they occasion. To hate, to love, to think, to feel, to see; all this is nothing but to perceive.

(*T* 1.2.6.7; SBN 67. Added emphasis)

By itself, this paragraph might not determine that perceptions are the only objects of experience. There are ways of reading “all this is nothing but to perceive” and “nothing is really ever present with the mind but its perceptions” that would not commit Hume to what I have called his fundamental assumption about experience. There are some theories of

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of continued existence and that it “without much study or reflection draws the other [distinct existence] along with it” (*T* 1.4.2.44; SBN 210. See also *T* 1.4.2.23; SBN 199).

<sup>30</sup> I describe distinctness here in terms of a *perceiver* instead of a *mind* because Hume’s experiments at *T* 1.4.2.45 show the dependency of perceptions on a perceiver’s bodily organs.

perception according to which the inherent *aboutness* or *intentionality* of a perception can tell us about something beyond itself (see Lutz 2015, 313–16). According to these theories, if I see (to take one of Hume’s examples) another person, that might indeed involve having a perception of that person, but my perception has to *convey* that person to me (and the same would go for loving, hating, or thinking of a person). Reid stated that we should be careful to distinguish between a perception and *the object of that perception* (2002/1785, 20). For Reid, the intentionality of our cognitions is not explained by any more basic feature: according to Nichols’ (2007, 68) interpretation of Reid, intentionality is a “primitive, unaccountable feature of mind”.<sup>31</sup>

Hume, in contrast to Reid, denies that perceptions can tell us about anything besides perceptions themselves. We can see this by looking at what Hume says in the paragraph following the one just quoted. Hume argues that we lack any idea of an object “specifically different” from perception. This term is used by Hume to refer to *non-perceptions*, or, in other words, objects that are of a different *species* to perceptions (I argue for this more fully in Section 2.2). It should be noted that Hume qualifies the following in the final paragraph of *T* 1.2.6, but, nonetheless, this is the immediate application that Hume makes of the view expressed at *T* 1.2.6.7:

Now since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions, and since all ideas are deriv’d from something antecedently present to the mind; it follows, that ’tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much

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<sup>31</sup> Reid appeals to language in support of his view. It is just a fact, he claims, that we commonly distinguish between a perception and the object the perception is about, and Reid says philosophers ought not to abuse this language. Reid obviously has *T* 1.2.6.7 in mind when he makes the following complaint: “[Hume] gives the name of perceptions to every operation of the mind. Love is a perception, hatred a perception. Desire is a perception, will is a perception; and, by the same rule, a doubt, a question, a command, is a perception. This is an intolerable abuse of language, which no Philosopher has authority to introduce” (Reid 2002/1785, 28).

as possible: Let us chace our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass.

(*T* 1.2.6.8; SBN 67–68)

Here, Hume's fundamental assumption about perception combines with his *copy principle* of the origin of ideas here to preclude a conception of "any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions." The *copy principle* states that ideas are derived from impressions and that they differ only in degree (see *T* 1.1.1.7; SBN 4. See also Garrett 1997, 21). Against this, Reid would say that even a single perception could take us beyond ourselves because of its intentionality. Hume and Reid are simply at loggerheads over this issue.

Since Hume denies that any perception can tell us about the existence of non-perceptions, some *inference* will have to be made. Hume is sceptical of our ability to draw this inference. This is exemplified in his scepticism of the philosophical system of double existence.

## 1.2 The Development of Hume's Sceptical Crisis

I have suggested that grasping Hume's sceptical crisis is pivotal for reading his epistemology and metaphysics. Hume's sceptical crisis is an expression of a variety of sceptical considerations that emerge from different parts of his project, and so we need to understand the development of these sceptical considerations. In this section, I explain my view of how Hume's epistemic attitude shifts and develops in the course of his works.

A preliminary point about the terminology is in place. Hume's sceptical considerations may also be called "doubts", "worries" or "concerns", and these are more appropriate than the term "arguments", because Hume does not lay out a number of

propositions or claims and show how they connect or build up to a particular conclusion. To a large extent, Hume is unclear about the *implications* of the various sceptical considerations that he runs through and he takes no time to reflect on any logical or structural differences between them.<sup>32</sup> In Chapter 4, I will return to the way in which Hume's sceptical crisis is best characterised as a compilation of different sceptical doubts.

Hume's sceptical crisis emerges at the end of Book One of the *Treatise* and in the last section of the *Enquiry*. These texts begin as *genetic* projects concerning the operations of the human mind. The language of the Introduction to the *Treatise* and the start of *T* 1.1 indicate that analysing and understanding the operations of the human mind is of central importance to Hume. The opening section of the *Enquiry* similarly pronounces the necessity of investigating "the nature of human understanding" as an alternative to, and remedy for, "abstruse philosophy and metaphysical jargon" (*EHU* 1.12; SBN 12). In *T* 1.3 and *EHU* 4, Hume's goal is to understand the idea of the relation of cause and effect, and this is because that relation is of supreme importance to the mind's formation of ideas. Hume does not say at the start of *T* 1.3 or *EHU* 4 that he is interested in determining whether or not our causal beliefs are epistemically justified.

Although Hume sets out on a genetic investigation, over the course of his texts he begins dealing with the question of how beliefs can be justified, or whether they are worthy of belief altogether. Loeb, (2002, 63) has acknowledged that in *T* 1.3, Hume changes the subject from belief to *justified belief* and that he does so "without notice". In the course of *T* 1.3, Hume draw a distinction between *probabilities* and *proofs* in terms of the high level of assurance of the latter (see *T* 1.3.11.2; SBN 124). In the *Enquiry*, Hume elevates the prominence of the distinction between probabilities and proofs, dedicating an entire short section to it (*EHU* 6, "Of Probability"). At *T* 1.3.12–13, Hume also makes a normative

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<sup>32</sup> Garrett (2015, 213) also opts to refer to the variety of sceptical doubts as sceptical *considerations*.

distinction between *philosophical* and *unphilosophical* probabilities, and at *T* 1.3.15 (“Rules by which to judge of cause and effect”) he offers eight general rules for determining the veridicality of causal beliefs. He says: “Since therefore ’tis possible for all objects to become causes or effects to each other, it may be proper to fix some general rules, *by which we may know when they really are so*” (*T* 1.3.15.2; SBN 173. Added emphasis).<sup>33</sup>

While there is a great deal of complexity to the issue of the possible sceptical implications of Hume’s treatment of causation, I will take it for granted that, within the context of *T* 1.3 and *EHU* 4–5, Hume himself is not perturbed by a possible sweeping, negative assessment of causal beliefs (we will see shortly, though, that in the *Treatise* he acknowledges that his causal theory may seem “extravagant and ridiculous” (*T* 1.3.14.26; SBN 167)).<sup>34</sup> I will take it for granted that Hume is a sceptic in at least a very loose sense in *T* 1.3 and *EHU* 4–5, that is, a sceptic of tradition and received views. I suggest that the first point in the *Treatise* in which Hume is seriously taken by a more troublesome sceptical threat is at the end of *T* 1.4.2. The last two paragraphs in this section (*T* 1.4.2.56–57) are distinctive for the way in which they display Hume’s poignant and unforeshadowed despair. That said, a variety of different considerations are motivating Hume’s sceptical crisis at *T* 1.4.7. Putting them together is a formidable task because (a) it involves engaging with all of the various philosophical arguments of Book One of the *Treatise* and trying to say how they relate, and (b) the text of *T* 1.4.7 is difficult to deconstruct because Hume simply compiles his sceptical doubts one on top of the other, and he uses artful, vague imagery right from the very outset of

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<sup>33</sup> The fact that Hume unproblematically suggests that we can have justified causal beliefs does not by itself count as a reason to reject an overall sceptical interpretation of Hume on induction and causation. Such a suggestion would miss the point of those who read Hume as a sceptic on induction, because they would hold that causal beliefs can indeed be *conditionally* justified on the assumption of the uniformity of nature but that once we separately inquire into the justification of this uniformity we are at a loss (see Millican 2007, 165).

<sup>34</sup> Ainslie (2015, 7) agrees: “[Hume] does not, in this Part, worry about possibly [sic] sceptical implications of his treatment of causation”. De Pierris (2015) represents the very alternative outlook: she argues that there is a continual trajectory of sceptical developments in *T* 1.3 and *T* 1.4. Broughton (2004; 2003, esp. 13 ff.) and Loeb (2002) share my view that *T* 1.4 expresses sceptical concerns that turn against attitudes expressed in previous parts of the *Treatise*. Broughton and Loeb present Hume’s final position as more deeply sceptical than Ainslie.

the section. I will now briefly defend my claim about the distinctive character of *T* 1.4.2.56–57.

The titles of the sections of *T* 1.4 suggests that the first two are examinations of scepticism (with regard to reason and the senses, respectively) and that Hume moves on when he examines ancient philosophy in *T* 1.4.3 and modern philosophy in *T* 1.4.4. Approaching *T* 1.4 in this way, however, belies the complexities of the way topics interrelate: the concluding section (*T* 1.4.7) is a culmination of a series of sceptical worries that have built up all throughout the *Treatise*, and some of the sections that follow *T* 1.4.2 are still pertinent to the question of external objects that is explicitly raised in *T* 1.4.2. Indeed, Hume ends *T* 1.4.2 by declaring that he will move on to an examination of systems of the internal and external world (*T* 1.4.2.57; SBN 218). As much as *T* 1.4.2 represents Hume’s core discussion of beliefs in external objects and the sceptical implications of his negative evaluation of such beliefs, Hume does not put the issue of external objects or scepticism behind him after *T* 1.4.2.

Ainslie (2015, 39–41) emphasises the structural parallels between *T* 1.4.1 and *T* 1.4.2. Because I give Hume’s treatment of objects a special place in the development of his sceptical crisis, my view stands in contrast to this. As evidence for his view, Ainslie points to the similar titles that the two sections have (2015, 8), as well as the fact that the concluding paragraph of *T* 1.4.2 apparently hearkens back to *T* 1.4.1, since it references, “This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses ...” (*T* 1.4.2.57; SBN 218) (Ainslie 2015, 8). Ainslie concedes, though, that the organisation of the two sections are very different. Hume only moves to a direct consideration of evaluative questions quite late in *T* 1.4.2 (paragraph 44 onwards). Ainslie accounts for this late shift by saying that Hume did not need to provide the background on demonstrative and probable reasoning in *T* 1.4.1, because that was already accomplished in *T* 1.3, but that the background on the belief in body does need to

be provided in *T* 1.4.2 (2015, 41). However, I would observe that there is a more crucial difference between the two sections. Hume is unperturbed by the sceptical implications of the argument he runs through in *T* 1.4.1, but the sceptical predicament of *T* 1.4.2 causes him distress and despondency. In order to explicate this difference, a brief analysis of *T* 1.4.1 is in place.

Following Waldow (2009, 48–49), I will refer to Hume’s argument at *T* 1.4.1.1–6 (SBN 180–83) as Hume’s “degeneration argument”.<sup>35</sup> This argument leads to the assessment that our degree of confidence in any belief, even a supposedly demonstratively certain belief, can be reduced to zero once we reflect on the simple fact of human fallibility. Hume suggests that human cognitive abilities are simply less than perfect, and that our awareness of this ought to make us gradually reduce our confidence in beliefs: “all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence” (*T* 1.4.1.6; SBN 183). Hume’s response to this dire conclusion is swift and decisive. He directly tells us the purpose for which he displayed the degeneration argument and he distances himself from scepticism:

Shou’d it here be ask’d me, whether I sincerely assent to this argument, which I seem to take such pains to inculcate, and whether I be really one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in *any* thing possess of *any* measures of truth and falsehood; I shou’d reply, that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I, nor any other person was ever sincerely or constantly of that opinion. Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin’d us to judge as well as to breathe and feel [...]

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<sup>35</sup> The entire argument can be divided into sub-arguments, such as in Nelson (2017, 68–69, 132–36). Nelson uses the term “degeneration argument” to apply only to the reduction of demonstration to probability at *T* 1.4.1.1–3 (SBN 180–81) and not to the extermination of probability itself. For the sake of simplicity, I will treat the section as offering a single sceptical argument.



My intention then in displaying so carefully the arguments of that fantastic sect, is only to make the reader sensible of the truth of my hypothesis, *that all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative parts of our natures.*

(*T* 1.4.1.7–8; SBN 183. Original emphasis)

Hume evidently has a definite end in mind for his rehearsal of the degeneration argument. Belief, for Hume, is not an “act of thought” that involves rational choice; it is not an act of the “*cogitative* part of our natures”, but it depends on custom. So, *Hume himself* does not worry that we are irrational in continuing to hold beliefs in face of the degeneration argument. Even though he admits that his reader will “find no error in the foregoing arguments”, Hume uses this fact to highlight that “any one ... may safely conclude, that his reasoning and belief is some sensation or peculiar manner of conception, which ’tis impossible for mere ideas and reflections to destroy” (*T* 1.4.1.8; SBN 184). Disagreements abound as to how to make sense of Hume conceding the soundness of sceptical reasoning in this section, and I do not mean to suggest that reading *T* 1.4.1 is a less formidable task than reading *T* 1.4.2. But there are marked textual differences between the two sections that justify paying special attention to the place of the sceptical predicament in the expression of Hume’s overall sceptical crisis. Hume’s swift and positive response to the sceptical argument in *T* 1.4.1 stands in contrast with Hume’s expression of sceptical despair at *T* 1.4.2.56. As Hume concludes his investigation into beliefs in external existence, his immediate reaction is to rescind the confidence that he assumed at the very start of *T* 1.4.2:

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

(T 1.4.2.56; SBN 217. Original emphasis)

In context, Hume has just finished his review of the abject failure of the philosophical system to improve on the false vulgar opinion. Hume takes time to summarise his dismay, reminding his reader that the imagination is led to a belief in the D&C existence of perceptions from the qualities of constancy and coherence of perceptions (this will be discussed in Section 2.1), but that such qualities do not actually entail such existence:

I cannot conceive how such trivial qualities of the fancy, conducted by such false suppositions, can ever lead to any solid and rational system. They are the coherence and constancy of our perceptions, which produce the opinion of their continu'd existence; tho' these qualities of perceptions have no perceivable connexion with such an existence. The constancy of our perceptions has the most considerable effect, and yet is attended with the greatest difficulties. 'Tis a gross illusion to suppose, that our resembling perceptions are numerically the same; and 'tis this illusion, which leads us into the opinion, that these perceptions are uninterrupted, and are still existent, even when they are not present to the senses.

(T 1.4.2.56; SBN 217)

Later in the same paragraph, Hume says that the philosophical system of double existence ostensibly denies the truth of the vulgar opinion but depends on the underlying conviction towards the vulgar opinion for any appeal that it might have towards the imagination (this will be discussed in Section 3.1). Hume also asserts that what the philosopher calls an “object” is really just another perception (I will address this part of the quote in Section 3.2).

For present purposes, the end of the following passage is most relevant:

This is the case with our popular system. And as to our philosophical one, 'tis liable to the same difficulties; and is over-and-above loaded with this absurdity, that it at once denies and establishes the vulgar supposition. Philosophers deny our resembling perceptions to be identically the same, and uninterrupted; and yet have so great a propensity to believe them such, that they arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions, to which they attribute these qualities [...] What then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falshood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief we repose in them?

(*T* 1.4.2.56; SBN 217–18)

Very simply, the last two sentences here are unforeshadowed and totally unparalleled up to this point in the *Treatise*. Hume will not again express such dismay until his sceptical crisis in *T* 1.4.7. I propose that this is evidence that Hume’s sceptical predicament is the first of several sceptical considerations that compile in *T* 1.4 for Hume, and which culminate with his expression of sceptical despair at *T* 1.4.7. It is in the sceptical predicament that Hume encounters just how the enlivening of ideas can be wholly “trivial” and can lead to “error and falshood” (*T* 1.4.2.56; SBN 218). This element of dismay is missing from *T* 1.4.1. *Pace*

Ainslie, we need to understand the dissimilitude between *T* 1.4.1 and *T* 1.4.2 in order to appreciate the significance of Hume's scepticism with regard to the senses within the wider context of his scepticism more generally.

The final section of *T* 1.4 is Hume's expression of his sceptical crisis and his response to it. That section recollects thoughts and themes from various parts of the *Treatise*. In *T* 1.4, Hume identifies and examines a number of unjustified beliefs and unclear ideas that arise from the faculty of the imagination. This prompts Hume to cast suspicion over the very functioning of the faculty of imagination (at *T* 1.4.7.3 (SBN 265) he describes all products of the imagination as "trivial", which is a term he uses at *T* 1.4.2.56). In *T* 1.3, Hume does not raise the worry that causal beliefs being the products of imagination might mean that they are unjustified, but he comes to realise this *after* his results in *T* 1.4. Since Hume does not explicitly reflect on any sceptical implications of his philosophy in *T* 1.3, there is no precedent for the end of *T* 1.4.2. Hume does acknowledge the counter-intuitiveness of his claims that there are no necessary connections between objects and that the idea of such connections derives from a mental transition (at *T* 1.3.14.24–27; SBN 166–68).<sup>36</sup> This is a point that Hume recalls in his sceptical crisis (*T* 1.4.7.5; SBN 266–67). But Hume does not initially *despair* over the counter-intuitiveness of his theory. Indeed, Hume defends the results of his theory by saying, "We do not understand our own meaning" when we complain that we have been deprived of an idea of a "real connexion betwixt causes and effects" (*T* 1.3.14.27; SBN 166). I will have more to say about the relationship between *T* 1.3.14 and *T* 1.4.7.5 when I examine Hume's sceptical crisis in Section 4.2.1.

Regarding the other sections of *T* 1.4, the very ending of *T* 1.4.2 (*T* 1.4.2.57; SBN 218) suggests that *T* 1.4.3 and *T* 1.4.4 concern some particular ways of thinking about external objects and that *T* 1.4.5 and *T* 1.4.6 concern ways of thinking about the mind and

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<sup>36</sup> This aspect of Hume's theory of causation is emphasised by De Pierris (2015).

internal perceptions. That said, I maintain that we should recognise that Hume’s sceptical predicament is a special sceptical worry for Hume. It is characterised as an evaluative epistemological problem, about what belief or system about external existence we ought to endorse. In Section 3.4, I will offer a reading of Hume’s treatment of the modern distinction between primary and secondary qualities (which he calls “The *modern philosophy*” (original emphasis) at *T* 1.4.4.2 (SBN 226)). This is an important discussion which, unlike the discussions of ancient philosophy (*T* 1.4.3), the immateriality of the mind (*T* 1.4.5), and personal identity (*T* 1.4.6), appears in both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*. In both texts, Hume treats his argument concerning the primary/secondary qualities distinction as having sceptical implications. In the *Enquiry*, Hume identifies his argument against the feasibility of that distinction as a sceptical “topic” (*EHU* 12.15; SBN 154). In the *Treatise*, Hume says in three places that his treatment of modern philosophy has sceptical implications: (1) when he briefly remarks that the admission that sensible qualities are mind-dependent ought to result in “the most extravagant scepticism” (*T* 1.4.4.6; SBN 227–228); (2) when he ends *T* 1.4.4 by concluding that the belief in external objects is in “direct and total opposition” to reason (*T* 1.4.4.15; SBN 231); and (3) when he includes a footnote back to *T* 1.4.4 in his rehearsal of sceptical worries in *T* 1.4.7 (*T* 1.4.7.4; SBN 265–66). I will argue that Hume aims to establish a conclusion about the *idea* of so-called primary qualities in his treatment of modern philosophy. Hume’s sceptical predicament is a highly general epistemological problem concerning external existence, but the discussion of modern philosophy has a more targeted aim. In Section 3.4, I will argue against Jani Hakkarainen’s (2012a; 2012b) thesis that the treatment of modern philosophy in the *Enquiry* commits Hume to there being no idea of external existence (I will also discuss the possibility of a *relative idea* of external objects in Section 2.2.2).

Since I am reading both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, a word is in place about the different character of the developments in each of these texts. Book One of the *Treatise* is characterised by the incongruence between the confidence expressed in the Introduction and the gloom expressed in *T* 1.4.7. In this text, Hume loses his grip on his own philosophy before the reader's very eyes. Sceptical worries build up, and then Hume offers his response. Section 12 of the *Enquiry* still relates to previous sections of that work – it is still Hume's own commentary on his epistemology and metaphysics as a whole – but this feature of incongruence is missing. This is not to diminish the way in which *EHU* 12 is puzzling: it is still the case that Hume's response to sceptical worries is hard to decipher. But it would be a mistake to think that the *Enquiry* evinces what I have called “incongruence” in the same way as the *Treatise*. An obvious relevant historical consideration here is that Hume has had time to reflect on his project, so no wonder his latter text appears more integrated.<sup>37</sup>

Hume's sceptical crises in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* are expressed in different terms. The crisis in the *Treatise* foregrounds the faculty of the imagination. The operation of the imagination is to enliven ideas *via association* and Hume entertains suspicion precisely over this operation. In the *Enquiry*, references to the faculty of imagination are minimised. Hume frames all of *EHU* 12 in terms of his novel distinction between “antecedent” and “consequent” scepticism (mentioned in Section 1.1.3 above), with discussion of examples of the latter constituting most of the entire section (*EHU* 12.5–22; SBN 150–59).

Having this background in place, I now proceed to offer an overview of the argument of this thesis and outline what each chapter contributes.

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<sup>37</sup> Another difference between the texts is that the discussion of causation is directly identified as “sceptical” in the titles of the relevant sections of the *Enquiry*: “Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding” (*EHU* 4) and “Sceptical Solution of theses Doubts” (*EHU* 5). A puzzling feature of these texts is that there are almost no instances of the term “scepticism” (or its cognates) in them.

### 1.3 Overview of the Argument

Hume's predicament about objects concerns the vulgar opinion and the philosophical system. Hume's dissatisfaction is not merely intellectual; he experiences a poignant worry that prompts negative thoughts and actions and which, in part, fuels his sceptical crisis. The problem is that the vulgar opinion is provably false. We may become aware of the falsity of the vulgar belief and attempt to console ourselves by developing a philosophical system of the "double existence" of perceptions and objects. Hume has some scathing criticisms of this philosophical system, which include that, unlike the vulgar opinion, it is a psychological confabulation that cannot be stably believed. Moreover, the philosophical system does not really free us from the difficulty of the vulgar opinion, because it is utterly unjustified. Hume is simply torn because both the vulgar and philosophical systems are defective.

Ultimately, Hume is a sceptic about the existence of non-perceptions. The vulgar view is what the human person generally always believes, but this is due to ascribing D&C existence to perceptions. We can realise the falsity of the vulgar belief upon reflection, and it can seriously trouble us (and once we consider the abject failure of the philosophical system, our troubles deepen). Once reflection ceases, we forget about the falsity of the vulgar opinion, and we forget about the philosophical system entirely. Hume goes on to continue living, and indeed, philosophising, in the face of the sceptical predicament, just as he continues to live and philosophise in response to his wider sceptical crisis. Crucially, though, he does not forsake his scepticism or revise any elements of his philosophy that lead him to his sceptical crisis.

Chapter 2 of this thesis will be devoted to the vulgar opinion. I begin by focusing on a reading of the start of *T* 1.4.2. Two main tasks that I have are, to understand the meaning of "body" in that section, and to determine the way in which *T* 1.2.6 ("Of existence, and external existence) informs *T* 1.4.2, as per Hume's own footnote at the end of *T* 1.4.2.2. I argue that

we must read the belief in body that Hume investigates at the outset of *T* 1.4.2 as the vulgar belief in objects, which is the belief that perceptions themselves enjoy distinct and continued existence. There are two alternative ideas that Hume might investigate: a *positive* idea of objects specifically different from perceptions, and a *relative* idea of objects specifically different from perceptions. I argue that an attentive reading of *T* 1.2.6 allows us to see that the positive idea is impossible for Hume and that he has good reason to dismiss the relative idea given his genetic interests at the start of *T* 1.4.2. In this chapter, I also explicate Hume's reasons for thinking that the vulgar belief is false in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, and I observe some differences between these two texts and some questions that arise pertaining to them. Hume's argument for the falsity of the vulgar belief is based on what he considers satisfactory *experimental reasoning*, which is to say, reasoning deriving from observation and experience. Since Hume is an experimental philosopher, this means that the evidence produced against the vulgar belief is as satisfactory as he can hope for. This is a significant thesis that will go a long way towards problematising the suggestion that Hume may easily distance himself from his argument against the vulgar belief. I also present evidence from the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* that shows that Hume thinks the vulgar belief is psychologically compulsive and instinctive. I describe the vulgar as a *universal* belief and as our default position regarding external existence (Hume himself uses the word "universal" at *EHU* 12.9 (SBN 152)).

Chapter 3 of this thesis will be on the philosophical system. I clarify how the philosophical system is a confabulation but still the intuitive response to the realisation of the falsity of the vulgar belief. I argue that the objects that the philosophical system posits are objects "specifically different" from perceptions (Hume uses this term at *T* 1.2.6.9; SBN 68. See also Section 1.1.5 above). I also go through Hume's reasons for taking the philosophical system to be unjustified. Hume finds the reasoning against the philosophical system



satisfactory by his own experimental standards. Hume's arguments against the philosophical system in the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* commit him to seeing any belief in non-perceptions as unjustified. In this way, I challenge the predominant view of Hume's scepticism *vis-à-vis* objects, in which Hume has a normative response to sceptical doubts about external existence.<sup>38</sup> In this chapter, I also consider the relationship between Hume's scepticism about the philosophical system of double existence and his argument against the modern philosophical distinction between primary and secondary qualities. I argue against the orthodoxy of taking Hume's argument against this distinction to engender a more penetrating problem than Hume's sceptical predicament (such a position is taken by De Pierris (2015, 285), Winkler (2015), Hakkarainen (2012a; 2012b), Broughton (2003), Morris (2000), and Garrett (1997, 215–18)). My view is that Hume considers *both* the sceptical predicament and the argument against the modern philosophy to present sceptical problems. The two problems involve distinct issues: the sceptical predicament reveals a lack of epistemic justification for a belief in D&C existence, and the argument against the modern philosophy concerns the emptiness of the *idea* of an object that has primary qualities but lacks secondary qualities. I especially argue against Hakkarainen's (2012a; 2012b) view that the *Enquiry* version of the argument against the modern philosophy commits Hume to there being no idea of non-perceptions at all. My main evidence against this reading is that Hume directly allows for an "imperfect notion" of an "inexplicable *something*" (*EHU* 12.16; SBN 155. Original emphasis).

In Chapter 4, I offer a reading of Hume's sceptical crisis and his responses to it in both *T* 1.4.7 and *EHU* 12. In both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, we only get more than a brief reply to Hume's predicament in the context of his response to his general sceptical crisis. My

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<sup>38</sup> Offered by Qu (2017; 2014), Ainslie (2015), Garrett (2015; 1997), Boehm (2013), Rocknak (2013), Kail (2010/2007), Kemp Smith (2005/1941), Schnall (2004), Buckle (2001), Owen (1999), Strawson (1992/1989), Baier (1991), and Wright (1991; 1986; 1983).

central argument pertaining to Hume’s sceptical crisis is that Hume falls back on a moderate (or “mitigated” as he calls it in the *Enquiry*) form of scepticism. I describe Hume’s position as *residual scepticism* in order to capture the way he reverts to a moderate sceptical position after conceding that various sceptical worries cannot be refuted.

In Chapter 5, I defend my reading of Hume as a sceptic about external existence in light of my wider argument about his general response to scepticism. In particular, I deal with Loeb’s (2002) argument that we can easily amend Hume’s views to accommodate for the *truth* of the vulgar belief. I also deal with the suggestion, that appears in different forms in Ainslie (2015) and Garrett (2015; 1997), that Hume’s final position must be less sceptical than I insist because he describes himself as a “true sceptic” at *T* 1.4.7.14 (SBN 273). I also consider the possibility that the best way of reading Hume is as endorsing different positions in different moods or domains, or from different perspectives (what Hakkarainen (2012a; 2012b) calls the ‘no-single Hume’ interpretation). I defend my residually sceptical reading of Hume against such interpretations by insisting on the integrality of Hume’s sceptical predicament to Hume’s sceptical crisis: we have to make sense of the fact that Hume himself draws a sceptical result from the predicament and uses it to motivate his residual scepticism. Hume does not abandon philosophy in light of any sceptical results, but he does not defeat scepticism in the very sense that some commentators insist he *must*. As Hume’s predicament forms part of his *residual scepticism*, it motivates his final, considered position. To dismiss Hume’s scepticism about external existence would be to fail to appreciate his wider epistemological views.

## 2. The Vulgar Opinion

### 2.1 Overview and Preliminaries

Hume's account of the vulgar belief represents his treatment of the ordinary belief that we generally always adopt regarding external existence. This account is one aspect of Hume's broader project of providing a science of human nature. In the *Treatise*, Hume's turn to the evaluation of the vulgar opinion at *T* 1.4.2.44 (SBN 210) represents a key moment in the development of his scepticism. Hume's treatment of the vulgar belief has a noteworthy place in the *Enquiry* too, as his negative evaluation of it forms the first part of the very first "profound" sceptical objection in that section (*EHU* 12.6; SBN 151).

In Sections 2.1 and Section 2.2, I focus on some issues that apply to Hume's account of the vulgar belief in the *Treatise* specifically. There are three differences between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* that make this appropriate. Firstly, there are separate sections of the *Treatise* in which Hume goes through his predicament and his wider sceptical crisis (*T* 1.4.2 and *T* 1.4.7), but they all appear in one section in the *Enquiry* (*EHU* 12). This makes going through *EHU* 12 a more manageable task. Secondly, in the *Enquiry* there is no section that forms the essential background for reading Hume on external existence (*T* 1.2.6).<sup>39</sup> Thirdly, in the *Enquiry*, Hume does not explain the psychological mechanisms that lead to the vulgar opinion; he is more directly focused on the tension between this opinion and the philosophical system. In Sections 2.3 and 2.4, I will devote separate sub-sections to discussing the falsity and the universality of the vulgar belief in the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*. I will use the remainder of this first section to discuss some preliminary issues pertaining to *T* 1.4.2.

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<sup>39</sup> Hume addresses the issue of what is immediately given to us in experience in the *Enquiry* at the same time that he critiques the vulgar opinion (at *EHU* 12.8; SBN 151–52).

This chapter has three main aims: (1) to offer a reading of the content and phenomenology of the vulgar opinion (Section 2.2); (2) to show why Hume thinks it is false (Section 2.3); and (3) to show that Hume thinks it is our default psychological position (Section 2.4). In offering a reading of the content of the vulgar belief, I will consider the relationship between *T* 1.4.2 and the earlier section *T* 1.2.6 (“Of existence, and external existence”). These two sections are linked by Hume’s own footnotes (at *T* 1.2.6.9 and *T* 1.4.2.2). The earlier section establishes Hume’s basic assumption that only perceptions can ever be the direct objects of experience, and that only a peculiar contravention of his copy principle allows for the possibility of thought of non-perceptions.

A simple description of the organisation of Hume’s thought in *T* 1.4.2 is evasive. The bulk of the text pertains to the vulgar opinion: first, an investigation into the genesis of that opinion, and then a turn to the question of its epistemic status. Hume devotes a substantial portion of *T* 1.4.2 to his positive account of how the faculty of the imagination gives rise to the vulgar belief (*T* 1.4.2.15–43; SBN 194–210).

The opening of *T* 1.4.2 is puzzling because Hume seems to suggest that he will not be concerned with justificatory issues *at all*. He declares early on in *T* 1.4.2 that he is investigating which one of three faculties is responsible for an opinion of distinct and continued existence: the senses, reason, or the imagination. But *T* 1.4.2 is supposed to be on *scepticism*, as per its title. A text can obviously be *about* scepticism without affirming a sceptical conclusion (as *T* 1.4.1 can naturally be read), but, even given this, the way in which *T* 1.4.2 begins is puzzling. While Hume indeed displays a sceptical argument in *T* 1.4.1 in order to show our imperviousness to it (see *T* 1.4.1.8; SBN 183–84), the opening paragraph of *T* 1.4.2 does not assert the fact of our imperviousness to scepticism, but its *irrelevance*. Hume says that we can ask what *causes* us to believe in body, but not *whether there be body* (*T* 1.4.2.1; SBN 187). In this section, then, Hume seemingly declares that there is no

legitimate evaluative question to be asked about the belief in body, and then directs his attention towards a genetic project. The fact that Hume begins *T* 1.4.2 undisturbed by sceptical doubts accentuates the shock and despair that he expresses at the end of the section (at *T* 1.4.2.56; SBN 217–18).

The vulgar belief is that some perceptions enjoy distinct and continued existence (“D&C” for short; see Section 1.1.5 above). The vulgar (i.e. those who hold the vulgar opinion) do not, however, consciously entertain a belief about perceptions. Hume tells us that the vulgar do not distinguish between perceptions and non-perceptions at all. In other words, the vulgar do not realise that their perceptions are *in fact* perceptions. Hume says:

For philosophy informs us, that every thing, which appears to the mind, is nothing but a perception, and is interrupted, and dependent on the mind; *whereas the vulgar confound perceptions and objects*, and attribute a distinct continu’d existence to the very things they feel or see.

(*T* 1.4.2.14; SBN 193. Added emphasis)

By saying the vulgar “confound” perceptions, Hume does not mean that the vulgar confuse them, as if they consciously have trouble telling which is which. The sense of “confound” here is that of our word “conflate”.<sup>40</sup> Annemarie Butler (2008) explains how the vulgar belief works by distinguishing between the content of the belief and the “*objective situation of the vulgar mind*” (2008, 120. Original emphasis). Butler intends this distinction to capture the difference between what the vulgar consciously or actively believe, and what those who reflect may realise about the vulgar belief: only upon reflection may we realise that the items

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<sup>40</sup> Norton & Norton (2000, 574) define “confound” in Hume’s *Treatise* as “confuse, jumble together”.

to which the vulgar attribute D&C existence are in fact perceptions. Butler (2008, 152, n. 11) also suggests that another way of making the point is through the *de dicto/de re* distinction.<sup>41</sup> Such a distinction is employed to differentiate between having a belief *that* an object is such and such, on the one hand, and holding a belief *about* an object being such and such, on the other hand. For illustration: a child may carry Hume's *Treatise* and think "this is a large book", but they do not know the contents or the authorship of the book, so they have a *de re* belief about the *Treatise* and not a *de dicto* belief. They have a belief about what is *in fact* the *Treatise*, but they would not report that "Hume's *Treatise* is large". Butler says that the vulgar have *de re* beliefs because they have beliefs about perceptions, but they do not have *de dicto* beliefs because they do not actively entertain thoughts about perceptions.

Although the vulgar do not cognise their perceptions *as such*, they also do not indiscriminately attribute D&C existence to all perceptions. Impressions of pain and pleasure are sensory impressions, but even the vulgar do not pretend that these exist independently of themselves (*T* 1.4.2.12; SBN 192). The vulgar still operate with an understanding that some things are *internal* and others *external*, as Hume explicitly says in the very last paragraph of *T* 1.4.2 (*T* 1.4.2.57; SBN 218).

Hume identifies both the *constancy* and *coherence* of perceptions as the qualities of perceptual experience that lead the imagination to the vulgar opinion (*T* 1.4.2.15; SBN 194). *Constancy* is that quality whereby perceptions do not change despite interruptions (such as blinking or turning one's head) and *coherence* is that quality whereby any changes that we do perceive accord with our wider system of beliefs. Hume refuses to consider constancy as a special case of coherence, instead maintaining that these two qualities *together* lead the imagination to the vulgar opinion.<sup>42</sup> Hume explains how coherence contributes to the belief in

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<sup>41</sup> Miren Boehm has also suggested that the *de dicto/de re* distinction can be useful for describing the vulgar belief (in her comments responding to my presentation at the 2017 Hume Society Conference).

<sup>42</sup> Loeb (2002) considers this a puzzling feature of Hume's account of the vulgar belief. This will be further discussed in Section 5.2.

D&C existence in the space of four paragraphs (*T* 1.4.2.19–22; SBN 195–98). Hume illustrates how coherence works by saying that his perception of a fire at one moment is not the same as it is an hour later, but that he *expects* it to change in this fashion (*T* 1.4.2.19; SBN 195). He adds a second illustration in which he describes how, upon hearing the sound of a door opening without seeing it, he supposes the present and past existence of the door (*T* 1.4.2.20; SBN 196).<sup>43</sup> The explanation of how constancy contributes to the vulgar belief is notoriously tortuous, and Hume is even self-conscious about the complexity of the account. He calls it, “a considerable compass of very profound reasoning” (*T* 1.4.2.23; SBN 199) and confesses that “an intelligent reader will find less difficulty to assent to this system, than to comprehend it fully and distinctly” (*T* 1.4.2.43; SBN 209). Hume summarises his genetic argument at *T* 1.4.2.24 (SBN 199) before delineating four sub-topics at *T* 1.4.2.25 (SBN 199–200) that together constitute his full explication of constancy.<sup>44</sup> These four topics go on to constitute a substantial portion of the entire section (Hume finalises the fourth and final topic at *T* 1.4.2.43; SBN 209–10).

Hume holds that the vulgar opinion is false. He employs *causal reasoning* to establish this. Hume fully endorses this reasoning, and, as will become clear in Chapter 4, he endorses such reasoning even when he adopts his position of moderate or mitigated scepticism. This is significant because it tells against the suggestion that Hume resolves his sceptical

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<sup>43</sup> This illustration incidentally reveals that the vulgar sometimes attribute D&C existence not just to their present impressions, but to their *ideas* (as observed by Rocknak (2013, 108, 112–13)). Note also that Hume had foreshadowed the way in which we imagine a world far beyond the reach of our senses and memory in his explication of two systems of “reality” at *T* 1.3.9.3–4 (SBN 107–08). We call what we directly sense and vividly remember “realities”, and we also call “realities” some things that we have no direct memory of and have never sensed. Hume says that he has no memory or sense experience of Rome, but that, nonetheless, the idea of such a place for him “is connected with such impressions as I remember to have received from the conversation and books of travellers and historians” (*T* 1.3.9.4; SBN 108) (see also Rocknak (2013, 113–15)).

<sup>44</sup> These are: (1) an explanation of the philosophical sense of “identity”; (2) an explanation of why the resemblance of interrupted perceptions leads to an attribution of identity to them; (3) an explanation of why we attribute continued existence to those resembling perceptions that we (mistakenly) take to be identical; (4) an explanation of why the supposition of continued existence has sufficient liveliness or vivacity to constitute belief.

predicament by later realising that he need not be convinced of his negative assessment of the vulgar belief.

In the *Treatise*, Hume calls the numerous considerations against the truth of the vulgar opinion “experiments”. In Hume’s time, the word “experiment” did not necessarily refer to a controlled scientific test, but was used more loosely to refer to observations derived from experience (Norton & Norton 2000, 425; Beauchamp 1999, 227). Hume calls such observations “experiments” all throughout his texts.<sup>45</sup>

An issue arises with regard to Hume’s *need* to resort to experiments to establish the falsity of the vulgar belief. Hume’s language in his argument against the senses being capable of producing any belief in D&C existence already suggests that he thinks the vulgar belief is false. Hume appeals to a notion that is now referred to in the literature as *mental transparency* or *Hume’s transparency thesis* (discussed by Qu (2015)). While I will refrain from entering into the debate over defining this thesis precisely, it generally concerns some sense in which we cannot be mistaken about facts about our own perceptions (which specific facts, and what conditions might need to be met before we can be impervious to error, are matters of contention).<sup>46</sup> Qu (2015) suggests that one of the most important desiderata for an interpretation of Hume’s transparency thesis is to account for Hume saying that it is altogether impossible that the senses could deceive us with regard to distinct existence (at *T* 1.4.2.7 and *T* 1.4.2.11). Hume’s argument for this impossibility tacitly assumes that the distinct existence of perceptions is false.

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<sup>45</sup> Some notable instances outside of *T* 1.4.2 are: *T* 1.3.8.3–5; SBN 99–100; *T* 1.3.8.8–11; SBN 101–103; *T* 1.4.6.9; SBN 256; *T* 2.2.2.1–27; SBN 332–347; *T* 2.2.9.5; SBN 382–383; *EHU* 5.15–17; SBN 51–52; *EHU* 8.7–9; SBN 83–85.

<sup>46</sup> Qu (2015) identifies different interpretations of the transparency thesis as follows: (i) we cannot ever be mistaken about any aspect of our perceptions; (ii) we cannot be mistaken about any aspect of our perceptions *so long as* they are carefully considered; (iii) our higher-order perceptions of our perceptions *as* perceptions cannot be mistaken (endorsed by Baxter 2008); and (iv) we cannot fail to apprehend the qualitative characters of our current perceptions and these apprehensions cannot fail to be veridical (Qu’s own view). “Qualitative character” for Qu means, “the raw phenomenal feel or ‘what-it-is-like-ness’ of a perception” (2015, 2).



After ruling out the possibility that the senses could produce an opinion of *continued* existence (at *T* 1.4.2.3; SBN 188–89), Hume considers the possibility that the senses could *immediately* convey perceptions that enjoy distinct existence.<sup>47</sup> Strikingly, Hume suggests that this would involve the senses reporting a falsehood: “If our senses, therefore, suggest any idea of distinct existences, they must convey the impressions as those very existences, by a kind of *fallacy* and *illusion*” (*T* 1.4.2.5; SBN 189. Added emphasis). Hume has not offered any argument against the very fact of the distinct existence of impressions at this point; he has not even previously hinted that the belief being investigated in *T* 1.4.2 might be fallacious or illusory.

Hume offers his argument against the senses conveying perceptions as distinct existences by utilising a conditional: “Now if the senses presented our impressions as external to, and independent of ourselves, [then] both the objects and ourselves must be obvious to our senses” (*T* 1.4.2.5; SBN 189). Hume appeals to the obscurity attached to the question of the nature of a human subject (the question of “identity”) in order to argue by *modus tollens* that the senses do not present impressions as distinct (*T* 1.4.2.6; SBN 189–90).<sup>48</sup> Hume then adds to this argument by establishing the total impossibility of the senses conveying a notion of distinct existence. The puzzle about the following paragraph is that there are two ways to read it, and either Hume’s argument entirely misses the point or it begs the question. He says:

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<sup>47</sup> In the same paragraph, Hume clarifies that the question at hand concerns *perceptions* themselves and not non-perceptions. Hume says the relevant question concerns not the “nature” of sensations (that is, not whether non-perceptions are the direct objects of experience), but concerns the “relations and situations” of sensations (*T* 1.4.2.5; SBN 189).

<sup>48</sup> When Hume restricts the discussion to the faculty of the senses, the question of the D&C existence of perceptions becomes the question of the D&C existences of the objects of sensation, which are sensory impressions.

Add to this, that every impression, external and internal, passions, affections, sensations, pains and pleasures, are originally on the same footing; and that whatever other differences we may observe among them, they appear, all of them, in their true colours, as impressions or perceptions.

(*T* 1.4.2.7; SBN 190)

So far, there is nothing here that would indicate that sensations necessarily lack distinct existence. However, Hume says in the very next sentence that it is not possible – he even goes as far as saying it is not “conceivable” – that the senses could deceive us with regard to the question of the distinct existence of sensations. He concludes:

Every thing that enters the mind, being in *reality* a perception, ’tis impossible any thing shou’d to *feeling* appear different. This were to suppose, that even where we are most intimately conscious, we might be mistaken.

(*T* 1.4.2.7; SBN 190. Original emphasis)

Hume already established in *T* 1.2.6 that the direct objects of the mind are perceptions. But this *alone* is not relevant to the question at hand. Whether or not we are presented with perceptions or non-perceptions in sense experience is one question, and whether we are presented with *perceptions that enjoy distinct existence* is another. We may read the passage as asserting that everything that enters the mind is a *mere* perception, that is, a mental item that lacks distinct existence. But now Hume would be simply stating what he is supposed to be arguing for.

Hume’s official position, which derives from his conceivability principle, is that it is *possible* for a perception to exist outside of and independently of any mind (*T* 1.4.2.40;

SBN 207–08).<sup>49</sup> At the same time, though, he does seem to think that simple reflection shows that one’s perceptions are in fact dependent on one’s mind and, therefore, by his understanding of the logic of D&C existence, enjoy neither distinct nor continued existence. I will have more to say about the apparent tension between Hume’s conceivability principle and his argument against the vulgar belief in relation to my discussion of Loeb (2002) in Section 5.2. Overall, the position that Hume arrives at concerning the vulgar belief is that it is the product of the imagination and that experimental reasoning confirms its falsity. Hume thinks that neither the faculty of the senses nor reason can produce any opinion of distinct or continued existence. I maintain that Hume’s style of argument against the vulgar belief is characteristic of his experimental approach to philosophy.

## 2.2 The Content of the Vulgar Belief

### 2.2.1 Body

The vulgar and the philosophical beliefs are both versions of belief in *body*. In general, “body” refers to those composite objects that we take ourselves to be able to encounter in sense experience.<sup>50</sup> The use of the word “body” in *T* 1.4.2.1 (SBN 187) might superficially suggest that Hume’s topic throughout *T* 1.4.2 is what he identifies at *T* 1.2.6.9 (SBN 68) as objects *specifically different from* perceptions. Close attention to the first two paragraphs of *T* 1.4.2, however, tells against such a reading. At the end of *T* 1.4.2.2, Hume refers back to *T* 1.2.6 with a footnote and makes it clear that the only sense of “body” he could possibly be dealing with is to be gleaned from that earlier section. He says that the notion of an external

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<sup>49</sup> For Hume’s statement of the conceivability principle see *T* 1.1.7.6; SBN 19–20; *T* 1.2.2.8; SBN 32; *T* 1.4.5.5; SBN 233.

<sup>50</sup> This sense of “body” emerges from *T* 1.2.4.24; SBN 47–49; *T* 1.2.5.10; SBN 57; *T* 1.2.5.16; SBN 59; *T* 1.2.5.24; SBN 63; *T* 1.2.5.26; SBN 64. Locke has more to say by way of describing “body” than Hume (see *ECHU* 2.23.16–17). It is not built into the definition of “bodies” that they are material or physical objects, since phenomenologists and idealists would analyse “body” in terms of perceptions.

object as specifically different from perception is absurd (note that Hume inserts his own footnote at the end of the following passage):

But tho' the decision of the one question decides the other [i.e. of distinct and continued existence]; yet that we may the more easily discover the principles of human nature, from whence the decision arises, we shall carry along with us this distinction, and shall consider, whether it be the *senses*, *reason*, or the *imagination*, that produces the opinion of a *continu'd* or of a *distinct* existence. These are the only questions, that are intelligible on the present subject. For as to the notion of external existence, when taken for something specifically different from our perceptions, we have already shewn its absurdity.<sup>[Hume's footnote to T 1.2.6]</sup>

(T 1.4.2.2; SBN 188. Original emphasis)

Hume is here justifying treating separately the questions of distinct and continued existence, and his simple point is that it will ease his genetic investigation. On this distinction Hume says: “[...] why we attribute a CONTINU’D existence to objects, even when they are not present to the senses; and why we suppose them to have an existence DISTINCT from the mind and perception?” (T 1.4.2.2; SBN 188. See also Section 1.1.5 above). Hume says, moreover, that “distinct existence” encompasses the *external position* of perceptions and the *independence* of both their existence and operation (ibid.). Hume understands a logical implication to hold both ways between distinct and continued existence: an object has distinct existence *if and only if* it has continued existence. In the secondary literature, it has been thought that Hume neglects the possibility that items with distinct existence could come in and out of existence at the very moment when they are experienced (see Ainslie (2015, 48); Allison (2008, 231); Price (1940, 18)). Such items would enjoy distinct existence without

continued existence. Hume himself does not countenance such a possibility, and he utilises the biconditional between distinct and continued existence throughout *T* 1.4.2. As part of his genetic investigation, Hume makes it clear that the imagination is led to attribute continued existence to perceptions first, and then the mind simply “draws [distinct existence] along with it” (*T* 1.4.2.44; SBN 210; see also *T* 1.4.2.23; SBN 199).

At the end of *T* 1.4.2.2, Hume is contrasting an absurdity with some intelligible “questions” (the plural indicating that Hume is counting continued and distinct existence as separate). The present task is to identify what the *absurd* question is. Reading directly off the text, the absurdity is “the notion of external existence, when taken for something specifically different from our perceptions ...”. The footnote at the end of the sentence points us to *T* 1.2.6. There, Hume discusses the possibility of an idea of external existence in the space of three paragraphs (he does not draw a distinction between distinct and continued existence at this point) and in the final paragraph he concedes the possibility of a *relative idea* of external objects, saying that this is the “farthest we can go towards” an idea of an object specifically different from perception (*T* 1.2.6.7–9; SBN 67–68). I proceed now to clarify the meaning of this “relative idea” with the intention of elucidating the subject matter of *T* 1.4.2.

### 2.2.2 Relative Ideas

In this sub-section, I maintain that Hume’s view is that a *positive idea* of anything specifically different from perception (in a word, of a non-perception) is impossible. In *T* 1.4.2.2, Hume is telling us that *because of this impossibility* he is instead investigating the idea of the D&C existence of perceptions themselves.

The distinction between relative and positive ideas was made by Hume’s predecessors, including Locke and Berkeley (Flage 1990, 42–43).<sup>51</sup> Flage (1990) stresses the

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<sup>51</sup> Flage draws on Locke (1975/1690), Berkeley (1949), and (Hume’s contemporary) Reid (1969/1788).

historical characterisation of positive ideas, by Hume and others, as “images” (1990, 42). Positive ideas are those ordinary, imagistic ideas that Hume is generally concerned with throughout his entire project.<sup>52</sup> For Hume, the copy principle describes the psychological genesis of positive ideas: upon having a complex sensory impression of a fire, for example, one retains a positive idea of that fire (indeed, the difference between the impression and the idea is just the degree of liveliness. See *T* 1.1.1.1; SBN 1; *T* 1.1.1.5; SBN 3). In his chapter in *The New Hume Debate* (2007), Flage takes a different approach to the positive/relative idea distinction, arguing that the distinction corresponds roughly to Bertrand Russell’s (1912) distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance. Such an understanding is problematic, however, because the positive/relative idea distinction pertains to cognitive content, not to the epistemic question of what we can know or justify. At *T* 1.2.6, Hume allows that we can have the relative idea of an object specifically different from perception, but it is not until his criticism of the philosophical system of double existence in *T* 1.4.2 that he shows why the supposition of non-perceptions is unjustified. The two issues are therefore distinct for Hume.<sup>53</sup>

Flage consistently describes relative ideas in terms of how they function: relative ideas refer to an entity (the intentional object of the idea) by means of its relation to other things. We have a relative idea of  $x$  when we have an idea of some  $y$  together with an idea of some relation  $R$  between  $x$  and  $y$ . That is all that is requisite to have a relative idea of  $x$ ; the  $x$  is simply, ‘the thing that stands in relation  $R$  to the thing  $y$ ’. Flage (2007) insists that we should not commit the mistake of thinking that positive ideas are in all things *superior* to relative ones, since you might have a positive idea of a thing and lack knowledge of the

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<sup>52</sup> Hume defines “ideas” in the opening paragraph of the *Treatise* as “the faint images” of impressions “in thinking and reasoning” (*T* 1.1.1.1; SBN 1; see also *T* 1.1.1.11; SBN 6–7).

<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, one of Russell’s illustration of the acquaintance/description distinction involves acquaintance with “sense-data” and then description of external objects. To suggest that Hume’s positive/relative idea corresponds to this could potentially obfuscate Hume’s views on perception. See Flage (2007, 143) for his response to some other charges that the parallel is inappropriate.

relations between it and other things, and sometimes knowledge of such relations is more practically useful than having a positive idea (compare looking for a book in a library given you know its place amongst other books versus holding a picture of it).

The mere claim that Hume allows for relative ideas is itself tendentious, given that they seem to represent a contravention of Hume's copy principle, which is his "first principle ... in the science of human nature" (*T* 1.1.1.12; SBN 7). In this sub-section, I will defend the claim that Hume allows for relative ideas by looking at two passages from the *Treatise* (*T* 1.2.6.9 (SBN 68) and *T* 1.4.5.19 (SBN 241)). I will extend my defence in Section 3.2 when I argue that the relative idea of an object specifically different from perception features in the philosophical system of double existence, drawing on *T* 1.4.2.46–57 (SBN 211–18) and *EHU* 12.11–14 (SBN 153–54).

In *T* 1.2.6, "Of existence and external existence", Hume comes close to saying that there can be no conception whatsoever of the non-mental, since perceptions are mental entities and "To hate, to love, to think, to feel, to see; all this is nothing but to perceive" (*T* 1.2.6.7; SBN 67. See also Section 1.1.5 above). Hume qualifies this by saying:

The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos'd *specifically* different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects. Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different relations, connexions and durations. But of this more fully hereafter.<sup>[Hume's footnote to *T* 1.4.2]</sup>

(*T* 1.2.6.9; SBN 68. Original emphasis)

At *T* 1.4.5.19 (SBN 241), Hume repeats the same qualified claim:

[...] as every idea is deriv'd from a preceding perception, 'tis impossible our idea of a perception, and that of an object or external existence can ever represent what are specifically different from each other. Whatever difference we may suppose betwixt them, 'tis still incomprehensible to us; and we are oblig'd either to conceive an external object merely as a relation without a relative, or to make it the very same with a perception or impression.

(*T* 1.4.5.19; SBN 241)

Hume here unpacks the notion of a relative idea, saying we have a conception of “an external object merely as a relation without a relative ...”. What emerges from this description is that an ideational relation involves two *relata*, but that the relative idea involves only a clear idea of one *relata*. The other is supposed as *the thing whatever it is* that stands in the relationship.

Hume takes the idea of an object specifically different from perception to be compromised. This explains why he appeals to them so scarcely, and seemingly as little more than sidenotes when he does. But Hume does *not* think there is *no idea at all* of an object specifically different from perceptions. This much emerges clearly from a face-value reading of the text; the challenge is to sustain such a reading given other things that Hume says about external objects and our ideas of them (as we will see in Section 3.2, one of Hume's criticisms of the philosophical system at *T* 1.4.2.56 (SBN 218) threatens to undermine the fact that Hume countenances relative ideas).

In light of this understanding of how relative ideas work, we can describe the relative idea of an object specifically different from perception in the following way: we have a positive idea of perception (understood as the general term “perception”, not just any



individual perception) and we have an idea of the relation of specific difference, so we have a relative idea of ‘the thing that is specifically different from perception’. Norton & Norton (2000, 445) simply claim “specific difference” means “of a different kind or species”, and this is the reading of “specific difference” that naturally emerges from *T* 1.2.6, since Hume had just emphasised that we are restricted to thought about perceptions themselves and nothing else in two paragraphs preceding *T* 1.2.6.9.

Hume does not tell us how we derive the idea of the relation of specific difference. We can plausibly entertain the idea of specific difference outside of the context of the relative idea of an object specifically different from perception. Just as we can have an idea of a relation between two things like ‘larger than’, ‘the same shape as’, or ‘the father of’, we can observe a specific difference between them. Garrett (2015, 52) similarly maintains that Hume’s allowance for ideas of relations opens up the possibility of relative ideas.<sup>54</sup>

To return to *T* 1.2.6.9, Hume says that, with regard to the relative idea of external objects, we cannot pretend to “comprehend” the related objects. This failure of comprehension signifies that a relative idea is compromised in its representational capacity (which coheres with the description of a relative idea involving a clear idea of only one *relata*). Hume also says, “generally ... we do not suppose” objects to be specifically different from perceptions and this raises the question of the *relevance* of relative ideas. What is clear is that if there is an idea of objects specifically different from perception, then it is a relative idea. If Hume is not investigating a relative idea at the start of *T* 1.4.2, then it follows that he is not investigating an idea of objects specifically different to perception. Since he is

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<sup>54</sup> A potential issue regarding the idea of specific difference arises from *T* 1.1.5.10 (SBN 15). Hume says that difference is always a *negation* of a relation, and for this reason he opts to exclude the relation of difference from his categorization of “several general heads” of relation, in *T* 1.1.5. However, he does not say there is *no idea at all* of difference. We can indeed have ideas of difference, and they come in two kinds: either when two things fail to be identical, or when two things fail to resemble one another. Thus, Hume’s claim that difference is reducible to negation is not, in itself, an obstacle to the possibility of the idea of specific difference.

investigating some idea of external objects, it must be the idea of external objects that are *not* specifically different from perceptions. As we have seen, the idea that Hume is investigating is the alternative to something that is absurd, and we know that this absurdity is identified in *T* 1.2.6. That section revealed that it is absurd to think that we have a non-relative idea (i.e. a positive idea) of an object specifically different from perception.

Hume gives us a hint as to what it could mean to investigate objects that are not specifically different from perceptions when he says the following, just before the very end of *T* 1.4.2.2. These are the very objects that we are directly given in sense experience:

These two questions concerning the continu'd and distinct existence of body are intimately connected together. For *if the objects of our senses continue to exist, even when they are not perceiv'd*, their existence is of course independent of and distinct from the perception.

(*T* 1.4.2.2; SBN 188. Added emphasis).

We know from *T* 1.2.6.8 that Hume is not open to possibility that “the objects of our senses” are non-perceptions. Hume confirms this point a couple of paragraphs later:

That our senses offer not their impressions as the images of something *distinct*, or *independent*, and *external*, is evident; because they convey to us nothing but a single perception, and never give us the least intimation of any thing beyond.

(*T* 1.4.2.4; SBN 189. Original emphasis)

Hume dismisses the question of the possibility of a positive idea of objects specifically different from perceptions, since all we can do is, “attribute to them different relations,

connexions and durations” (*T* 1.2.6.9; SBN 68). The “them” in this sentence refers to objects that are *not* specifically different from perceptions. Putting this together, we can see that Hume is investigating at the outset of *T* 1.4.2 the belief that *perceptions themselves* enjoy D&C existence. This is what Hume goes on to call the “vulgar” belief.<sup>55</sup>

The interpretation that I am offering turns on reading the end of *T* 1.4.2.2 together with *T* 1.2.6. A fair question to ask is, why are there some suggestions that Hume uses “objects” in the sense of non-perceptions in the first half of *T* 1.4.2.2? To pick out the relevant statements in the paragraph: (i) “why we attribute a CONTINU’D existence *to objects*”; (ii) “why we suppose them to have an existence DISTINCT *from the mind and perception*?”; (iii) “if the objects of our senses continue to exist, even when they are not perceiv’d, their existence is of course *independent of and distinct from the perception*” (*T* 1.4.2.2; SBN 188. Added emphasis). The term “the perception” suggests the following reading of the third quoted portion above: if mind-independent objects continue to exist when not perceived, then they are independent of our perceptions of them. However, I maintain such a reading is incompatible with the end of the very same paragraph, as per the relationship between *T* 1.2.6 and *T* 1.4.2 just explained. Can my reading make sense of Hume saying that distinct existence means “independent of and *distinct from the perception*”? An answer may be found in reading “the perception” as “the *activity* of perception”. Suppose one experiences an impression. The impression is itself a perception, but also the very experience of the impression is an instance of the activity of perception. So we may read Hume as saying that, if an impression continues to exist after *the act* of perception ceases, then, supposing that continued existence implies distinct existence, the impression is distinct from one’s perceiving it. This sense of “perception”, to broadly cover activities of the mind, is prevalent

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<sup>55</sup> At *T* 1.4.2.12; SBN 192; *T* 1.4.2.14; SBN 193; *T* 1.4.2.31; SBN 202; *T* 1.4.2.43; SBN 209; *T* 1.4.2.46; 211; *T* 1.4.2.49; SBN 213; *T* 1.4.2.53; SBN 216; *T* 1.4.2.56; SBN 218.

in Locke's philosophy (see *ECHU* 2.9.1–3; see also Chappell (1994, 26–28)), and is employed by Hume outside of *T* 1.4.2.<sup>56</sup>

This section has established that Hume rejects the possibility of a positive idea of specific difference and opts to investigate the belief in the D&C existence of perceptions (which is the vulgar belief) at the start of *T* 1.4.2. We might think that there is a significant lacuna in the very last remark of *T* 1.4.2.2. Hume is there telling us what the “intelligible” questions on the present subject are, but he neglects the relative idea altogether. To explain this, we have to realise that, in *T* 1.4.2, Hume is initially concerned with giving an account of the psychological origins of the belief in body that humans *actually entertain*. In *T* 1.2.6, Hume was already aware that an investigation into the beliefs that humans actually have will not have to deal with relative ideas. Recall: “*Generally speaking* we do not suppose them [our perceptions] specifically different ...” (*T* 1.2.6.9; SBN 68. Added emphasis). Thus, Hume's concern with the origins of belief explains his initial snubbing of relative ideas in *T* 1.4.2.2. I shall have much more to say about the psychological prevalence of the vulgar view of objects in Section 2.4.

## 2.3 The Falsity of the Vulgar Belief

### 2.3.1 The Falsity in the *Treatise*

Hume's outlook on the vulgar opinion is not merely that there is a lack of support for it, but that philosophical reflection on perceptual experience confirms its falsity. Hume uses causal reasoning, in particular, to establish that this belief is false. Hume argues for the falsity of the vulgar supposition in specific places: *T* 1.4.2.45 (SBN 210–11) and *EHU* 12.9 (SBN 152).

Although Hume lists a multitude of potential experiments at *T* 1.4.2.45 that could confirm the

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<sup>56</sup> Hume uses “perception” in the sense of the activity of perception at *T* 1.3.10.3; SBN 119; *T* 1.4.2.13; SBN 192; *T* 1.4.2.16; SBN 194; *T* 1.4.2.18; SBN 194; *T* 1.4.2.20; SBN 197; *EHU* 12.7–8; SBN 151–52.

falsity of the vulgar belief, he only elaborates on one of them. Hume proceeds differently in the *Enquiry*, as he cites only one experiment, and it is different from the one that he singles out in the *Treatise*.

A host of issues pertain to Hume's experiments against the vulgar opinion. Doubts about the adequacy of the *Treatise* version of the experiments, in particular, have been raised frequently in the secondary literature. Loeb (2002) considers the experiments to be disconnected from the rest of Hume's metaphysical views, and he exploits this fact to offer an amended reading of *T* 1.4.2 on which Hume does not take the vulgar belief to be false (this will be more thoroughly explored in Section 5.2).<sup>57</sup> These issues notwithstanding, Hume's official position is that causal reasoning shows the falsity of the vulgar belief. The fact that Hume endorses such reasoning, combined with his recognition that the vulgar belief is his own actual belief, results in the falsity of the vulgar belief engendering a serious problem for Hume.

In this sub-section and the next, I will consider the relationship between Hume's argument against the vulgar belief and ancient sceptical arguments pertaining to the senses. Ancient sceptical arguments are relevant to both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* treatments of the vulgar belief. The multitude of experiments listed in the *Treatise* seem to be direct references to ancient sceptical arguments that pertain to the variations of our perceptions due to arbitrary changes (as claimed by Norton & Norton (2000, 477)). But the conclusion that Hume intends to establish at *T* 1.4.2.45 is very different to the ancient sceptical conclusions. The need to clarify the difference between Hume's experiments and ancient arguments is even more imperative in the *Enquiry*, because of a textual puzzle that arises from Hume's distinction

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<sup>57</sup> Doubts about Hume's experiments have also been raised by Fogelin (2009a), Bennett (1971), Cook (1968), and Price (1940).

between “trite” and “profound” sceptical arguments against the senses, as we will see in the next sub-section (*EHU* 12.6; SBN 151).

At *T* 1.4.2.45, Hume utilises what he takes to be the logical connection between distinct existence and continued existence in order to infer that perceptions have neither. In the first sentence of *T* 1.4.2.45, Hume says his experiments will show that “our perceptions are not possess of any *independent* existence” (*T* 1.4.2.45; SBN 210. Added emphasis). In the final sentence of that paragraph, Hume concludes “our sensible perceptions are not possess of any *distinct or independent* existence” (*T* 1.4.2.45; SBN 211. Added emphasis).<sup>58</sup> In the first sentence of *T* 1.4.2.46 (SBN 211), Hume takes himself to have established “that our perceptions have no more a continu’d than an independent existence”.

The one experiment that Hume takes time to describe involves pressing an eye-ball to produce double vision (*T* 1.4.2.45; SBN 210–11). I will refer to this experiment as “DVE” for “double vision experiment”. Pressing an eye-ball produces double vision, but Hume takes the second, duplicate image to be an artefact of the eyes being manipulated. No one, not even the vulgar, would reasonably attribute continued existence to this second image. But Hume thinks it is obvious that the original image and the duplicate are of the same nature. He asserts the crux of the argument in one sentence:

But as we do not attribute a continu’d existence to both of these perceptions, and as they are both of the same nature, we clearly perceive, that all our perceptions are dependent on our organs, and the disposition of our nerves and animal spirits.

(*T* 1.4.2.45; SBN 210–11)

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<sup>58</sup> Hume had also singled out the *dependency* of perceptions in his direct foreshadowing of the falsity of the vulgar belief at *T* 1.4.2.10 (SBN 191).

Here, Hume infers that the duplicate image lacks distinct existence because it lacks continued existence. Since the duplicate image is dependent for its existence on the manipulation of our organs, this means the original is too (whether Hume is entitled to make this inference about the original image is precisely the point that has been challenged in the literature).

The DVE is not original to Hume. Hobbes had produced a similar line of reasoning concerning double images in his *Human Nature* (1839–1845/1650, 4–5), as did Jacques Rohault in his *System of Natural Philosophy* (1969/1723, 6–7). Hume mirrors Hobbes’s argument especially closely. Hume’s premise that the two images are “of the same nature” echoes Hobbes’s claim that “the *one* of them is no more inherent than the *other*” (1839–1845/1650, 5).

A few more observations are listed in the same paragraph that are supposed to confirm the opinion that perceptions lack independent existence. Loeb (2002, 196) describes these considerations as appeals to “perceptual relativity”, because they all involve showing how perceptions differ as seemingly trivial circumstances change:

This opinion is confirm’d by the seeming encrease and diminution of objects, according to their distance; by the apparent alterations in their figure; by the changes in their colour and other qualities from our sickness and distempers; and by an infinite number of other experiments of the same kind; from all which we learn, that our sensible perceptions are not possest of any distinct or independent existence.

The natural consequence of this reasoning shou’d be, that our perceptions have no more a continu’d than an independent existence.

(*T* 1.4.2.45–46; SBN 211)

Hume identifies these experiments as essentially the same as the DVE, but we should be aware of their differences from it. In the DVE, Hume proceeds by saying that we do not attribute continued existence to an artificial image and then asserts that our non-artificial sensations must be of the same nature. The experiment from the “encrease and diminution of objects” does not parallel this. When we stand at a certain distance from a tower, we can discern its shape, but from a very long distance we can perhaps hardly see it (let us suppose that one sees it shaped differently). It is not obvious that the vulgar would concede that *neither* has a continued existence. Indeed, given that the vulgar do not distinguish between towers and impressions of towers at all, it seems that they would attribute continued existence to *both* items (see *T* 1.4.2.14; SBN 193). Yet, insofar as the impressions are different, they cannot both be veridical (assuming, of course, that the same tower does not suffer arbitrary changes). For the argument to be successful, Hume needs to establish that at least one perception lacks either continued or distinct existence. A different case might be more propitious for Hume. One case of “apparent alterations in ... figure” would be of an oar that appears straight when above water but bent when inserted halfway into water. The vulgar would presumably think that the straight oar enjoys a continued existence, but that their impression of a bent oar is an illusion. Ultimately, we can see that there are noteworthy differences amongst the variety of the “infinite number” of experiments, let alone the DVE. Clearly, Hume’s claim that these are all “of the same kind” is made hastily and betrays a lack of philosophical rigour on his part.

Having given an overview of how Hume’s experiments work, I will now explain the different ends that Hume and the ancient sceptics have in mind. The ancient sceptical tradition expressed doubts over whether *appearances* were true (I will use the word “veridical”), without reducing appearances to internal, mind-dependent mental states (Burnyeat 1982, 25–27). In other words, the ancient sceptics raised doubts concerning what



the world is like, without ever directly questioning whether anyone can know that there actually *is* a world beyond one's own mental perceptions. We can clarify the situation by distinguishing the following theses (I use "SS" to indicate sceptical arguments pertaining to the senses"):

SS1: Appearances are sometimes non-veridical.

SS2: We can never distinguish veridical and non-veridical appearances.

SS3: Perceptions are always mind-dependent.

Hume intends the experiments of *T* 1.4.2.45 to establish SS3. The ancient sceptical thinkers, by contrast, intended to arrive at SS2 by compiling examples of SS1 and casting doubt over any way of safeguarding against error (via a *criterion*).<sup>59</sup> We should observe that SS3 is anachronistic for ancient thinkers, as they did not distinguish between the mind and everything external to the mind in the modern, Cartesian fashion (Burnyeat 1982, 29).<sup>60</sup>

For Hume, the perceptual relativity experiments show that perceptions are malleable: they are easily influenced by trivial changes in the perceiver. Later, at *T* 1.4.2.56, Hume will offer a sweeping indictment of the senses, but he does not immediately employ the relativity arguments for this purpose. In the *Enquiry*, Hume distinguishes between different types of relativity arguments. As we will see, he repeats the observation that one has different perceptions based on one's distance from an object in order to establish the mind-dependency

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<sup>59</sup> Sextus contrasts practical and philosophical criteria, the latter being the most relevant here: "the criterion ... is spoken of in two ways: in one way it is that to which we attend when we do some things and not others, while in another way it is that to which we attend when we say that some things are real and others are not real, and that these things are true and those things are false" (Sextus Empiricus 2005, 8).

<sup>60</sup> We should also observe a further, subtle difference between Sextus's use of an eye-pressing experiment (at *PH* 1.14.47) and Hume's, which shows that Hume was not directly reading Sextus's *Outlines*: Sextus says that pressing an eye makes objects appear *elongated*, as opposed to presenting us with two images (Sextus draws a comparison with animals that have elongated pupils here). Norton & Norton (2000, 477) cite Sextus Empiricus's *Against the Logicians* (Book 1, verse 192; see Sextus Empiricus 2005, 40) as a precedent for the DVE. This text is more pertinent, as it does indeed reference seeing double (albeit very briefly).

of perceptions, but he *explicitly* rejects the idea that variations due to sickness and health (and variations amongst people) push us towards a sceptical attitude towards the senses.

There are many different strategies for arriving at a position of scepticism with regard to the senses. Which arguments or considerations Hume takes seriously will influence how we understand and then scrutinise his response. I maintain that to read Hume's scepticism as Pyrrhonian scepticism would potentially be misleading (such a reading is offered by Baxter (2008), Maia Neto (1991) and Popkin (1951)). Hume thinks that the problem of the falsity of the vulgar belief, compounded by the abject failure of the philosophical position to improve on it, is a dire sceptical problem. Hume does not argue that we cannot determine which perceptions are veridical. This is what the Pyrrhonists were concerned with when they expounded the problem of establishing a criterion. The problem that arises from Hume's scepticism concerns *external existence* (or, in the case of *T* 1.4.2.45, one particular aspect of D&C existence, namely, *independent* existence). As we will see more fully in Chapter 4, Hume explicitly distances himself from Pyrrhonism in the *Enquiry* (*EHU* 12.23; SBN 159–60).<sup>61</sup> In the next sub-section, we will see that the *Enquiry* involves contrasting what Hume considers to be weak, Pyrrhonian arguments for scepticism about the objects of sense and his own sceptical predicament about external existence.

### 2.3.2 The Falsity in the *Enquiry*

Hume's treatment of scepticism pertaining to the senses in the *Enquiry* is much shorter than in the *Treatise*, mainly due to Hume omitting the labyrinthine account of how the imagination produces the vulgar opinion. Hume also omits the details behind how the imagination moves from the realisation of the falsity of the vulgar opinion to the philosophical system. The word

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<sup>61</sup> In light of Hume's identification of Pyrrhonism with extreme scepticism at *EHU* 12.23, it is also plausible to read *T* 1.4.1.7–8 (SBN 183–84) as a rejection of Pyrrhonism. Even though the exact term is not used there, Hume refers to "that fantastic sect" at *T* 1.4.1.7.8 (SBN 183).

“vulgar” is not used in *EHU* 12, but the dialectic of the sceptical predicament remains the same.

The *Enquiry* argument against the vulgar belief is similar to the *Treatise* version insofar as Hume shows that the direct objects of sense are merely perceptions that lack D&C existence, but the precise means used to arrive at this conclusion are different. Hume draws a distinction between “trite” and “profound” sceptical objections (at *EHU* 12.6; SBN 151) that calls for clarification. By rejecting the efficacy of the trite objections, Hume may seem to be repudiating the reasons cited in the *Treatise* for the falsity of the vulgar, since he mentions, “the double images which arise from the pressing one eye; with many other appearances of a like nature” (ibid.). I maintain that the purpose Hume has in mind when rejecting the efficacy of the trite sceptical objections is to show that the DVE (and other considerations) cannot be used to establish SS2 (the thesis that we can never distinguish between veridical and non-veridical appearances). In the *Enquiry*, Hume still thinks that reflection on perceptual experience easily allows us to conclude the truth of SS3 (the thesis that perceptions are always mind-dependent).

Since Hume describes the double existence of perceptions and objects in the very same paragraph in which he argues for the falsity of the vulgar opinion, he opens up the possibility that the supposition of the double existence of objects and perceptions is a direct product of the faculty of *reason*, which would directly contradict the *Treatise* (see *T* 1.4.2.47; SBN 212). In this sub-section, I will largely agree with Butler’s (2008) reading of the development of the philosophical system in the *Enquiry*. Butler takes the development of the philosophical system to be fundamentally the same in the *Enquiry* as the *Treatise*: it is not reason alone that leads to it, but the desire to reconcile the falsity of the vulgar belief and the opinion that there are some D&C existences. In Chapter 3, I will have much more to say about the origins of the philosophical system. The topic must be addressed in this sub-section,

though, because the references to the philosophical system in the passage that shows the falsity of the vulgar in the *Enquiry* are conspicuous.

Before describing the vulgar opinion of external existence, Hume observes some “trite” attempts to establish scepticism about the senses:

I need not insist upon the more trite topics, employed by the sceptics in all ages, against the evidence of *sense*; such as those which are derived from the imperfection and fallaciousness of our organs, on numberless occasions; the crooked appearance of an oar in water; the various aspects of objects, according to their different distances; the double images which arise from the pressing one eye; with many other appearances of a like nature.

(*EHU* 12.6; *SBN* 151. Original emphasis)

Hume’s assessment of these considerations seems to involve a repudiation of the “infinite number” of experiments referenced at *T* 1.4.2.45. Remarkably, Hume even cites the DVE. Hume displays his awareness of the ancient origin of these considerations by referring to “the sceptics in all ages”. However, as was observed in the previous sub-section, Hume uses traditional sceptical arguments to establish a distinctly modern conclusion about mind-dependency (“SS3”). The above portion of text considered by itself leaves it unclear exactly what Hume is intending to establish. The rest of the paragraph, though, confirms that these experiments merely show that sensory impressions can be easily manipulated, and that this alone does not rule out the possibility that the senses can be corrected (that is, that we might still be able to distinguish veridical from non-veridical appearances). The conclusion that Hume draws from the trite experiments is that the senses are not to be “implicitly” depended on, but that we must consider the way in which our sensations can be warped by “the nature

of the medium, the distance of the object, and the disposition of the organ” (*EHU* 12.6; SBN 151). Consider the DVE specifically. When we press an eye-ball, the senses present us with two images. The Hume of the *Enquiry* thinks it obvious that we ought to *correct* our senses in this instance, by not interfering with the function of our eyes. This is what it means to take “the disposition of the organ” into consideration.

We need not read Hume’s assertion that we ought to correct our impressions as an endorsement of the distinction between impressions and non-perceptual objects. In the text, Hume is about to explain precisely why he thinks such a distinction cannot withstand scrutiny. But we need not interpret Hume’s response to the trite objections insincerely either. We should see Hume’s response as revealing that some sceptical considerations pertaining to the senses are unconvincing even in light of our naïve, commonsensical standards for judging the veridicality of sense impressions. More specifically, this means that, even in a vulgar state of mind, we still draw distinctions between veridical and non-veridical sense perceptions (we imagine that oars have D&C existence, but we do not imagine that they are bent, even though they look that way in the water). In light of the sceptical predicament, this ability would definitely be called into doubt, insofar as the belief in D&C existences altogether would be called into doubt, but Hume can accept that *the predicament* (which is a “profound” sceptical objection; *EHU* 12.6; SBN 151) troubles us in this way. The reading that we must resist of Hume’s response to the trite objections is that he establishes that some fact about external existence is immune to sceptical doubt; on the contrary, the purpose of rejecting those arguments is to accentuate the arguments that *do* convincingly establish sceptical doubt. In other words, Hume contrasts the trite objections with the objections he endorses because he wants to clarify which considerations brings the evidence of sense into doubt. When we return to the vulgar opinion, the trite objections will never bother us, but the predicament

will. The predicament, unlike the trite objections, plays a role in Hume's wider sceptical crisis.

Another textual puzzle that arises from Hume's argument against the vulgar belief in the *Enquiry* is the similarity between the actual experiment that Hume offers against the vulgar belief and one of the trite objections from *EHU* 12.6, namely, "the various aspects of objects, according to their different distances". Before moving on to that, an explication of the argument is in place.

In the very last sentence of *EHU* 12.6, Hume alludes to some "more profound arguments against the senses, which admit not of so easy a solution" (*EHU* 12.6; SBN 151). He then individuates two arguments, which he also calls "topics" (at *EHU* 12.14–15; SBN 153–55) and "objections" (at *EHU* 12.16; SBN 155). Hume does not employ the terms "vulgar", "philosophical system" or "double existence" at *EHU* 12.6–16 and he does not distinguish between distinct and continued existence. Nonetheless, the parallel between this portion of the *Enquiry* and Hume's treatment of the vulgar opinion and philosophical system in *T* 1.4.2 is unmistakable. The first of Hume's two objections is his sceptical predicament (*EHU* 12.6–14). The second objection (*EHU* 12.15–16) is a version of Hume's argument against the primary/secondary qualities distinction, originally given at *T* 1.4.4 ("Of the modern philosophy"). These two arguments, made together in the space of eleven paragraphs, constitute Hume's entire treatment of scepticism pertaining to external existence in the *Enquiry*.

Hume provides the background for the first sceptical objection pertaining to the senses by describing "a natural instinct or prepossession" (*EHU* 12.7; SBN 151). He observes that human persons are naturally led to "repose faith in their senses" and to presuppose external objects to exist in a mind-independent world (*ibid.*). Hume says that this "blind and powerful instinct" also makes us "suppose the very images, presented by the senses, to be the

external objects” (*EHU* 12.8; SBN 151). This, I maintain, is a description of the same vulgar position that was the object of Hume’s investigation in *T* 1.4.2. We can see the notions of distinct existence and continued existence described in different words in the following illustration of Hume’s:

This very table, which we see white, and which we feel hard, is believed to exist, independent of our perception, and to be something external to our mind which perceives it. Our presence bestows not being on it: Our absence does not annihilate it. It preserves its existence uniform and entire, independent of the situation of intelligent beings, who perceive or contemplate it.

(*EHU* 12.8; SBN 151–52)

Hume wastes no time in establishing a sceptical argument concerning this opinion. He says that “philosophy” tells against it: the direct items of experience are perceptions only, but perceptions are mind-dependent existences that do not inform us of anything beyond themselves. He says:

[...] the slightest philosophy [...] teaches us, that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and that the senses are only the inlets, through which these images are conveyed, without being able to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and the object.

(*EHU* 12.9; SBN 152)<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Hume’s phrasing here is similar to *T* 1.4.2.38 (SBN 207): “Here then may arise two questions; *First*, How we can satisfy ourselves in supposing a perception to be absent from the mind without being annihilated? *Secondly*, After what manner we conceive an object to become present to the mind, without some new creation of a perception or image ...” (original emphasis).

No part of this statement directly refers to perceptions lacking continued existence (what Hume had referred to as the “fleeting” existence of perceptions in the *Treatise*), but Hume apparently thinks that it is part of what it means to call something a mental “image” that we cannot truly say that it enjoys D&C existence (we can neither say that “Our presence bestows not being on it” nor that “Our absence does not annihilate it”). Hume follows this with an illustration:

The table, which we see, seems to diminish, as we remove farther from it: But the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration: It was, therefore, nothing but its image, which was present to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason; and no man, who reflects, ever doubted, that the existences, which we consider, when we say, *this house* and *that tree*, are nothing but perceptions in the mind [...]

(*EHU* 12.9; SBN 152. Original emphasis)

This illustration may seem perplexing in light of the distinction between trite and profound arguments against the senses, since Hume seemingly employs here a perceptual relativity argument based on distance.<sup>63</sup> The logic of the argument may seem to depend on positing a mind-independent table and insisting that it does not suffer alterations; however, we should recall at this point the difference between perceptual relativity arguments as they were employed by ancient sceptics and the purpose that Hume has for such arguments. Hume admits that the trite sceptical objections show that perceptions are not always perfectly veridical; sometimes they make a large tower seem small, and if we press an eye-ball with a

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<sup>63</sup> Sextus Empiricus describes his “argument ... depending on positions, distances, and locations” at *PH* 1.14.118–123.



finger we can see two images of a table when we think there is actually only one. At *EHU* 12.6, Hume is content to note that it does not follow from these facts that the senses are always fallacious. The purpose that Hume has in mind at *EHU* 12.9, by contrast, is to show that the direct items of our experience are *mere* perceptions: his exact words are, “nothing but perceptions in the mind”. I agree with Butler’s (2008, 128) view that the argument ultimately supplied against the vulgar belief is essentially the same in the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, and that Hume would have considered the DVE adequate *if* it was employed for the purpose that he has in mind in the at *EHU* 12.9. Ultimately, it is simply a jarring feature of Hume’s text that he directly repudiates the consideration from the change in distances at *EHU* 12.6 and then uses it at *EHU* 12.9, even if it is for a different purpose.

Although Hume describes the philosophical system immediately after identifying the falsity of the vulgar opinion, we should be careful to avoid inferring that the philosophical system is a product of reasoning alone. We come to the supposition of double existence not because the realisation of the falsity of the vulgar belief makes us realise that there is a good argument for such a supposition, but as a result of the psychological fact that we cannot forsake all belief in D&C existences. Butler (2008) has previously argued that the philosophical system is not a product of reason in the *Enquiry*, and therefore that the *Enquiry* does not diverge from the *Treatise* in this regard. I disagree, however, with Butler’s view that there is something *besides* the vulgar belief that accounts for the inclination towards the philosophical system. Butler distinguishes two different opinions that are produced without any effort or reflection (which she calls effects of “instinct”): (1) the general belief that an external world exists – that is, a world that “depends not on our perception” and that “would exist, even though we and every sensible creature were absent or annihilated” (*EHU* 12.7; SBN 151) and (2) the specific, vulgar opinion that the immediate items of experience enjoy external existence (Butler 2008, 134–35). Butler’s distinction is supposed to reflect the fact

that Hume himself refers to a general “prepossession” to believe in an external world in a separate paragraph to that in which he describes the vulgar belief (at *EHU* 12.7 and *EHU* 12.8, respectively). According to Butler, Hume’s argument at *EHU* 12.9 is targeted against the vulgar belief in the D&C existence of the immediate objects of experience and *not* the general belief that something has external existence. She says, “[the argument] need not amount to a wholesale rejection of instinct” (2008, 146). In this way, Butler uses the distinction between two effects of instinct to extenuate the sceptical implications of Hume’s overall argument at *EHU* 12.7–14.

However, we can see at *EHU* 12.14 that Hume really does think that an unanswerable sceptical question derives from the fact of the vulgar being false: “This is a topic, therefore, in which the profounder and more philosophical sceptics will always triumph” (*EHU* 12.14; SBN 153). I do not read Hume as qualifying this, as if the sceptic’s victory is only over a certain group of philosophers from which Hume excludes himself. On Butler’s interpretation, Hume has a reply to the trite objections to the evidence *and* to the “more profound” one (*EHU* 12.6; SBN 151). For Butler, the argument at *EHU* 12.7–14 is “more profound” perhaps only in the sense that it is more intricate or philosophically interesting. I would insist that Butler’s reading of Hume’s predicament cannot account for the significance of the sceptical predicament for Hume’s scepticism as a whole. Unlike some other sceptical considerations, Hume takes the sceptical predicament seriously and personally (this will be taken up more directly in Chapter 4).

Moreover, Butler’s suggestion that there are two distinct effects of instinct at play in *EHU* 12.7–8 is problematic because Hume’s more detailed account in the *Treatise* reveals that the compulsiveness of the vulgar belief *specifically* is what drives us towards the philosophical system in the face of the realisation of the falsity of the vulgar belief: “Philosophers deny our resembling perceptions to be identically the same, and uninterrupted;

*and yet have so great a propensity to believe them such ...*” (T 1.4.2.56; SBN 218. Added emphasis). Given that Butler (2008, 117) explicitly claims that Hume’s genetic accounts of the philosophical system in the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* are the same and that she draws on parallels in order to support her analysis of the *Enquiry*, the objection that her distinction between different instincts distorts the *Treatise*’s account carries much weight. Furthermore, the text of the *Enquiry* does not offer an overwhelming reason to distinguish between two different effects of instinct in the way that Butler does. The description of the belief in an external world at *EHU* 12.8 can be seen as part of Hume’s attempt to convince his reader that the problem with the vulgar belief really is a problem with the ordinary approach that we take to external existences. The belief that sensory images enjoy external existence may seem bizarre considered alone (since we generally do not entertain *de dicto* beliefs about images) and so it may seem an implausible description of ordinary phenomenology, but the belief that there is an objective, shared, external world would seem familiar to Hume’s readers. Hume’s description of our “prepossession” towards the belief in an external world, therefore, would serve an expository purpose.

## 2.4 The Universality of the Vulgar Belief

### 2.4.1 Reflection and Default Belief

So far I have established that Hume takes experimental reasoning to reveal the falsity of the vulgar belief. In this section, I show that Hume takes the vulgar belief to be a universal belief. I adopt the term “universal” from Hume’s own description of the vulgar belief in the *Enquiry* (*EHU* 12.9; SBN 152).<sup>64</sup> I use the term “universality” to characterise Hume’s references to the prevalence of the vulgar belief amongst people, as well as its naturalness and

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<sup>64</sup> Gaskin (1974, 286) also describes the belief in a mind-independent world as “universally” held (in the context of describing how *natural beliefs* work in general).

instinctiveness. The “naturalness” of the belief refers to the fact that the vulgar belief is the product of the normal functioning of the human mind, and the “instinctiveness” of the belief refers to the fact that it is produced without attention or effort. I also understand the naturalness of the vulgar belief to mean that it is a compulsive belief that we inevitably entertain as our default belief.

Hume’s project is a science of human nature, and one of the results of this project is the realisation that the human person is naturally inclined to imagine that non-identical resembling perceptions are objects that enjoy D&C existence. Hume clearly thinks that we can reflect so as to have conscious thoughts about our own mental processes, such as about how the imagination operates on ideas and impressions. Hume engages in such reflection all throughout his philosophy. A more specific sort of reflection that is relevant for understanding the vulgar belief involves reflection *on perceptual experience*, whereby we may realise that the immediate data of such experience are perceptions.

In both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, Hume very often contrasts vulgar and philosophical opinions, or at least mentions them together.<sup>65</sup> Hume’s references to the “vulgar” confirm that vulgar opinions are common, instinctive and unreflective. Hume comes close to offering a definition in the following remark: “The vulgar, who take things according to their first appearance...” (*T* 1.3.12.5; SBN 132). Hume repeats this phrase verbatim at *EHU* 8.13 (SBN 86). Even if Hume is describing a fact about vulgar people, rather than making a conceptual claim about all vulgar opinions, the repetition reveals that he takes it to be central to his understanding of vulgarity. It is no wonder, then, that Hume should

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<sup>65</sup> Instances from *Treatise* Book One (excluding *T* 1.4.2) are: *T* 1.2.1.1; SBN 26; *T* 1.2.3.11; SBN 37; *T* 1.3.12.1; SBN 129; *T* 1.3.12.6; SBN 132–33; *T* 1.3.12.20; SBN 138–39; *T* 1.3.14.4; SBN 157; *T* 1.3.14.7; SBN 158–59; *T* 1.4.3.9; SBN 222–23. Instances from the *Enquiry* are: *EHU* 7.21; SBN 69–71; *EHU* 9.5; SBN 106–07; *EHU* 11.3; SBN 133.

characterise the natural, default view of external existence as the vulgar opinion.<sup>66</sup> Before any reflection or philosophy is done, human persons take their perceptions to enjoy D&C existence. To become aware of our own vulgar opinions, or to adopt the philosophical view, requires reflection on perceptual experience. When we specifically reflect on the fact that the immediate objects of experience are perceptions only, we can cognise our perceptions *as such*. For Hume, this reflection cannot be more than momentarily sustained.

The description just offered of the universality of the vulgar belief calls to mind the notion of *natural beliefs*, which has been a prominent feature in the literature on Hume's epistemology since Kemp Smith's (2005/1941; 1905a; 1905b) seminal scholarship. The notion of natural belief is closely associated with psychological *imperviousness* to sceptical challenge: we do not (and cannot) relinquish natural beliefs in face of sceptical doubt, and we do not choose to adopt natural beliefs into our belief system because of argument or evidence (Gaskin (1974, 284–86) describes this as the “non-rational” nature of those beliefs). I take it that the universality of the vulgar belief means that it enjoys such imperviousness, but I distance myself from the suggestion that it is therefore inappropriate or illegitimate to ask sceptical questions about that belief. While we cannot relinquish the vulgar belief, we can still be troubled by a negative epistemic evaluation of it. The fact remains that, for Hume, the merit of our natural beliefs *can* be called into question. The fact of the universality of the vulgar belief does not provide an answer to the challenge of reading Hume's scepticism about objects; rather, it allows us to fully appreciate that scepticism.

The problem with the vulgar belief is not a problem with some special theory adopted by a select group of people; it is a problem for our instinct, for what we naturally believe. Hume's sceptical predicament is an epistemological problem that is realised once we reflect,

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<sup>66</sup> There is one aberrational usage of the term “vulgar” at *T* 1.4.5.15 (SBN 239), where Hume uses it to describe philosophy. Hume here uses “vulgar” as a modifier to capture the way in which some philosophical reflections are unsophisticated or unrefined.

but it is a problem that *applies* to us even outside of the philosophical study. In brief, the universality of the vulgar opinion contributes to the plight of Hume's predicament.

In the next two sub-sections, I will clarify the way in which the vulgar belief is universal and display the full textual evidence for taking Hume it as such. The abundance of references to the universality of the vulgar belief is a clear sign Hume wants to emphasise this point. The universality of the vulgar belief creates a dire problem when combined with the falsity of that opinion, and Hume is fully aware of this.

#### 2.4.2 The Universality in the *Treatise*

Although the opening paragraph of *T* 1.4.2 ("That is a point that we must take for granted ...") is Hume's most famous statement about the naturalness of a specific belief, the extent to which it can be used as textual evidence for the universality of the vulgar belief is limited. That passage, considered alone, only shows the naturalness of some belief in *body*. Only from *T* 1.4.2.2 does it emerge that the topic of *T* 1.4.2 is the belief in the D&C existence of perceptions (this was argued for in Section 2.2 above). For the purpose of displaying the universality of the vulgar opinion, we should recall that *T* 1.2.6 informs Hume's choice of topic at the start of *T* 1.4.2. At *T* 1.2.6.9, Hume said that we can have a relative idea of an object specifically different from perceptions, but that this is largely irrelevant: "Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different relations, connexions, and durations" (*T* 1.2.6.9; SBN 68). For Hume, the belief that we take for granted is absolutely not that of "something specifically different from our perceptions" (*T* 1.4.2.4; SBN 188). Rather, what we take for granted is that perceptions themselves enjoy D&C existence.

In the course of Hume's investigation into the genesis of the vulgar opinion, we see several clear references to the universality of that opinion. In Section 2.1, I quoted *T* 1.4.2.14

(SBN 193) as signifying the content of the vulgar belief (“the vulgar confound perceptions and objects, and attribute a distinct continu’d existence to the very things they feel or see”). The paragraph as a whole reveals Hume’s commitment to the instinctiveness and prevalence of the vulgar belief. Hume argues that the belief in D&C existences could not be due to reason by appealing to the fact that most people do not concern themselves with arguments for the existence of an external world. This would be irrelevant unless he was accounting for the belief that most people actually have:

[...] we can attribute a distinct continu’d existence to objects without ever consulting REASON, or weighing our opinions by any philosophical principles. And indeed, whatever convincing arguments philosophers may fancy they can produce to establish the belief of objects independent of the mind, ’tis obvious these arguments are known but to very few, and that ’tis not by them, that children, peasants, and the greatest part of mankind are induc’d to attribute objects to some impressions, and deny them to others.

(*T* 1.4.2.14; SBN 193)

The operations of reason are not needed to make us attribute D&C existence to perceptions. The number of people who are aware of any purported reasons is much smaller than the number that holds the vulgar belief.

Later in *T* 1.4.2, Hume reiterates the universality of the vulgar belief by stating that the large part of all mankind ascribes identity to resembling perceptions. In the following, Hume contrasts the natural vulgar supposition with the confabulated belief in double existence:

The persons, who entertain this opinion concerning the identity of our resembling perceptions, *are in general all the unthinking and unphilosophical part of mankind, (that is, all of us, at one time or other)* and consequently such as suppose their perceptions to be their only objects, and never think of a double existence internal and existence, representing and represent. The very image, which is present to the senses, is with us the real body; and 'tis to these interrupted images we ascribe a perfect identity.

(T 1.4.2.36; SBN 205. Added emphasis)

For this to be consistent with Hume's claim that the vulgar "confound" perceptions and objects, we have to render a *de re* reading of "suppose their perceptions to be their only objects". The vulgar suppose that what are *in fact* perceptions are their only objects.<sup>67</sup>

In the course of his investigation into the genesis of the vulgar belief, Hume feels the need to clarify the way in which we could possibly entertain "so palpable a contradiction" as the D&C existence of perceptions. He finds it germane to remind his reader of the content and significance of the vulgar belief. He says that the vulgar opinion is not a contradiction in terms and that his task is to find the means by which we come to believe it:

[...] it may be doubted, whether we can ever assent to so palpable a contradiction, and suppose a perception to exist without being present to the mind [...].

We may begin with observing, that the difficulty in the present case is not concerning the matter of fact, or whether the mind forms such a conclusion concerning the continu'd existence of its perceptions, but only concerning the manner

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<sup>67</sup> Ainslie (2015, 101) also cites T 1.4.2.36 as evidence that the belief we generally always have is the vulgar. See also T 1.4.2.31 (SBN 201–02) for Hume's description of the vulgar belief as considering only "a single existence".



in which the conclusion is form'd, and principles from which it is deriv'd. 'Tis certain, *that almost all mankind, and even philosophers themselves, for the greatest part of their lives, take their perceptions to be their only objects, and suppose, that the very being, which is intimately present to the mind, is the real body or material existence.*

(T 1.4.2.37–38; SBN 206–07. Added emphasis)

This passage displays that the distinction between the generality of “mankind” and “philosophers” is not a sharp one. Crucially for Hume, assent to the philosophical system can only be temporary, since all people, even those who devise theories about the external world, return to the common vulgar position. Hume makes this same point again in the context of offering an account of the psychological origins of the philosophical system. For Hume, the vulgar and the philosophical systems are similar insofar as the philosopher still holds that there are D&C existences that bear some relevant relation to our immediate objects of experience:

Another advantage of this philosophical system is ... [that] we can humour our reason for a moment, when it becomes troublesome and sollicitous [sic]; and yet upon its least negligence or inattention, can easily return to the vulgar and natural notions. Accordingly we find, that philosophers neglect not this advantage; but immediately upon leaving their closets, mingle with the rest of mankind in those exploded opinions, *that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue identically and uninterruptedly the same* in all their interrupted appearances.

(T 1.4.2.53; SBN 216. Added emphasis)

Hume is here expressing the view that the proponents of the philosophical system naturally fall back on the compulsive vulgar opinion that they ostensibly reject.

#### 2.4.3 The Universality in the *Enquiry*

The universality of the belief that perceptions themselves enjoy external existence emerges clearly at *EHU* 12.7–14 (SBN 151–54). Hume introduces the first sceptical objection pertaining to the faculty of the senses as follows:

It seems evident, that men are carried, by a natural instinct or prepossession, to repose faith in their senses; and [...] always suppose an external universe, which depends not on our perception, but would exist, though we and every sensible creature were absent or annihilated.

(*EHU* 12.7; SBN 151)

Hume here connects “faith” in the senses to the supposition of an external and thoroughly mind-independent world (betraying no interest in the genetic question of what may give rise to such notions). Hume describes such a supposition as the result of “a natural instinct or prepossession” and he says that we “always” make it. In the same paragraph, he adds that animals “are governed by” the same supposition. This is stated simply in one sentence, so Hume evidently thinks it requires no argument or evidential support. The following replaces the *Treatise*’s exposition of the meaning of “body” in terms of “distinct” and “continued” existence:

It seems also evident, that, when men follow *this blind and powerful instinct of nature*, they always suppose the very images, presented by the senses, to be the

external objects, and never entertain any suspicion, that the one are nothing but representations of the other. This very table, which we see white, and which we feel hard, is believed to exist, independent of our perception [...]

But *this universal and primary opinion of all men* is soon destroyed by the slightest philosophy [...]

(*EHU* 12.8–9; SBN 151–152. Added emphasis)

Hume repeats here the strong influence of the instinctive, vulgar view and immediately reveals that it cannot withstand the slightest scrutiny. Hume clearly thinks it is relevant that the sceptical objection at hand pertains to a natural belief. The fact that the belief in question is natural and universal amplifies the seriousness of the sceptical objection.

At *EHU* 12.10, Hume turns to the attempted philosophical remedy to the vulgar opinion and its deficiency. Hume finds it worth stating that this remedy is not the natural and instinctive position: when we turn to the philosophical system we “can no longer plead the infallible and irresistible instinct of nature” (*EHU* 12.10; SBN 152). In the following, Hume contrasts the philosophical system about external existence with “the instincts and propensities of nature” while recapitulating his evaluations of the vulgar opinion and philosophical systems:

This is a topic, therefore, in which the profounder and more philosophical sceptics will always triumph [...]. Do you follow *the instincts and propensities of nature*, may they say, in assenting to the veracity of sense? But these lead you to believe, that the very perception or sensible image is the external object. Do you disclaim this principle, in order to embrace a more rational opinion, that the perceptions are only representations of something external? *You here depart from your natural*

*propensities and more obvious sentiments*; and yet are not able to satisfy your reason, which can never find any convincing argument from experience to prove, that the perceptions are connected with any external objects.

(*EHU* 12.14; SBN 153–54. Added emphasis)

It is worth stressing that Hume singles out the unnaturalness of the philosophical system. For Hume, the situation is as follows: either we assent to the plainly false, but natural, vulgar system, or we attempt to improve on it with an unnatural and unjustified system.

Overall, Hume takes the vulgar believe to be a universal belief: it applies to all people, and even non-human creatures. Hume begins *T* 1.4.2 as an investigation into the genesis of this vulgar belief. He is abundantly aware that the philosophical system is a view that cannot be sustained, and that any popularity it has must be explained by its psychological dependence on the vulgar belief. In the *Enquiry*, the detail behind the dependence of the philosophical system on the vulgar belief is dropped. Instead of a sceptical problem emerging from what began as a genetic investigation, Hume *begins* with a sceptical objection about the senses and makes his psychological claims in order to whet his objection.

### 3. The Philosophical System

#### 3.1 Overview and Preliminaries

In the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, Hume examines the philosophical system after displaying the falsity of the vulgar opinion. Hume treats the philosophical system from the very beginning as an attempted, but failed, remedy for the vulgar view; it arises from a desire to accommodate the falsity of the vulgar while still allowing that there are some D&C existences.

The *Treatise* account of the transition from the vulgar opinion to the philosophical system exemplifies Hume's aptitude for keen psychological analysis. Hume accounts for the motivations behind the transition and the mechanisms that facilitate it. He finds that the philosophical system is a product of the faculty of the imagination, but that it does not have any "*primary recommendation*" to this faculty, since the philosophical system derives any psychological vivacity it has from the very conviction behind the vulgar opinion itself (*T* 1.4.2.47; SBN 212. Original emphasis). This means that the associative principles of the imagination would not be led by the raw data of experience to the philosophical system; the imagination arrives at it only by passing through some medium (the acceptance of some other belief, namely, the vulgar opinion). The details of Hume's analysis are delicate: it is not merely the realisation of the falsity of the vulgar belief that pushes us towards the philosophical system, but it is actually the underlying, universal conviction towards the vulgar opinion itself that accounts for the system. The philosophical system emerges as the means for satisfying "contrary principles" that push us towards and pull us away from the vulgar opinion (*T* 1.4.2.52; SBN 216). Hume's first statement of the origin of the philosophical system is difficult to parse and even appears contradictory:

Were we not first persuaded, [1] that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue to exist even when they no longer make their appearance to the senses, we shou'd never be led to think, [2] that our perceptions and objects are different, and that our objects alone preserve a continu'd existence.

(T 1.4.2.46; SBN 211)

The two propositions identified here are jointly inconsistent, because we cannot hold both that perceptions enjoy continued existence and that “objects alone” enjoy continued existence. But Hume is saying we only come to believe [2] in virtue of believing [1]. The explanation for this is that we do not *consciously* believe two contradictory things at the same time, but we sometimes briefly convince ourselves of [2] even though we return to [1] in the course of ordinary life. The philosophical system pleases our reason insofar as [1] arises from the recognition of the falsity of the vulgar belief. But there is inherent *tension* in the philosophical system, deriving from the fact that it “at once denies and establishes the vulgar supposition” (T 1.4.2.56; SBN 218). Hume cites this inherent tension in the philosophical system as evidence of its “absurdity” (ibid.). In the *Enquiry*, Hume does not describe the genesis of the philosophical system in detail; he does not directly say that the underlying conviction towards the vulgar belief pushes us towards the philosophical system, but just that we are “necessitated by reasoning ... to embrace a new system” once we realise the falsity of the vulgar opinion (EHU 12.10; SBN 152). We could only be “necessitated” to embrace the philosophical system if abandoning all belief in D&C existences was not an option. That we cannot abandon the belief that there are D&C existences is *implicit* in the *Enquiry*, whereas in the *Treatise* Hume states that even the self-declared sceptics “maintained that opinion [that there are no D&C existences] in words only, and were never able to bring themselves sincerely to believe it” (T 1.4.2.50; SBN 214).

Although Hume stresses that the vulgar opinion is the singular, natural belief in D&C existences, we should realise that, in terms of a *response* to the falsity of the vulgar opinion, the philosophical system is not merely one choice from amongst many options. Hume thinks that positing the double existence of objects and perceptions is itself intuitive once we realise the deficiency of the vulgar view. Hume does not emphasise this point, but it is unmistakable. Hume thinks the connection between the philosophical system and the universal vulgar belief offers an explanation for how the philosophical system could be so widespread:

For as the philosophical system is found by experience to *take hold of many minds*, and in particular *of all those, who reflect ever so little on this subject*, it must derive all its authority from the vulgar system; since it has no original authority of its own.

(*T* 1.4.2.49; SBN 213. Added emphasis)

So, while the philosophical system is not a direct product of the imagination, Hume thinks it is necessary to account for the prevalence of it. Earlier, Hume had said that the majority of mankind never thinks of a double existence (*T* 1.4.2.14; SBN 193), but we can see that there is no contradiction between this and the above quote if we realise that the majority of mankind never reflects on the nature of perceptual experience. In stressing that the philosophical system is a confabulation, Hume is deriding it for being *impermanent*. The philosophical system is not entirely impossible to entertain. As an *impermanent* belief, it is entertained by a noteworthy number of people.

As much as Hume characterises the movement towards the philosophical system as a prevalent response to the falsity of the vulgar opinion, he also seemingly refers to “philosophers” as if it were a more or less identifiable group that he excludes himself from. Fogelin (2009a, 78–79) suggests that Hume turns to the philosophical system precisely

because it was widely endorsed by other philosophers in Hume's time. Hume does not cite any names himself, but the standard proponent of the philosophical system is taken to be Locke. Ainslie treats Hume's attack on the philosophical system as primarily targeted against Locke (2015, 57), but he briefly notes that "suitably modified versions" of the philosophical system may be attributed to "Descartes, Hobbes, and others" (2015, 138).<sup>68</sup> We may also plausibly include Malebranche here, controversies around the correct interpretation of his views notwithstanding (see Ayers (1984, 314–23); see Scott (1996) for discussion on interpreting Malebranche's view). Hume certainly does not pay attention to the idiosyncrasies of Malebranche's system, or indeed, any one particular philosopher, but we know from Hume's 1737 letter to his friend Michael Ramsay that he took Malebranche to be a central influence on the "metaphysical Parts" of his philosophy.<sup>69</sup>

There is no reason why the philosophical system cannot be both a prevalent theory in the intellectual world of Hume's time and a common, intuitive response to realisation of the falsity of the vulgar opinion. Seeing the philosophical system as the intuitive response to the vulgar opinion allows us to appreciate the significance of Hume's treatment of it. The fact that prominent philosophers in his own time advocated it is not the *only* reason that Hume includes discussion of the philosophical system in both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*. The non-justification of the philosophical system really does compound the problem of the falsity of the vulgar. The sceptical predicament is a problem that applies to "all those, who reflect ever so little" (*T* 1.4.2.49; SBN 213).

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<sup>68</sup> Beauchamp (1999, 57) makes the same claim about the salience of Locke. Butler (2008, 147) cites proponents of the system as "Descartes, Locke, among others".

<sup>69</sup> "I shall submit all my Performances to your Examination, & to make you enter into them more easily, I desire of you, if you have Leizure, to read over once *le Recherche de la Verité* of Pere Malebranche, the *Principles of Human Knowledge* by Dr Berkeley, some of the more metaphysical Articles of Bailes *Dictionary*; such as those [of] Zeno, & Spinoza. Des-Cartes *Meditations* would also be useful but don't know if you will find it easily among your Acquaintances. These Books will make you easily comprehend the metaphysical Parts of my Reasoning and as to the rest, they have so little Dependence on all former systems of Philosophy, that your natural Good Sense will afford you Light enough to judge of their Force & Solidity" (cited in Mossner 1980/1954, 627).



In the next section of this chapter, I clarify the content of the philosophical system by paying close attention to Hume's description of it at *T* 1.4.2.46–57 (SBN 211–18) and *EHU* 12.11–14 (SBN 153–54). In Section 3.3, I explicate Hume's argument against the justification of the philosophical system. Hume's scepticism about the philosophical system is his scepticism about objects specifically different from perceptions. As such, my view has affinity with readings of Hume as a sceptic about non-perceptions, such as Fogelin (2009a; 2009b; 1985), Hakkarainen (2012a; 2012b), Inukai (2011), and Price (1940). In Section 3.4, I consider Hume's discussion of the primary/secondary qualities distinction at *T* 1.4.4 and *EHU* 12.15–16. My argument in this section will be that Hume considers *both* the sceptical predicament and the argument against the modern philosophy to present sceptical problems and that the two problems involve distinct issues.

Overall, the philosophical system is a disappointing remedy for the vulgar opinion. In *T* 1.4.2.46, when Hume is still introducing the philosophical system to his reader, he observes that “'tis only a palliative remedy” and, remarkably, that “it contains *all the difficulties* of the vulgar system, *with some others, that are peculiar to itself*” (*T* 1.4.2.46; SBN 211. Added emphasis). Hume summarises his criticisms of the philosophical system before he clarifies the content of it, which suggests that Hume takes his reader to be familiar with the proposal (the fuller description comes at *T* 1.4.2.54–55 (SBN 216–17)). Hume maintains that neither reason nor the natural principles of the imagination can lead us to the philosophical system. Hume's final position is that, while we can become aware of the falsity of the vulgar belief, even then we are still compelled by that very belief.

### 3.2 The Content of the Philosophical System

In this section, I specify the nature of the “objects” that the philosophical system posits. I argue that Hume understands these objects to be *specifically different from* perceptions. As I

argued in Section 2.2.2, Hume allows only for a *relative* idea of objects specifically different from perceptions. A challenge for my view is that Hume does not use the term “relative idea” when introducing the philosophical system in the *Treatise* and he does not explicitly mention relative ideas anywhere in *EHU* 12.

A further problem is that at *T* 1.4.2.56 – the penultimate paragraph of *T* 1.4.2 – Hume characterises the philosophical system as positing two sets of perceptions, which is contrary to the present suggestion that he posits objects in contrast to perceptions. While disparaging the philosophical system, Hume observes:

Philosophers deny our resembling perceptions to be identically the same, and uninterrupted; and yet have so great a propensity to believe them such, *that they arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions*, to which they attribute these qualities. I say, a new set of perceptions: For we may well suppose in general, but ’tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions.

(*T* 1.4.2.56; SBN 218. Added emphasis)

This seems to indicate that relative ideas play no role at all in the philosophical system. My first point of reply to this is to highlight the second half of the above quote. Hume says, “For we may well suppose in general, but ’tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive ...”, which indicates that the philosopher might *indistinctly* conceive objects specifically different from perceptions. That the relative idea of objects is indistinctly conceived coheres with the claim at *T* 1.2.6.9 that we fail to “comprehend” one of the related objects in a relative idea.

I read Hume as endorsing a disjunction at *T* 1.4.2.56: the philosopher *either* has a positive idea of a perception *or* they have a relative idea of an object specifically different

from perception. This is consonant with the text, because Hume admits “we may well suppose in general” that objects are specifically different from perceptions. It may be protested, however, that the supposition is a mere possibility, and that Hume thinks that what the philosopher *actually does* is posit two sets of perceptions. I will argue shortly that we should not regard the philosophical system as always involving two sets of perceptions because it strains Hume’s contrast between objects and perceptions. Essentially, there is more reason to think that those who entertain the philosophical system successfully distinguish between objects and perceptions in thought than that they do not.

Instead of the philosophical system involving ideas of two sets of perceptions, another alternative to my reading of the philosophical system is that the distinction between perceptions and objects is made in words only and that no idea, positive or relative, corresponds to the words “object” and “objects”. I will refer to this as *the linguistic* interpretation of the philosophical system. This interpretation has some *prima facie* feasibility, insofar as Hume criticises, at various places, standard metaphysical theories for employing words but having no idea attached to their words. Hume thinks empty concepts can be found in the ancient and scholastic notions of “faculty” and “occult quality”, which are discussed at *T* 1.4.3.10 (SBN 224), and the notions of “substance” and “inhesion”, which are treated at *T* 1.4.5.6 (SBN 234).<sup>70</sup> Early on in the examination of the philosophical system, Hume says that the proponent of the philosophical system “calls” a set of things “*objects*”, and Hume’s choice of verb here might potentially invite us to read the philosophical system as making a mere linguistic distinction (*T* 1.4.2.52; SBN 215. Original emphasis).

The *Enquiry* description of the philosophical system is much shorter than the *Treatise* version. No part of this text indicates that Hume takes the second set of objects to be always reducible to perceptions themselves, which is a point in favour of my view. However,

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<sup>70</sup> At *T* 1.4.5.26–27 (SBN 244–46), Hume also criticises the emptiness of the phrase “action [of the mind]”.

*EHU* 12 by itself does not allow us grasp how the idea of objects specifically different from perceptions is possible, as there is no direct reference to relative ideas in this section of text.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, in this section, I mainly rely on the detail of the *Treatise* version in order to understand Hume's considered view.

When Hume turns to an examination of the philosophical system, he does not describe the way in which the philosopher takes objects to relate to perceptions (which is of objects causing perceptions, and of resemblance between them; see *T* 1.4.2.54–55; SBN 216–17). Hume launches into invective against the philosophical system as soon as he presents it:

[Philosophers] change their system, and distinguish, (as we shall do for the future) betwixt perceptions and objects, of which the former are suppos'd to be interrupted, and perishing, and different at every return; the latter to be uninterrupted, and to preserve a continu'd existence and identity. But however philosophical this new system may be esteem'd, I assert that 'tis only a palliative remedy, and that it contains all the difficulties of the vulgar system, with some others, that are peculiar to itself.

(*T* 1.4.2.46; SBN 211)

Before this paragraph, Hume had been using “perception” and “object” interchangeably, since this way of expressing the matter is appropriate when discussing the vulgar belief (see *T* 1.4.2.31; SBN 201–02). He now tells his reader that he will not take perceptions and objects to be the same. The proponent of the philosophical system only assigns D&C existence to objects, not perceptions. In this way, the philosophical system is an (attempted) remedy for the vulgar opinion; it is specifically designed to accommodate for the falsity of

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<sup>71</sup> There is a direct reference to an “imperfect notion” of external existences at *EHU* 12.16 (SBN 155). The context of this reference will be addressed in Section 3.4.2.

the vulgar opinion. Therefore, given that the proponents of the philosophical system *actually* make this accommodation in thought – that is, that they consistently deny distinct and continued existence to perceptions – then, if they have *any* idea corresponding to the term “objects”, it will be an idea of non-perceptions. In order to justify this reading, I will offer a reading of Hume’s account of the transition from the vulgar belief to the philosophical system.

In *T* 1.4.2.48, Hume argues that the imagination offers no *primary recommendation* of the philosophical system. He describes the lack of primary recommendation as follows: “[the imagination] wou’d never, of itself, and by its original tendency, have fallen upon [the philosophical system]” (*T* 1.4.2.48; SBN 212). It is the conviction towards the vulgar belief in conjunction with the realisation of the falsity that belief that pushes us towards the philosophical system. The mind is drawn to the philosophical system only once we specifically reflect on the nature of perceptual experience and realise that the vulgar opinion is false. The fact that the philosophical system arises in this way is a sign that the philosophical system cannot be permanently entertained, since the principles pushing us towards it will not always be active.

Hume admits that he cannot rigorously prove that the philosophical system lacks primary recommendation from the imagination, but he thinks that anyone who would contradict him on this point is faced with a challenge. He says that, given that perceptions are in fact dependent and interrupted, “[let] any one upon this supposition show why the fancy, directly and immediately, proceeds to the belief of another existence ... and ... I promise to renounce my present opinion” (*T* 1.4.2.48; SBN 218).<sup>72</sup> According to Hume, we can realise the falsity of the vulgar belief, but cannot possibly give up believing in D&C existences

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<sup>72</sup> The full paragraph also marks the first time Hume informs his reader that the philosophical system posits objects that *resemble* perceptions. This is stated more directly at *T* 1.4.2.54 (SBN 216).

altogether. The human mind experiences a “struggle” (*T* 1.4.2.52; SBN 215) between the natural, vulgar opinion and the realisation of the falsity of the vulgar belief. The philosophical system allows for the coexistence of the falsity of the vulgar opinion and belief in the D&C existences. In the first regard, the philosophical system pleases reason, and in the second regard, the philosophical system pleases the imagination:

In order to set ourselves at ease in this particular, we contrive a new hypothesis, which seems to comprehend both these principles of reason and imagination. This hypothesis is the philosophical one of the double existence of perceptions and objects; which pleases our reason, in allowing, that our dependent perceptions are interrupted and different; and at the same time is agreeable to the imagination, in attributing a continu'd existence to something else, which we call *objects*. [...] [We] set ourselves at ease as much as possible, by successively granting to each whatever it demands, and by feigning a double existence, where each may find something, that has all the conditions it desires.

(*T* 1.4.2.52; SBN 215. Original emphasis)

The philosopher posits objects in contrast to perceptions, and each of these play different roles in the philosophical system. Hume grants that the lack of D&C existence for perceptions would be successfully accounted for by the philosophical system, but his criticism is that the belief in D&C non-perceptual objects does not withstand scrutiny. There is a difference between the content of the philosophical system not even putatively satisfying reason, and the content representing what reason *wants* but failing to be justified. To put the matter differently, the philosophical system pleases reason insofar as it denies that

perceptions enjoy D&C existence, but the *separate* claim of the philosophical system about non-perceptions enjoying D&C existence does not satisfy reason.

In the *Enquiry* version, Hume no longer takes time to explain the way in which the philosophical system is able to please both reason and the imagination. He merely says, “So far, then, are we necessitated by reasoning to contradict or depart from the primary instincts of nature, and to embrace a new system with regard to the evidence of our sense” (*EHU* 12.10; SBN 152). It is clear in this text, though, that the objects that the philosophical system posits are to be contrasted with perceptions. Hume describes the philosophical system as positing the existence of objects “entirely different from” perceptions (*EHU* 12.11; SBN 152–3) and as holding that “perceptions are only representations of something external” (*EHU* 12.14; SBN 154). In none of these passages does Hume even hint at any doubt over the *conceivability* of such things.

Even if there is a case to be made for interpreting the philosophical system as positing objects in contrast to perceptions, we still need to account for the reference to “a new set of perceptions” at *T* 1.4.2.56, as remarked earlier. I have already observed that Hume expresses a disjunction at *T* 1.4.2.56: we either have a positive idea of a perception, *or* we have a relative idea of something specifically different. It is incumbent upon me to explain how the philosophical system involves two sets of perceptions at least sometimes. We may offer up the following picture on Hume’s behalf. So long as the philosopher realises that the vulgar belief is false, he or she will be convinced that perceptions lack D&C existence, and so they will please their reason by positing the existence of non-perceptions. In this case, the philosopher supposes “in general” that D&C non-perceptions exist. However, the philosopher may attempt to conceive of objects specifically different from perceptions *imagistically*, such as when they try to conceive of a literal visual resemblance between their perception of a table and the purported non-perceptual table that is supposed to cause it and resemble it. In

this case, the philosopher could only conceive another perception, as per Hume's assumption from *T* 1.2.6.7–8.

We cannot interpret the philosophical system as *always* involving two sets of perceptions, even if the philosopher falls into this mistake some of the time. Hume has already conceded that the philosophical system “pleases our reason” by “allowing, that our dependent perceptions are interrupted and different” (*T* 1.4.2.52; SBN 215). By attempting to conceive of objects imagistically, the philosopher can only conceive further perceptions, and in this regard the philosophical system would not please reason in the way Hume describes it. But conceiving of objects imagistically represents a departure from what the philosopher *typically* does anyway. The reference to a second set of perceptions in *T* 1.4.2.56 is a parenthetical remark; the sense of “object” as specifically different from perception (that is, as drawn in explicit contrast to “perception”) predominates in Hume's treatment of the philosophical system in the *Treatise*, not to mention that the *Enquiry* contains not a shred of evidence that the philosopher posits two sets of perceptions.

Another interpretation of the philosophical system is what I have called the *linguistic interpretation*, according to which the philosopher has *no idea at all* when they refer to “objects” in their system. Powell (2013) has shown that Hume does not think that understanding what words mean is sufficient for being able to conceive what those words express. Accordingly, we can understand what it means to say that some things are *impossible*, such as “We can form no idea of a mountain without a valley” (*T* 1.2.2.8; SBN 32), without having ideas of impossible things. This means that we cannot infer that there must be some idea of *objects* in the philosophical system just because Hume does not say that the system is meaningless. It could be the case that philosophers understand what they assert when they say perceptions are caused by and resemble objects, but that they have no idea, positive or relative, corresponding to such objects. It seems like one of the textual



advantages of this linguistic interpretation is that it is consonant with the fact that Hume does not directly refer to relative ideas throughout most of *T* 1.4.2

However, there are a couple of considerations that problematise the linguistic interpretation of the philosophical system. Firstly, Hume's statement about what the philosopher can conceive at *T* 1.4.2.56 is supposed to present a challenge to my view, but the linguistic interpretation does a worse job of accounting for this passage. As we have seen, Hume expresses a disjunction there: we either have a positive idea of a perception, or we have a relative idea of an object specifically different from perception. On my reading, the philosopher can alternate between the two, but on the linguistic reading the philosopher can only alternate between an idea of perception and a mere term with no idea attached. So, the linguistic reading would misrender the situation. Secondly, while there are no references to relative ideas in the bulk of *T* 1.4.2, there are no references to mere empty words either, so the linguistic interpretation does not fare better than my own in this regard. Hume criticises the notions of "*faculty*" and "*occult quality*" at *T* 1.4.3.10 (SBN 224) and "*substance*" and "*inhesion*" at *T* 1.4.5.2 (SBN 215) for involving mere wordage. These terms, like the philosophical system, are employed by philosophers to put themselves at ease (see *T* 1.4.2.52; SBN 215; *T* 1.4.3.10; SBN 224). But Hume *never* criticises the philosophical system of double existence for involving mere wordage; on the contrary, he grants that philosophers may distinguish between objects and perceptions but then insists that they cannot justify the belief in the existence of the objects they posit. So, while the linguistic interpretation represents an intriguing suggestion, it struggles to account for the things that Hume does and does not say about the conceivability of objects in the philosophical system.

I do not see Hume's reference to "two sets of perceptions" at *T* 1.4.2.56 as entirely irrelevant, as if it were an unfortunate phrase or a mistake on Hume's part. Hume compiles a number of criticisms of the philosophical system together in *T* 1.4.2.46–56 and *one* of them

concerns the ideational content of the items that the philosophers posit. Hume's view is that we ought to suspend judgement about the truth or falsity of the system of double existence (as we will see in the next section), and that the idea of the objects specifically different from perceptions is compromised because even this thing we suspend judgement about is a *thing-we-know-not-what*. As soon as we try to conceive of it imaginatively, we revert to having an idea of what is *in fact* a perception, contrary to the very intentions of the philosophers.

Ultimately, the supposition of a relative idea in the philosophical system has three advantages: (1) it coheres with the fact that Hume says in *T* 1.4.2.56 (in the very sentence that is supposed to be a stumbling block for my reading, no less) that we may "suppose in general" that objects specifically different to perceptions exist; (2) it gives a less strained distinction between "perceptions" and "objects" at *T* 1.4.2.46–56 and *EHU* 12.11–14; and (3) it accounts for the fact that Hume does not develop the same criticism of the philosophical system as he develops of our ideas of substance, faculty, and occult quality.

### 3.3 Hume's Scepticism of Double Existence

#### 3.3.1 Hume's Scepticism in the *Treatise*

In this section, I address Hume's rationale for taking the philosophical system to be devoid of justification. Hume's reasoning against the philosophical system is elegant and establishes a firm conclusion. In both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* versions, Hume's argument harkens back to his account of causal reasoning provided in early sections of the text (*T* 1.3 (esp. *T* 1.3.6–7, 12–13) and *EHU* 4–5). Hume officially *suspends belief* about the causes of perception. He does not dogmatically think that there could not be objects that cause and resemble our perceptions. He just thinks that we cannot offer any evidence in favour of this proposal.

The use of causal reasoning to establish a sceptical conclusion raises an issue, since Hume adopts *some* sceptical attitude to such reasoning himself (even if the details remain

contentious). What is clear, though, is that Hume does not *refrain* from causal science and experimental philosophy in light of his scepticism. Hume does not pause to reflect on sceptical results established by his own philosophy until the end of his metaphysical and epistemological investigations (at *T* 1.4.7 and *EHU* 12). Any potential problem about Hume's scepticism and his use of causal reasoning will concern his entitlement to confidently engage in causal reasoning after this encounter with scepticism. I will have much more to say about the challenge of integrating Hume's scepticism within his philosophy in Sections 4.1.2 and 5.3 below. For now, suffice it to say that Hume himself does not raise any doubts concerning causation when he criticises the philosophical system. Realising that Hume's scepticism about that system emerges from what he considers to be appropriate causal reasoning will help us appreciate the force of that scepticism for Hume, and, consequently, the seriousness of the sceptical predicament.

In the *Treatise* Hume provides a detailed account of the genesis of the philosophical system, and, in particular, of the way in which the conviction towards the vulgar belief itself accounts for it. Hume shows that reason cannot lead us directly to embrace it. Proponents of the philosophical system hold that only perceptions are the direct items of experience but that non-perceptions also exist. Hume turns to causal reasoning because it represents the only means by which reason could potentially infer the existence of a non-present object:

The only existences, of which we are certain, are perceptions, which being immediately present to us by consciousness, command our strongest assent, and are the first foundation of all our conclusions. The only conclusion we can draw from the existence of one thing to that of another, is by means of the relation of cause and

effect, which shows, that there is connexion betwixt them, and that the existence of one is dependent on that of the other.

(T 1.4.2.47; SBN 212)

Next, Hume observes that causal inferences depend on the *past experience* of the conjunction of items or events. Since non-perceptions are not experienced, it follows that causal reasoning can never allow us to conclude that such things exist:

The idea of this relation [cause and effect] is deriv'd from past experience, by which we find, that two beings are constantly conjoin'd together, and are always present at once to the mind. *But as no beings are ever present to the mind but perceptions*; it follows that we may observe a conjunction or a relation of cause and effect betwixt different perceptions, but can never observe it betwixt perceptions and objects.

(T 1.4.2.47; SBN 212. Added emphasis)

For Hume, we simply do not experience non-perceptions conjoined with perceptions. So, while we can have some justified beliefs in the existence of things not present to us – for example, the existence of fire somewhere because we see smoke in the distance – this is impossible in the case of non-perceptions. It is worth highlighting that Hume thinks the proponents of the philosophical system share with him the assumption that only perceptions are the direct objects of experience. They do not realise the fallacy of their opinion, then, due to their erroneous conception of causal reasoning. Hume would hold that his own philosophy offers the proper understanding of causal inference; such an understanding, combined with the fact about perceptions only being the direct items of experience, allows Hume to establish scepticism about the philosophical system. In short, for Hume, to believe in the external

existence of non-perceptions is to defy causal reasoning. Causal reasoning allows us to infer from a perceived to an unperceived thing, but it can never make an inference to a thing that is altogether by its nature *unperceivable*.

Hume only countenances causal reasoning as a possible means for justifying the philosophical system. One might criticise Hume for overlooking other options, especially given that the philosophical system *might* be true (in contrast to the downright false vulgar belief). Given that objects specifically different from perceptions may exist, might it be reasonable to *suppose* that they exist? Might it be the most plausible way of explaining for the coherence of perceptual experience? Indeed, Hume himself admits that the similitude between the vulgar and philosophical systems is an “advantage” of the philosophical system (*T* 1.4.2.53; SBN 216), which suggests that the philosophical system may indeed play some positive function for philosophy. I will return to this suggestion in Section 5.1. For now, it is important to note that, although Hume negatively assesses both the vulgar and philosophical systems, he establishes the falsity of the opinion in the first case and the lack of justification in the second.

### 3.3.2 Hume’s Scepticism in the *Enquiry*

At *EHU* 12.10, the very paragraph in which Hume describes being “necessitated” to depart from the vulgar view, he lambastes the philosophical system. As I have repeated throughout, Hume stresses that it is both unjustified and a psychological confabulation. Remarkably, Hume criticises the “new system” before he even describes it:

So far, then, are we necessitated by reasoning [...] to embrace a new system with regard to the evidence of our senses. But here philosophy finds herself extremely embarrassed, when she would justify this new system, and obviate the cavils and

objections of the sceptics. She can no longer plead the infallible and irresistible instinct of nature: For that led us to quite a different system [...] And to justify this pretended philosophical system, by a chain of clear and convincing argument, or even any appearance of argument, exceeds the power of all human capacity.

(*EHU* 12.10; SBN 152)

Hume clearly has a low opinion of the merit of the philosophical system. He thinks we cannot even put forward the mere “appearance” of argument in its favour. Hume also says that philosophy “can no longer plead the infallible ... instinct of nature” when she abandons the universal vulgar opinion for the confabulated philosophical system. Hume, of course, does not think nature is infallible, as his commitment to the falsity of the vulgar belief reveals. But he thinks that one of the costs of endorsing the philosophical system in response to the problem of the falsity of the vulgar view is that we must forsake our ordinary, pretheoretical assumption that there is no need to justify what is naturally obvious to us.

The rationale behind Hume’s scathing assessment of the philosophical system comes in the next two paragraphs. Hume’s first point of criticism is that there are many potential causes that could give rise to perceptions. He also raises a parenthetical doubt about the possibility of external objects resembling perceptions:

By what argument can it be proved, that the perceptions of the mind must be caused by external objects, entirely different from them, though resembling them (if that be possible) and could not arise from either the energy of the mind itself, or from the suggestion of some invisible and unknown spirit, or from some other cause still more unknown to us?

(*EHU* 12.11; SBN 153)

Hume here appeals to the fact that the cause or causes of our perceptions cannot be determined. He even suggests that the cause might be something we cannot even guess at. He ends the paragraph by adding that, even if we suppose that external objects cause perceptions, it would be beyond our human capacity to explain the *manner* in which objects give rise to perceptions:

It is acknowledged, that, in fact, many of these perceptions arise not from any thing external, as in dreams, madness, and other diseases. And nothing can be more inexplicable than the manner, in which body should so operate upon mind as ever to convey an image of itself to a substance, supposed so different, and even contrary a nature.

(*EHU* 12.11; SBN 153)

Hume adds one more paragraph that tells us what *kind* of argument could putatively justify the philosophical system. It is not abstruse metaphysics that could establish the philosophical system, but only reasoning based on experience. Specifically, it is *causal reasoning* that, on Hume's own account, gives us assurance of matters of fact, and Hume finds that such reasoning is derived from the constant conjunction of objects in experience (see *EHU* 5.5; SBN 43). We simply do not experience our perceptions conjoined with external objects:

It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them: How shall this question be determined? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent. The mind has never any thing present to it but the perceptions, and

cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects. The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning.

(*EHU* 12.12; SBN 153)

This paragraph lucidly displays Hume's reasoning against the philosophical system. Hume is an experimental philosopher, so the philosophical system should be scrutinised with reference to what we experience. But the philosophical system posits objects that are not the direct items of experience. So, our reason cannot recommend the philosophical system to us. Consequently, it is a spurious remedy for the false vulgar opinion.

Before summarising his sceptical predicament at *EHU* 12.14 (SBN 153–54), Hume considers the possibility of justifying the philosophical system by appealing to existence of a deity. Hume raises two points in objection to such a suggestion. The first is that, if we suppose that God can never deceive, then God cannot *always* be responsible for our senses, since our senses clearly do deceive us at least some of the time, as even the trite sceptical objections from *EHU* 12.6 reveal (Hume here echoes Descartes (1996/1641, 14, 55)). The second point is that, once we seriously doubt the existence of the external world, we do not then have any resources to prove that a deity exists (Hume does not explain or justify this point).

Hume concludes his first sceptical objection pertaining to the senses by summarising the problems with both the vulgar opinion and the philosophical system (*EHU* 12.14; SBN 153–54). He reiterates that the philosophical system lacks justification and is a confabulation:

Do you disclaim this principle [that perceptions enjoy D&C existence], in order to embrace a more rational opinion, that the perceptions are only representations of



something external? You here depart from your natural propensities and more obvious sentiments; and yet are not able to satisfy your reason, which can never find any convincing argument from experience to prove, that the perceptions are connected with any external objects.

(*EHU* 12.14; SBN 153–54)

Overall, Hume's negative assessment of the philosophical system is one of the results of his experimental approach to philosophy that privileges the place of causal reasoning. I maintain that the argument expressed at *EHU* 12.11–14 is essentially the same as the argument from *T* 1.4.2.47: in order for the philosophical system to be justified, we would need to establish a causal link between objects and perceptions in experience, but once we admit that only perceptions are the items of experience, then there is no way of establishing such a link.

### 3.4 Hume on Modern Philosophy

#### 3.4.1 The Place of Hume's Predicament

Although Hume's sceptical predicament presents a vexing sceptical challenge, *T* 1.4.2 and *EHU* 12.6–14 are not the only places in which Hume deals with the topic of external existence. The very end of *T* 1.4.2 indicates as much. As part of his cursory response to the sceptical predicament, Hume says:

[...] whatever may be the reader's opinion at this present moment [...] an hour hence he will be perswaded there is both an external and internal world; and going upon that supposition, I intend to examine some general systems both antient and modern,

which have been propos'd of both, before I proceed to a more particular enquiry concerning our impressions.

(*T* 1.4.2.57; SBN 218)

Norton & Norton's (2000, 477) gloss on "a more particular enquiry concerning our impressions" is that this refers to the topic matter of Book Two of the *Treatise*. Ainslie (2015, 8) agrees with this, as he informs us that Book Two is devoted to an analysis of the passions, which are secondary impressions (see *T* 2.1.1.1; SBN 275). Hume is concerned, therefore, with systems of "an external and internal world" in the sections of *T* 1.4 following *T* 1.4.2, and this means that several sections of the *Treatise* have implications for the question of external existence.<sup>73</sup> In *T* 1.4.4 ("Of the modern philosophy"), Hume critiques the distinction between mind-dependent and mind-independent qualities of physical objects. Hume does not frame this section as pertaining to scepticism, but he perceives the *conclusion* of this section to have sceptical implications (at *T* 1.4.7.4; SBN 265–66). I will adopt Hume's own shorthand and refer to the primary/secondary qualities distinction as "the modern philosophy".

There is some superficial textual evidence that suggests the argument concerning the modern philosophy is more important to Hume than the sceptical predicament. Hume presents it *after* the sceptical predicament, so it seems to bring out a new problem or issue that the predicament did not cover. In the *Treatise* version of the sceptical crisis, Hume uses a footnote to *explicitly* refer back to *T* 1.4.4 but not *T* 1.4.2. And in the *Enquiry*, Hume directly

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<sup>73</sup> Ainslie analyses how the sections of Part 4 harmonise in the following way: *T* 1.4.3 and *T* 1.4.4 are the examinations of ancient and modern systems of the external world, respectively, and 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 are of ancient and modern systems of the *internal* world, respectively (2015, 8–9). As evidence for this reading of the structure, Ainslie points us to the first sentence of the final paragraph of *T* 1.4.6, which reads, "Thus we have finish'd our examination of the several systems of philosophy, both of the intellectual and natural world" (*T* 1.4.6.23; SBN 263).

says “the second objection [to the evidence of sense] goes farther [than the first]” (*EHU* 12.16; SBN 155). Amongst commentators who accept that Hume entertains serious sceptical doubts about external objects, it is somewhat of an orthodoxy that the argument concerning the modern philosophy presents a more penetrating problem than the worry concerning the vulgar and philosophical systems (see De Pierris (2015, 285), Winkler (2015), Hakkarainen (2012a; 2012b), Broughton (2003), Morris (2000), and Garrett (1997, 215–18)).

I do not intend to relinquish the significance of Hume’s argument concerning modern philosophy. Hume finds this argument at least important enough to warrant an appearance in his condensed *Enquiry*. I suggest, however, that the predicament is a distinct sceptical challenge that is important in its own right, and that *both* the predicament and the argument concerning modern philosophy are relevant to Hume’s wider sceptical crisis. My view is that Hume’s argument against the modern philosophy concerns *the idea* of an object that has primary qualities but lack secondary qualities. For Hume, such an idea can only be of a bare *something*. The predicament, by contrast, presents a distinct epistemological challenge for the ordinary, unreflective belief about D&C existence and the philosophical attempt to correct this belief.<sup>74</sup>

The parallel section to *T* 1.4.4 in the *Enquiry* is just two dense paragraphs (*EHU* 12.15–16; SBN 154–55). For ease of explication, I will proceed by first interpreting this later text and then use some of the ideas developed here for my exposition of *T* 1.4.4. The argument of this section will also be supplemented by my reading of *T* 1.4.7 (in Section 4.2), as there I will consider the explicit reference to *T* 1.4.4 at *T* 1.4.7.4, which is one of the sources that has led commentators to assert the priority of the argument concerning the modern philosophy over Hume’s sceptical predicament.

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<sup>74</sup> Winkler (2015, 158–59) also observes that the end of *T* 1.4.2 establishes an epistemological conclusion in contrast to the cognitive or conceptual conclusion of *T* 1.4.4. But in the same paper, Winkler also makes the exact point that I am contradicting, namely, that *T* 1.4.4 presents a deeper sceptical problem for Hume’s philosophy than *T* 1.4.2.

### 3.4.2 The Second Objection to the Evidence of Sense (*EHU* 12.15–16)

In *EHU* 12, Hume runs through a number of sceptical arguments, and he includes a couple that are “against the evidence of *sense*” (*EHU* 12.6; SBN 151. Original emphasis). Later, Hume calls each of these an “objection”, so we may refer to these as the first and second objections (*EHU* 12.16; SBN 155). The first objection is Hume’s sceptical predicament (*EHU* 12.6–14; SBN 151–154). Hume turns to his second objection by observing that the distinction between *primary* and *secondary* qualities is “universally allowed by all modern enquirers” (*EHU* 12.15; SBN 154). Very roughly, the modern philosophy holds that some of our ideas of physical objects correspond to mind-independent existences and others do not. The mind-independent existences are primary qualities and the mind-dependent existences are secondary qualities.

Jani Hakkarainen (2012a; 2012b) has argued that *EHU* 12.15–16, (which he calls Hume’s “second profound argument”) establishes a more decisive sceptical conclusion than Hume’s first objection because it reveals Hume’s commitment to the total *inconceivability* of non-perceptions.<sup>75</sup> The second objection does indeed pertain to the content of ideas, in contrast to the first objection. Hakkarainen’s inconceivability interpretation, however, is flatly incompatible with my reading of relative ideas in Hume’s philosophy (see Sections 2.2.2 and 3.2 above). Although Hume does not overtly reference relative ideas in *EHU* 12, at *EHU* 12.16 he allows that we may have an “imperfect notion” of a bare something that is devoid of secondary qualities (*EHU* 12.16; SBN 155). Hume considers this a sufficient objection to the modern philosophy because such an idea would not be of an object that has primary qualities but lack secondary qualities.

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<sup>75</sup> In this sub-section, I argue against Hakkarainen’s interpretation of *EHU* 12.15–16. In Section 5.4, I argue against a different feature of Hakkarainen’s interpretation, namely, his distinction between two *domains* in which Hume is taken to have different epistemic attitudes towards external existence.

That the second objection “goes farther” than the first suggests that the second is more penetrating than the first and that there is a common theme to both. However, as we will soon see, in the very sentence in which Hume says the second objection “goes farther” than the first, he also qualifies the conclusion of the second objection. I maintain that Hume says that the second objection “goes farther” than the first just because it represents the only time in the *Enquiry* that Hume addresses the *idea* of a *thing-we-know-not-what* that might cause our perceptions (since there is no parallel to *T* 1.2.6 in the *Enquiry*). The common theme that unites the two objections is their shared, general subject matter: they both concern our senses, and the assumption that there are external existences (in the *Enquiry*, Hume drops the nuanced terminology of D&C existence and refers to the objections to the evidence of sense as concerning *external existence*; see *EHU* 12.16; SBN 155). Hume’s predicament represents a dire problem because the vulgar is a universal opinion and the philosophical system represents the intuitive attempt to improve on it and which, “is found by experience to take hold of many minds” (*T* 1.4.2.49; SBN 213). The modern philosophy, by contrast, was a particular theory that was popular amongst intellectuals in Hume’s day. The second objection does indeed have significance for the wider context of *EHU* 12, which is that it is one of several sceptical considerations that Hume compiles in his recount of consequent scepticism, and it is the first time that Hume makes a point about a possible idea of a bare something that is different from and the cause of our perceptions. I now proceed to a close analysis of the text.

At *EHU* 12.15 (SBN 154–55), Hume rehearses Berkeley’s arguments against the modern philosophy. According to Buckle (2001, 304–05) and Beauchamp (1999, 57), Hume, like Berkeley before him, chiefly had Locke in mind as the target of this argument. Problematically, though, Hume’s description of the modern philosophy would be a

misinterpretation of the Lockean position (Buckle 2001, 305, n. 12).<sup>76</sup> For Locke, *qualities* in general are mind-independent powers that produce ideas (ECHU 2.8.8). Locke defines *primary qualities* as qualities that are “utterly inseparable” from an object (ECHU 2.8.9).<sup>77</sup> He defines secondary qualities as those that, “are nothing in the Objects themselves, but Powers to produce various sensations in us by their *primary Qualities*” (ECHU 2.8.10. Added emphasis). Fortunately, we need not read Hume as making an error in describing the modern philosophy, since there is no reason why Hume *must* be targeting Locke specifically. Kail (2010/2007, 151–58) has convincingly argued that Hume is accurately describing versions of the modern philosophy found in the works of Malebranche and Bayle. Malebranche modified the Cartesian view according to which colour properties in objects are themselves unknown and do not resemble our perceptions of colour (Kail 2010/2007, 154–55). For Malebranche, it was essential that colours be considered phenomenal qualities that human persons actually experience, and so, instead of drawing a distinction between colour properties in objects and colours as they are experienced, he says that colours just are the mind-dependent, phenomenal qualities (Kail 2010/2007, 156. See also Malebranche 1997/1674–75, 58–59). So, if one has this view in mind, it would be right to say that the modern philosophy asserts the mind-dependency of secondary qualities. In any case, whether we are considering the Lockean/Cartesian *power* view of secondary qualities or the phenomenalist Malebranchean view, the modern philosophy holds that our *ideas* of colours do not resemble anything in external objects, and it is this that Hume exploits in order to derive a problem for the modern philosophy.

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<sup>76</sup> According to Dancy (1998, 64–65), the Berkeleyan description of the modern philosophy mischaracterises not only Locke, but Descartes and Boyle too.

<sup>77</sup> Locke illustrates this by taking an example of a divided grain of wheat. He identifies the following as qualities that would be impervious to destruction, even when the miniscule parts of the grain become insensible: “*Solidity, Extension, Figure, and Mobility*” (ECHU 2.8.9. Original emphasis).

At the start of *EHU* 12.15, Hume recounts the modern philosophy not explicitly in terms of secondary qualities, but *sensible* qualities: he lists, “hard, soft, hot, cold, white, black &c.” (*EHU* 12.15; SBN 154).<sup>78</sup> Hume reads the modern philosophical view as encompassing the following theses about sensible qualities:

MP1: Sensible qualities “exist not in the objects themselves” (*EHU* 12.15; SBN 154).

MP2: Sensible qualities are (a) “perceptions of the mind”, and (b) “without any external archetype or model” (*ibid.*).

Hume’s objection to the modern philosophy at *EHU* 12.15 is remarkably swift. He puts forward a conditional that says, “if this [MP1, MP2(a), and MP2(b)], be allowed with regard to secondary qualities, it must also follow, with regard to the supposed primary qualities of extension and solidity” (*EHU* 12.15; SBN 154). Hume argues in a couple of sentences that our ideas of primary qualities must supervene on our ideas of secondary qualities, and that the claims of the modern philosophy about secondary qualities must thereby apply to primary qualities too. Taking the example of extension, he says:

The idea of extension is entirely acquired from the senses of sight and feeling; and if all the qualities, perceived by the senses, be in the mind, not in the object, the same conclusion must reach the idea of extension, which is wholly dependent on the sensible ideas or the ideas of secondary qualities.

(*EHU* 12.15; SBN 154)

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<sup>78</sup> Berkeley also refers to sensible qualities at *PHK* 14. Hakkarainen (2012a, 292) opts to call secondary qualities “*proper sensibles*” (original emphasis).

Hume then anticipates the suggestion that this conclusion can be avoided by means of a non-imagistic account of abstract ideas. Hume thoroughly rejects the possibility of such ideas. He reasons as follows: an invisible extension cannot be conceived, but a visible extension cannot lack colour; in the same way, a triangle cannot have any number of sides except three, and those sides cannot have no length, so these lengths must be determinate and stand in determinate proportion to each other (see also *T* 1.1.7; SBN 17–25). In neither case, for Hume, can there be a non-imagistic idea in question. Hume’s reasoning in this paragraph mirrors Berkeley’s at *PHK* 10–15.

After this, Hume proceeds to summarise both of his objections to the evidence of sense. He also reveals, for the first time, exactly what he takes the significance of the argument at *EHU* 12.15 to be. Referring to “the opinion of external existence”, he summarises the first objection by saying:

[...] such an opinion, if rested on natural instinct, is contrary to reason, and if referred to reason, is contrary to natural instinct, and at the same time carries no rational evidence with it, to convince an impartial enquirer.

(*EHU* 12.16; SBN 155)

He says of the second objection:

The second objection goes farther, and represents this opinion as contrary to reason; at least, if it be a principle of reason, that all sensible qualities are in the mind, not in the object. Bereave matter of all its intelligible qualities, both primary and secondary, you in a manner annihilate it, and leave only a certain unknown, inexplicable *something*,



as the cause of our perceptions; a notion so imperfect, that no sceptic will think it worth while [sic] to contend against it.

(*EHU* 12.16; SBN 155. Original emphasis)

Hume has already established that if ideas of secondary qualities do not resemble objects, then ideas of primary qualities do not resemble objects. Hume is now revealing that the second objection “goes farther” than the first, and that it shows the opinion of external existence to be “contrary to reason”. It is curious why the possibility of an “inexplicable something” does not mean that the opinion of external existence is *not* altogether contrary to reason. Why does Hume seem to make such a strong claim in one sentence, and then offer quite a substantial qualification in the next? I maintain that the argument reveals that there may be an “imperfect notion” at play in the modern philosophy and that Hume takes this to suffice as an objection to that system.

Hume’s conclusion is that we have no idea of an object that has primary qualities but lacks secondary qualities. Hume allows that the modern philosopher may have an idea of a bare something that is devoid of both primary and secondary qualities, but this is not a clear idea at all. This is why Hume dismisses the relevance of such a notion by saying, “no sceptic will think it worth while to contend against it” (*EHU* 12.16; SBN 155. Original emphasis). It is implicit in this remark that the *modern philosopher* him or herself will also find the imperfect notion inadequate. The proponents of the modern philosophical system countenance clear, positive ideas of primary qualities, not imperfect ones. The modern philosopher is content to concede that ideas of secondary qualities do not resemble external existences *so long as* some of our other ideas do. The question of whether a bare something exists would be susceptible to the same argument that Hume had just used against the philosophical system of double existence at *EHU* 12.11–12 (SBN 153).

Contrary to Hakkarainen’s (2012a; 2012b) interpretation, Hume himself describes the way in which the second objection goes “farther” than the first by saying that it reveals the belief in D&C existence to be “contrary to reason” (*EHU* 12.16; SBN 155). He adds a qualification to this remark: “... *if* it be a principle of reason that all sensible qualities are in the mind, not in the object” (*EHU* 12.16; SBN 155. Added emphasis).<sup>79</sup> Hume’s summary of his sceptical objections at *EHU* 12.16 is perplexing because the first argument already revealed that the belief in D&C existence “if rested on natural instinct, is contrary to reason” (*ibid.*). We have to realise that Hume’s *first* objection consists of two parts, the first of which establishes the falsity of the vulgar belief (*EHU* 12.8–9) and the second of which establishes the non-justification of the philosophical system (*EHU* 12.10–14). This understanding aligns with the grammar of *EHU* 12.16, as Hume uses an “and” when recapitulating the first objection. So, the second objection does indeed go further than the *second part* of the first objection, since that only revealed the non-justification of the supposition that a bare something exists that causes our perceptions. The second objection reveals that we cannot have a positive idea of this bare something. The second part of the first objection and the second objection have in common the fact that they do not refer to the vulgar view of objects.

### 3.4.3 Modern Philosophy in the *Treatise* (T 1.4.4)

We are now in a position to return to Hume’s earlier and lengthier discussion of modern philosophy in the *Treatise*. Hume introduces “The *modern philosophy*” (T 1.4.4.2; SBN 226.

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<sup>79</sup> The fact that Hume uses a conditional here invites the interpretation that he is not in fact committed to claims MP1, MP2(a) and MP2(b) himself. I will not investigate this issue in detail here. Some scholars have thought that Hume *must* be offering premises that he does not accept because it is implausible to read him as being straightforwardly committed to the conclusion of the argument (see Kail 2010/2007, 70; Blackburn 1993; Baier 1991). Recall also that it is not just the mind-dependency of secondary qualities that Hume capitalises on, but the claim that such qualities definitely do not resemble external existences. At *EHU* 12.11 (SBN 153), Hume expresses suspicion towards the claim that mind-dependent existences could resemble external existences, but he does not definitely say they *must* lack resemblance: “By what argument can it be proved, that the perceptions of the mind must be caused by external objects, entirely different from them, though resembling them (if that be possible) [...]”.

Original emphasis) by describing it as a failed attempt to avoid the defects of the ancient metaphysical system of substances, accidents, substantial forms, and occult qualities (which was the topic of *T* 1.4.3). This ancient philosophical system, for Hume, derives from trivial mental operations and is practically useless (by calling it “the ancient system”, Hume does not take it to be an artefact from the past, since proponents of the system carried on into Hume’s own time; see Ainslie 2015, 9–11). Hume says that the modern philosophy “pretends” to be free from such defects, and he sets out to discover, “Upon what grounds this pretension is founded” (*T* 1.4.4.2; SBN 226). The common theme that unites *T* 1.4.3 and *T* 1.4.4 is that they examine unnatural, confabulated attempts at explaining what mind-independent existences are, how we supposedly know about them, and the relationship between them and mind-dependent realities. Hume criticises the purported *ideas* of external existence of both the ancient and modern systems.<sup>80</sup>

The underlying logic of the argument presented against the modern philosophy in *T* 1.4.4 is the same as in the corresponding portion of *EHU* 12, but Hume takes time in the *Treatise* to describe a *reason* for believing in the claims of the modern philosophy and he also describes the inference from this reason to the conclusion about the mind-dependency of sensible qualities. Hume introduces the modern philosophical view as follows:

The fundamental principle of that philosophy is the opinion concerning colours, sounds, tastes, smells, heat and cold; which it asserts to be nothing but impressions in

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<sup>80</sup> Hume had previously briefly mentioned the system of modern philosophy at *T* 1.4.2.13 (SBN 192–93), where he criticised it for being a confabulation: “Now ’tis evident, that, whatever may be our philosophical opinion, colours, sounds, heat and cold, as far as appear to the senses, exist after the same manner with motion and solidity [...]. So strong is the prejudice for the distinct and continu’d existence of the former qualities, that when the contrary opinion is advanc’d by modern philosophers, people imagine they can almost refute it from their feeling and experience, and that their very senses contradict this philosophy.”

the mind, deriv'd from the operation of external objects, and without any resemblance to the qualities of the objects.

(*T* 1.4.4.3; SBN 226)

Soon after, he describes the system again, this time elucidating the notion of *primary qualities*. He lists more examples of primary qualities than in the *Enquiry*:

[...] upon the removal of sounds, colours, heat, cold, and other sensible qualities, from the rank of continu'd independent existences, we are reduc'd merely to what are called primary qualities, as the only *real* ones, of which we have any adequate notion. These primary qualities are extension and solidity, with their different mixtures and modifications; figure, motion, gravity, and cohesion.

(*T* 1.4.4.5; SBN 227. Original emphasis)

Hume recounts only one “satisfactory” reason for believing that secondary qualities do not resemble anything in objects (*T* 1.4.4.3; SBN 226). The reason is that impressions vary between different people, and within the same person, depending on time, state of health, and other circumstances.<sup>81</sup> Hume calls “the conclusion drawn from them” – where “them” refers to “instances” of variation that Hume has just listed – “as satisfactory as can possibly be imagin'd” (*T* 1.4.4.4; SBN 227). Modern philosophers draw the conclusion that secondary or sensible qualities are merely internal realities. We can have ideas of such things, but they do not resemble external, mind-independent objects. Hume introduces a causal principle as a premise that works towards the conclusion that secondary qualities lack resemblance: since

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<sup>81</sup> We should be aware that this is not in conflict with Hume’s rejection of the “*popular*” sceptical objections to matters of fact at *EHU* 12.21 (SBN 158–59. Original emphasis). There, Hume says it would be a *non sequitur* to infer that no opinion is better than any other from the fact that opinions widely vary. The point being raised at *T* 1.4.4.3, by contrast, is that impressions are totally determined by conditions that pertain to a subject.

“from like effects we presume like causes”, the fact that “Many of the impressions of colour, sound, &c. are confest to be nothing but internal existences” means that we can infer that, “all of them, [are] deriv’d from a like origin” (*T* 1.4.4.4; SBN 227).<sup>82</sup> The problem that Hume finds is that modern philosophers unwarrantedly supplement their claim about secondary qualities with the view that primary qualities enjoy mind-independent existence.

Hume presents several objections to the modern philosophy in *T* 1.4.4. The first, which is the same as that presented at *EHU* 12.15, Hume describes as “very decisive” (*T* 1.4.4.6; SBN 227). From the claim that secondary qualities are mind-dependent, modern philosophers should actually infer that so-called primary qualities are mind-dependent as well:

I assert, that instead of explaining the operations of external objects by its means [i.e. by the system of modern philosophy], we utterly annihilate all these objects, and reduce ourselves to the opinions of the most extravagant scepticism concerning them. If colours, sounds, tastes, and smells be merely perceptions, nothing we can conceive is possest of a real, continu’d, and independent existence; not even motion, extension and solidity, which are the primary qualities chiefly insisted on.

(*T* 1.4.4.6; SBN 227–228).

Hume then goes on to explicate his argument that ideas of primary qualities supervene on ideas of secondary qualities. He goes through motion, extension, and solidity separately (*T* 1.4.4.7–9; SBN 228–29). After confessing that his reasoning “may seem abstruse and intricate to the generality of readers” (*T* 1.4.4.10; SBN 229), he adds some further objections

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<sup>82</sup> Butler (2009) observes that, by introducing this causal principle, Hume does not directly mimic the actual arguments of the proponents of the modern philosophy.

to the modern philosophy (narrowing his focus to the primary quality of *solidity*). Hume applies his copy principle of the origin of ideas to the idea of solidity (*T* 1.4.4.12–14; SBN 230–31). He insists that even the proponents of the modern system would agree that sensory qualities do not give us an idea of solidity, and so the only candidate could be the *feeling* of touching something and experiencing its solidity. In a similar line of reasoning to that which was used to show that sensations are not images of distinct existence (at *T* 1.4.2.4; SBN 189), Hume shows there is a gap between the feeling of touch and the idea of solidity: impressions of touch, “neither represent solidity nor any real object” (*T* 1.4.4.14; SBN 231).

I will conclude this discussion of *T* 1.4.4 by considering the final, enigmatic paragraph of that section. This paragraph plays a conspicuous role in Hume’s expression of his sceptical crisis in *T* 1.4.7, and I will have more to say about it in Section 4.2.1. The full paragraph reads:

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 perswade us of the continu’d and independent existence of body. When we reason from cause and effect, we conclude, that neither colour, sound, taste, nor smell have a continu’d and independent existence. When we exclude these sensible qualities there remains nothing in the universe, which has such an existence.

(*T* 1.4.4.15; SBN 231)

Here, unlike at *EHU* 12.16, Hume does not remind his reader of the possibility of an imperfect notion of a bare something. There are two passages in *T* 1.4.4, though, that make it clear that it is the limitedness of any putative *idea* of primary qualities that is being called into question. Hume says, “Our modern philosophy ... leaves us *no just nor satisfactory idea*

of solidity; nor consequently of matter” (*T* 1.4.4.9; SBN 229. Added emphasis), and, “there remains nothing, which can afford us *a just and consistent idea* of body” (*T* 1.4.4.10; SBN 229. Added emphasis). If we were to consider *T* 1.4.4 in isolation, we would be left in the dark with regard to what the alternative to a “just” or “satisfactory” idea is, but we can read this section as harmonising with *EHU* 12 if we allow that there is an idea of a bare something that the modern philosopher *could* appeal to, but that such an idea would not be of a primary quality at all.

In summary, Hume’s argument against the modern philosophy is included in both his *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, which is a sign that he attaches significance to it. Hume disparages the modern philosophical distinction between primary and secondary qualities because he does not think that we can have a clear idea of an object that has primary qualities but lacks secondary qualities. Hume thinks it suffices as an objection to the modern philosophical system to say that, at most, the modern philosopher can have an imperfect notion of an external existence that is devoid of both primary and secondary qualities. I will have more to say about the potential sceptical implications of *T* 1.4.4 in Section 4.2.1.

## 4. Hume's Sceptical Crisis

### 4.1 Overview

#### 4.1.1 The Terms of Hume's Crisis

So far, I have analysed Hume's accounts of the vulgar belief and the philosophical system of double existence. Hume's negative outlook on these beliefs engenders a sceptical predicament concerning external objects. In the *Treatise*, Hume offers a rudimentary reply to this predicament at the end of *T* 1.4.2 and deals with it again later in the context of a myriad of other sceptical worries in *T* 1.4.7. In the *Enquiry*, Hume's discussion of objects and his wider treatment of scepticism occur in a single section, *EHU* 12. The aim of this chapter is to understand these difficult texts by tracing the development of Hume's thoughts within them. There are different parts of these texts in which Hume expresses markedly different attitudes.

In both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, Hume's expression of sceptical despair proceeds as a progression of loosely connected worries. The disconnectedness of Hume's different sceptical worries is especially apparent in the *Treatise* version. In this chapter, I characterise Hume's sceptical crisis as an encounter with a cluster or compilation of sceptical considerations.<sup>84</sup> Regarding any unifying theme to Hume's doubts, the most we can say is that they all pertain to the faculty of the imagination in the *Treatise*, and that they are all versions of consequent scepticism (that is, scepticism that derives from the results of investigation, as opposed to being taken up before any investigation) in the *Enquiry*.

Hume's "very dangerous dilemma" is sometimes given pride of place in the sceptical crisis of the *Treatise* (as in Ainslie (2015), Schafer (2014), Qu (2014), Durland (2011), Loeb (2002), and Maia Neto (1991)). It is the most elaborate of Hume's doubts in the

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<sup>84</sup> In this one respect, Hume's scepticism resembles Pyrrhonism: the Pyrrhonist strategy was to compile a variety of arguments in the hope of inducing a response of suspension of belief (*epochê*). See *PH* 1.13.31–1.14.35.



*Treatise*, and it is the only one that Hume plainly says is *insoluble*: “I know not what ought to be done ...” (*T* 1.4.7.7; SBN 268). It is also the final doubt before Hume’s most despairing expression of sceptical doom at *T* 1.4.7.8. However, I maintain that a close analysis of Hume’s worries reveals that the dilemma cannot be the encapsulation of all of Hume’s sceptical doubts in the *Treatise*. In *T* 1.4.7.3–4, Hume entertains the doubt that all of the products of the imagination are bereft of justification. The dangerous dilemma concerns the possibility of rejecting some products of the imagination in order to avoid “errors, absurdities, and obscurities” (*T* 1.4.7.6; SBN 267). Hume considers the possibility that we could reject all products of the imagination *except* for “the understanding” (*T* 1.4.7.7; SBN 267). But in *T* 1.4.7.3, Hume establishes a sceptical doubt pertaining to all of the imagination, *explicitly including* the understanding. I do not intend to accuse Hume of an oversight. I maintain that Hume did not intend the dangerous dilemma, or indeed any individual sceptical worry, to encapsulate all of his sceptical doubt. This is evident from his response to his crisis, which lacks close reference to any particular doubt.

There is another reason why we should not overstate the importance of the dangerous dilemma for Hume’s scepticism. Hume expresses sceptical crises in both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, but the dangerous dilemma does not make an appearance in the *Enquiry* (nor does anything remotely resembling it). So, even if Hume places some rhetorical emphasis on it in the *Treatise*, he does not find it worth reiterating in the *Enquiry*. There are other sceptical doubts that appear in both texts, as we will see. One of these is Hume’s sceptical predicament between the vulgar and philosophical systems of external existence.

The view of Hume’s sceptical crisis as a compilation of doubts is supported by the presentation of Hume’s encounter with scepticism. Hume’s various worries build up to a climax of despair, in which he enters a moment of cognitive paralysis and wishes to renounce all belief. Hume’s response is framed in terms of healing this paralysis, not in terms of

resolving any one of his sceptical worries. This reading goes some way towards addressing a puzzling feature of Hume's response to scepticism, which is that he does not refer back to any of his specific doubts. We may still find it unsatisfying that Hume does not recall his specific sceptical considerations in his response, but we can at least explain why Hume proceeds the way he does.

In this chapter, I show the place of Hume's sceptical predicament concerning objects within his wider sceptical crisis. In neither *T* 1.4.7 nor *EHU* 12 is it obvious that the vulgar or philosophical systems of external objects are front-and-centre in Hume's cluster of sceptical doubts. In the *Treatise*, Hume even seems to prioritise the sceptical implications of *T* 1.4.4 ("Of the modern philosophy") over any relevant doubt from *T* 1.4.2, since he directly references *T* 1.4.4 with a footnote. I show that such a view is misplaced, and that the sceptical predicament is a central part of the sceptical crisis of *T* 1.4.7. In the *Enquiry*, Hume's sceptical predicament is given pride of place. Sceptical objections to the evidence of sense are the first efficacious sceptical doubts that Hume presents.

I defend my reading of Hume's position as residual scepticism in this chapter by paying close attention to his response to his sceptical crisis (at *T* 1.4.7.9–15 (SBN 269–74) and *EHU* 12.23–34 (SBN 159–65)). In the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, Hume considers and rejects an extreme position (which he calls "PYRRHONISM" at *EHU* 12.23 (SBN 161)) whereby one chooses to relinquish all belief as a response to scepticism. Hume provides a rationale for rejecting this extreme position by claiming, amongst other things, that living without beliefs is not even possible. Crucially, though, Hume does not take his rationale for rejecting Pyrrhonism as a solution to the negative, sceptical evaluations that he expressed in his sceptical crisis. I maintain that reading Hume as a residual sceptic captures the way in which he moderates the impact of his sceptical doubts. Hume incorporates scepticism into his final, considered position, even as he continues to pursue philosophy. Ultimately, Hume

accepts the psychological impossibility of living radical scepticism at the same time that he accepts the “triumph” of sceptical doubts.<sup>85</sup> For Hume, becoming aware of the irrefutability of sceptical arguments leads us to modify the very life that we are necessitated to live, one in which we mingle with fellow humans and pursue intellectual inquiries.

A theme that has garnered much attention in the secondary literature on Hume’s response to scepticism is that he finds the pursuit of philosophy *after* his crisis to bring with it both psychological pleasure and practical utility. Any reading of Hume’s scepticism has to account for this. According to my view, Hume certainly thinks that pursuing philosophy brings with it more pleasure and practical benefits than abandoning philosophy. However, I depart from what has been called the “usefulness and agreeableness” (or “U&A”) interpretation of Hume’s epistemology (as Qu (2014, 501) calls it), according to which Hume appeals to the pleasure and practical benefits attached to pursuing philosophy in order to reject various sceptical doubts. The U&A interpretation is often (but not always) coupled with a focus on the role of Hume’s title principle: “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 on us” (*T* 1.4.7.11; SBN 270. See also Garrett (1997, 234–37; 2015, 227–33)). Qu (2014, 509 ff.) and Durland (2011, 79–84) have offered some objections to the U&A interpretation of Hume’s scepticism generally and to the title principle being used to support this reading. Qu insists that there is ample textual evidence for the practical utility of belief and reasoning coming apart for Hume, including in *T* 1.4.7 itself.<sup>86</sup> On my account of Hume’s residual scepticism, I will similarly problematise the U&A interpretation. Hume does not count the practical shortcomings attached to endorsing radical scepticism as a rebuttal of sceptical challenges; he admits those shortcomings at the same time that he integrates

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<sup>85</sup> Hume refers to the “triumph” of scepticism at several places: *EHU* 12.14; SBN 153; *EHU* 12.18; SBN 156; *EHU* 12.21; SBN 159; *EHU* 12.22; 159.

<sup>86</sup> Qu (2014, 509) cites *T* 1.4.7.14; SBN 272; *T* 2.3.2.3; SBN 409; *EHU* 1.3; SBN 6–7.

scepticism into his wider epistemological outlook. In my explication of *T* 1.4.7, I will suggest that the passage in which Hume states his title principle is one of the most direct statements of him conceding the triumph of scepticism in the *Treatise*. In Section 1.3, I claimed that Hume's sceptical crisis may be more accurately characterised as involving doubts, worries, or concerns, rather than explicit sceptical arguments. I make sense of Hume conceding the "triumph" of scepticism with reference to the insolubility of the problems that sceptical doubts, worries, or concerns present. These are problems that pertain to a negative verdict on the justification of our beliefs (even if Hume tends to directly refer to our *faculties* rather than classes of belief). What Hume *does* reject is that we are obliged to give up pursuing philosophy as a result of the insolubility of these problems; indeed, he thinks that the fact that such problems are insoluble plays a positive role in inspiring modesty, cautiousness and reserve in our continuation of philosophical pursuits. This is what the residually sceptical reading is intended to capture.

#### 4.1.2 Residual Scepticism and the Integration Problem

It is commonly accepted that the challenge of reading *T* 1.4.7 is to account for the transition of Hume's thought in that section. A corresponding challenge pertains to *EHU* 12, in which Hume moves from a presentation of antecedent and consequent scepticism, to a long discussion of various consequent sceptical considerations, to the endorsement of mitigated scepticism. The challenge of accounting for the transitions in *EHU* 12 has not yet gained a reputation in the literature, because that section has been unduly neglected, as Qu (2017) has observed. In this sub-section, I will take Ainslie's (2015) analysis of the interpretive issues pertaining to *T* 1.4.7 to demarcate my own position on interpreting Hume's response to his sceptical crisis. Ainslie (2015) describes the "sceptical" interpretation of *T* 1.4.7 as follows:

An interpretation of CtB [T 1.4.7] counts as sceptical to the extent that it sees Hume as endorsing the “desponding reflections.” They are not merely *prima facie* justified, awaiting further ratification or rebuttal (say by nature), but speak to our true cognitive condition.

(Ainslie 2015, 226. Original emphasis)

The “desponding reflections”, for Ainslie, are the sceptical worries expressed in the first seven paragraphs of T 1.4.7 (2015, 222–24). On the reading I offer, Hume thinks we ought to moderate the impact that these sceptical reflections have on us. Crucially, though, Hume also thinks we lack a certain *kind* of solution to the problems that the desponding reflections present; he thinks that there is no way to show that the products of the imagination are justified, but he maintains that we continue to hold beliefs and to pursue philosophy anyway. On the residually sceptical reading, Hume calls himself a sceptic at the same time that he denies that it is possible to reject all belief as a result of scepticism (which he thinks is the course of action that the extreme sceptic takes). As we will see shortly, Ainslie’s objections to the sceptical reading of T 1.4.7 (endorsed by Durland (2011), Broughton (2008; 2004; 2003) and Cummins (1999)) apply to my reading, notwithstanding the distinctive features of my residually sceptical interpretation.

The framework for understanding Hume’s residual scepticism can be represented by the following broad summary of Hume’s sceptical crisis (“SC” for “sceptical crisis”):

SC1: A rehearsal of sceptical worries that, collectively, lead to the consideration that important beliefs for philosophy and everyday life are to be rejected.

SC2: A rejection of the possibility of living according to such scepticism (i.e. the denial of the practical possibility of such scepticism).

SC3: A statement of moderate scepticism.

Such a framework is non-controversial in itself and is apparent in both Ainslie's (2015) and Garrett's (2015; 1997) readings. The notion of a residual scepticism that emerges from Hume's response to his sceptical crisis has been alluded to in various readings of Hume's scepticism. Cummins (1999, 57) indicates that any residual scepticism must *end* before we return to philosophy. On my view, by contrast, we can only understand Hume's residual scepticism by seeing how sceptical doubts *come with* Hume as he returns to philosophy (Hume's transition from his most despairing moment at *T* 1.4.7.8 to his recommendation to pursue philosophy at *T* 1.4.7.11 will be vital for explicating this aspect of my interpretation). Michaud (1985) offers an interpretation of *EHU* 12 that pays close attention to the way in which Hume uses "PYRRHONISM" (*EHU* 12.24; SBN 161) to motivate his final, moderately sceptical position. Maia Neto (1991) similarly maintains that Hume keeps scepticism close at hand after his sceptical crisis and that his final position *moderates* the radical scepticism that he briefly entertains. I agree that Hume does not think that the philosophical triumph of scepticism requires him to jettison philosophy altogether and that the notion of "residual scepticism" is of central importance to Hume's final, considered view. In my reading, I emphasise the way in which Hume needs to remind himself of the facts derived from his sceptical crisis in order to motivate his final position. We cannot make sense of Hume's recommendation that "a small tincture of PYRRHONISM" (*EHU* 12.24; SBN 161) can lead us to moderate scepticism without this view in mind. In this way, I show how Hume's negative evaluations of the vulgar opinion and philosophical system constitutes Hume's final, considered view on external existence. This present chapter will be concerned with an

explication of Hume's thought in *T* 1.4.7 and *EHU* 12. In Chapter 5, I will offer a more direct defence of my claim that the negative evaluations that Hume expresses in his sceptical predicament constitute his final, considered views on opinions of external existence.

Many commentators have found it deeply perplexing that Hume continues to pursue philosophy despite the sweeping sceptical challenges he encounters. Fogelin (2009a, 137) sees it as a *problem* that Hume continues to philosophise despite conceding the triumph of scepticism, and he even labels Hume's response a "palliative remedy", hearkening back to Hume's criticism of the philosophical system (*T* 1.4.2.46; *SBN* 211). Other interpreters, such as Broughton (2004) and Cummins (1999), have sought to respond to this problem on Hume's behalf. Ainslie (2015) criticises sceptical readings of Hume's crisis because they cannot solve this problem. The "integration problem", as Ainslie calls it, is the challenge of integrating Hume's sceptical moments into his philosophy as a whole.<sup>87</sup> Ainslie (2015, 227) identifies three related worries that are attached to the integration problem:

- "It is [...] unclear how human faculties can be disciplined to stay within the modest bounds that Hume, in his calmer moments, prescribes" (Fogelin 2009a, 137).
- "Hume appears paradoxically to endorse the triumph of skepticism, and, yet, continue his pursuit of just the kind of knowledge the triumph of skepticism would entirely preclude" (Cummins 1999, 43).

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<sup>87</sup> Greenberg (2008, 722) refers to the question of how Hume can continue philosophising as "the question of warrant". Greenberg cites Owen (1999, 211) as having used this terminology. However, Owen also uses that term to refer to Hume's considerations of the evaluation of belief in contrast to cognitive psychological analysis (see Owen 1999, 137–39). This makes "the question of warrant" a matter of *topic*, and not necessarily a broad interpretive challenge. The term "integration problem" is therefore more pertinent.

- “[...] in Book 2, Hume resumes his investigation of the causal structure of the human mind with detailed analyses of the passions, but does not pause once to worry about (what sceptical interpreters see as) his negative epistemic verdict on the very activity of causal reasoning” (Ainslie 2015, 227).

The first point, which Ainslie draws from Fogelin, is a complaint about what I have called Hume’s “residual scepticism”. Fogelin’s worry is that Hume’s response to scepticism might not secure the result that Hume wants. At *T* 1.4.7.9–10, Hume attempts to show how the total rejection of philosophy is impeded because of the impermanency of the feelings prompted by sceptical worries. Although Hume prescribes some boundaries for philosophy to operate in, Fogelin describes his situation as “fragile” because it is unclear why sceptical worries do not have a more enduring and devastating impact on philosophy (2009a, 136). In his explication of his moderately sceptical position, Hume appeals to the fact that he ought not be obliged to forsake philosophy: he says he has no obligation to torture himself with sceptical doubts (see *T* 1.4.7.10; SBN 269–70) and that philosophy “has nothing to oppose” the sentiments of his “spleen and indolence” which lead him back to philosophy (*T* 1.4.7.11; SBN 270). Fogelin evidently finds Hume’s attempts to provide a rationale for his continuation of philosophy unsatisfactory.

Cummins’s worry is closely related to Fogelin’s, but is less directly a criticism of the immediate response to scepticism that Hume provides at *T* 1.4.7.9–10. Cummins finds that Hume’s concession of the triumph of scepticism is in conflict with his desire to continue his own philosophical investigations. The problem partly concerns the legitimation of Hume’s pursuit of philosophy after the crisis, but also what entitlement he has to *not abandon* his earlier established results.



The third point, raised directly by Ainslie, has to do with Books Two and Three of the *Treatise* specifically. It is a textual point, about the sceptical doubts that Hume raises about philosophy in *T* 1.4.7 threatening the unity, consistency, and coherence of the *Treatise*. This point encompasses Cummins's concern that Hume illegitimately continues his pursuit of philosophy, as well as the fact that Hume *fails to refer back* to the new outlook that he establishes for philosophy in *T* 1.4.7. The question is, how can we make sense of the very existence of Books Two and Three given what Hume has to say in *T* 1.4.7? Additionally, how do the general metaphilosophical and methodological claims established in *T* 1.4.7 *inform* the rest of the *Treatise*? In Books Two and Three, Hume does not remind his readers that he is aiming to bring a new style of philosophising into fashion (as he says at *T* 1.4.7.14; SBN 273) or that *pleasure* is the origin of his philosophy (as he says *T* 1.4.7.12; SBN 271). Even in the section titled "Of curiosity, or the love of truth" (*T* 2.3.10), we find no reference to the triumph of scepticism, or to the fact that scepticism should inspire epistemic modesty, or to the fact that a system of philosophy that might be true is "too much to be hop'd for" (*T* 1.4.7.14; SBN 272). We might even think that the attitudes Hume implicitly adopts in Books Two and Three are in conflict with the attitudes that he endorses as part of his moderate scepticism. Hume's accounts of the passions and morals seem so ambitious that it may seem implausible to interpret him as merely gesturing towards an appropriate way of conducting philosophical investigation or being in some other way detached from his results. In the very last section of Book Three (which shares a title with *T* 1.4.7: "Conclusion of this book" (*T* 3.3.6)), Hume emphasises the way in which the conclusions of his theory are beyond a shadow of a doubt.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> For instance, the very start of this section (*T* 3.3.6.1; SBN 618) reads: "Thus upon the whole I am hopeful, that nothing is wanting to an accurate *proof* of this system of ethics. *We are certain*, that sympathy is a very powerful principle in human nature. *We are also certain*, that it has a great influence on our sense of beauty, when we regard external objects, as well as when we judge of morals" (added emphasis).

I understand “the integration problem” to capture all of these related worries. Ainslie maintains that an advantage of his reading is that Hume comes to resolve the triumph of scepticism. It is worth noting, though, that some aspects of the integration problem remain even on Ainslie’s account. It still is perplexing why Hume does not refer back to *T* 1.4.7 in Books Two and Three of the *Treatise*. Even if his outlook on philosophy is not fundamentally and irredeemably sceptical, Hume still does not remind his reader of that outlook in Books Two and Three (*T* 2.3.10 omits reference to the positive elements of *T* 1.4.7 as much as it omits references to the despairing elements). Hume does not refer back to the moderate or “true” scepticism that Ainslie thinks Hume develops in that section.<sup>89</sup>

I will explicate my views on the integration problem more fully in Section 5.3.1 below. For now, I will observe that it is questionable whether a total solution to the integration problem is a requirement for any successful reading of Hume’s philosophy. Ainslie thinks the problem applies to sceptical readings of *T* 1.4.7 (that is, those readings that take Hume to endorse the negative assessments that he expresses at *T* 1.4.7.1–7). For Ainslie, the fundamental problem with sceptical readings of *T* 1.4.7 is that, once they concede that scepticism triumphs, there is no way to account for Hume holding that some beliefs are better than others and, therefore, no legitimation for him continuing to pursue philosophy. I will argue in Section 5.3.1 for the textual advantage of my reading of *T* 1.4.7 over Ainslie’s. I hold that Ainslie’s appeal to “true” philosophy in *T* 1.4.7 enjoys minimal textual support. Ainslie appeals to Hume’s reference to “true” philosophy at *T* 1.4.3.9 (SBN 222–23) as corroborating evidence for his reading of *T* 1.4.7. The textual advantage of my view is that I extract Hume’s response to the triumph of scepticism from what he has to say at *T* 1.4.7.9–

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<sup>89</sup> This integration problem applies equally to the *Enquiry*. Hume expresses sceptical doubt and offers his response to such doubt in the very *last* section of this text. The *textual* element of the integration problem in the *Enquiry* is the challenge of understanding the earlier sections of that work in light of Hume conceding the triumph of scepticism at *EHU* 12.

15. In this portion of text, Hume explicitly addresses the fact that he will continue to pursue philosophy in the face of extreme sceptical doubt. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I display the evidence for Hume carrying on philosophising while keeping the sceptical considerations from his crisis close at hand. In Section 5.3.1, I will reinterpret Ainslie's charge against the sceptical reading of *T* 1.4.7 not as a decisive blow for interpretations that see Hume as accepting the philosophical triumph of scepticism, but as a complaint about Hume's response being unsatisfying.

## 4.2 Hume's Scepticism in the "Conclusion of this book" (*T* 1.4.7)

### 4.2.1 Hume's Doubts about the Imagination

The final section of Book One of the *Treatise* is very dense. Hume is also very unsystematic in this section, as he fails to clearly identify any view, or even a set of views, as his actual conclusion.<sup>90</sup> As we will see, Hume sometimes makes forceful points and then backtracks on what he has said.

Hume's conclusion begins remarkably. Way back at the start of the *Treatise*, Hume announced a bold new positive project based on experimental principles that would resolve perennial debates and aggrandise philosophical endeavour. There, Hume says that with careful experiment, mirroring the fruitful method of experimental natural philosophy, "we may hope to establish on them [i.e. our experiments] a science, which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension" (*T* Introduction 10; SBN xix). The tone at the start of *T* 1.4.7 could not be more different. In the very first paragraph, Hume deploys a rhetorical image of himself as a man travelling on a ship, and he says that to have confidence in philosophical endeavour at this point would be to

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<sup>90</sup> In this way, the prosaic title of the section belies its complexity, as noted by Ainslie (2015, 218) and Qu (2014, 501).

have the ambition of “compassing the globe” despite having narrowly escaped shipwreck in a “leaky weather-beaten vessel (*T* 1.4.7.1; SBN 263–64). He cites his awareness of “past errors and perplexities”, the “disorder of the faculties” and “the impossibility of amending or correcting these faculties” as motivating factors for his despair (*ibid.*).

In *T* 1.4.7.2, Hume reflects generally on his project, finding that he has rendered himself a social pariah and that he cannot even have confidence in the truth of his antisocial opinions:

I have expos'd myself to the enmity of all metaphysicians, logicians, mathematicians, and even theologians; and can I wonder at the insults I must suffer? I have declar'd my disapprobation of their systems; and can I be surpriz'd, if they shou'd express a hatred of mine and of my person? When I look abroad, I foresee on every side, dispute, contradiction, anger, calumny and detraction. When I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance.

(*T* 1.4.7.2; SBN 264).

Here, Hume is expressing his anxiety towards his own project. In *T* 1.4.2, Hume calumniated the philosophical system of double existence, and in *T* 1.4.3 and *T* 1.4.4 he reduced the substance/accidents distinction and the primary/secondary qualities distinction to absurdity. In the immediately preceding section, *T* 1.4.6, he had contradicted philosophical attempts to understand the nature of personal identity. But we have no reason to restrict our reading of Hume's worries to only *T* 1.4. By failing to single out any specific worry, Hume invites a reading on which he has the general features and characteristics of his entire project in mind. Hume indeed gains the disapprobation of metaphysicians from Parts 1–3 of Book One of the *Treatise*, such as with his rejection of non-imagistic abstract ideas (*T* 1.1.7; SBN 17–25), his

rejection of the infinite divisibility of space and time (*T* 1.2.1–2; SBN 26–33), and his rejection of a clear idea of causal power (*T* 1.3.14; SBN 155–72).<sup>91</sup>

In *T* 1.4.7.3, Hume comes to his first more focused sceptical worry, which pertains to the justification of the products of the imagination. Hume had previously treated the imagination as if it unproblematically produced justified beliefs at least some of the time, especially in his science of correct causal reasoning (given at *T* 1.3.11–12 and *T* 1.3.15) and with his confident distinction between approved and “irregular” principles of the imagination at *T* 1.4.4.1 (SBN 225–26). In Part 4 of the *Treatise*, though, Hume had displayed how the imagination produces unjustified, unintelligible and, in the case of the vulgar belief in external existence, downright false beliefs. The suddenness of Hume’s realisation of the unreliability of the imagination is remarkable (indeed, the reference to approved principles of the imagination at *T* 1.4.4.1 reveals that even in the middle of *T* 1.4 he has not yet had his confidence shaken). Hume considers the possibility that the enlivening of ideas via the imagination might be totally independent of the truth of those ideas. The following is what Garrett (2015, 218–27; 1997, 208) identifies as the first of Hume’s sceptical worries in *T* 1.4.7:

Can I be sure, that in leaving all establish’d opinions I am following truth; and by what criterion shall I distinguish her, even if fortune shou’d at last guide me on her foot-steps? After the most accurate and exact of my reasonings, I can give no reason why I shou’d assent to it; and feel nothing but a *strong* propensity to consider objects *strongly* in that view, under which they appear to me. Experience is a principle, which

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<sup>91</sup> The opening comment of *T* 1.2 is worth noting: “Whatever has the air of paradox, and is contrary to the first and most unprejudic’d notions of mankind is often greedily embrac’d by philosophers, as showing the superiority of their science [...] From these dispositions in philosophers and their disciples arises that mutual complaisance betwixt them [...] Of this mutual complaisance I cannot give a more evident instance than in the doctrine of infinite divisibility ...” (*T* 1.2.1.1; SBN 26). Hume also derides mathematicians specifically in *T* 1.2 (e.g. at *T* 1.2.2.7; SBN 32; *T* 1.2.4.18–19; SBN 45; *T* 1.2.4.31; SBN 638).

instructs me in the several conjunctions of objects for the past. Habit is another principle, which determines me to expect the same for the future; and both of them conspiring to operate upon the imagination, make me form certain ideas in a more intense and lively manner, than others, which are not attended with the same advantages. Without this quality, by which the mind enlivens some ideas beyond others (which seemingly is so trivial, and so little founded on reason) we cou'd never assent to any argument, nor carry our view beyond those few objects, which are present to our senses.

(*T* 1.4.7.3; SBN 265. Original emphasis)

Hume is telling us here that the principles of *experience* and *habit* work together on the faculty of the imagination to produce the liveliness of beliefs. But there is a gap, evidently, between what the mind has evidence for and what our lively beliefs boldly assert. Hume describes the enlivening of ideas in order to produce belief as “trivial”: by this, he does not mean that this operation is inconsequential, but that the enlivening of ideas is independent of the justification of our beliefs (see Allison (2005, 321) and Stroud (1991, 274)).<sup>92</sup> As Allison (2005, 324) and Singer (1995, 598) have observed, the entire passage asserts a *criterion* challenge: what feature of our ideas functions as a mark of justification? As a matter of fact, our beliefs are the result of the enlivening of our ideas (see *T* 1.3.7.5–8; SBN 96–98; *T* 1.4.1.8–10; SBN 183–85), but Hume does not consider this feature to be necessarily truth-tracking.

Later in the same paragraph, Hume states that the trivial enlivening of ideas makes us attribute external existence to the immediate objects of our senses, recalling *T* 1.4.2. Hume

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<sup>92</sup> Besides a reference to “the most trivial question” in the “Introduction” to the *Treatise* (SBN xiii–xiv), the only uses of the word “trivial” in Book One of the *Treatise* are from Part 4. Outside of *T* 1.4.7, these occur at: 1.4.2.56; SBN 217–218; 1.4.3.11; SBN 224–225; 1.4.6.8; SBN 255–256; 1.4.6.14; SBN 258.

even challenges the veracity of *memory* by questioning whether perceptions “immediately present” to the mind can be counted “as true pictures of past perceptions” (*T* 1.4.7.3; SBN 265). Hume’s conclusion in this paragraph is that the senses, the understanding, and memory are all founded on the imagination. Hume’s sceptical worry about the senses is the only one that is sufficiently foreshadowed in the text (precisely at *T* 1.4.2.56), even though the terms of his precise worry have changed, since, in *T* 1.4.2, Hume lamented over the deficiencies of the vulgar and philosophical systems without referencing the triviality of the imagination.<sup>93</sup>

Not dwelling too long on this sweeping challenge, Hume moves on to a further worry in the next paragraph, which is that causal reasoning and the belief in external existence are in conflict (*T* 1.4.7.4; SBN 265–66). Hume thinks that the operations of the imagination push us towards inconsistent beliefs:

’Tis this principle [the enlivening of ideas via the imagination], which makes us reason from causes and effects; and ’tis the same principle, which convinces us of the continu’d existence of external objects, when absent from the senses. But tho’ these two operations be equally natural and necessary in the human mind, yet in some circumstances they are directly contrary,<sup>[Hume’s footnote to *T* 1.4.4]</sup> nor is it possible for us to reason justly and regularly from causes and effects, and at the same time believe in the continu’d existence of matter. How then shall we adjust those principles together? Which of them shall we prefer? Or in case we prefer neither of them, but successively assent to both, as is usual amongst philosophers, with what confidence can we

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<sup>93</sup> Later in *T* 1.4.7, Hume will raise a doubt related to the understanding from *T* 1.4.1. But to reiterate a claim made earlier, there is no parallel to *T* 1.4.2.56–57 in *T* 1.4.1. Furthermore, the sense of “understanding” at play will shift substantially in *T* 1.4.7.7 (as we will shortly see).

afterwards usurp that glorious title, when we thus knowingly embrace a manifest contradiction?

(*T* 1.4.7.4; SBN 266)

Although Hume includes a footnote to his discussion of modern philosophy at *T* 1.4.4 here, I insist that we should read him as referring to the sceptical predicament from *T* 1.4.2 also. I do not intend to make the case that *T* 1.4.4 is *irrelevant* to this paragraph, but only that there are clear indications that Hume does not have this section alone in mind. Hume says that the imagination “convinces us of the continu’d existence of external objects, when absent from the senses”. This has to be construed as a reference to the vulgar belief. In *T* 1.4.2, Hume painstakingly explained how we come to believe in the existence of objects when not present to the senses. Hume’s examination of the primary/secondary quality distinction does not address the question of objects existing when they are not present to the senses, but concerns, rather, the *idea* of an object that has primary qualities but lacks secondary qualities (as I argued in Section 3.4). Furthermore, consider that Hume says that the operations of causal reasoning and belief in the continued existence of objects are, “in some circumstances . . . directly contrary”, and that he repeats himself by saying it is not even “possible” for us to apply consistent causal reasoning and believe in the continued existence of objects (Hume uses the word “matter”, which he also used while describing the vulgar view at *T* 1.4.2.43 (SBN 209)). The conflict is between two cognitive operations that are “natural and necessary”; however, in *T* 1.4.4, Hume declares from the very outset that the belief in the primary/secondary qualities distinction is *unnatural*. He compares it to the ancient metaphysical system from *T* 1.4.3 when he says:



The opinions of the antient philosophers, their fictions of substance and accident, and their reasonings concerning substantial forms and occult qualities, are like the spectres in the dark, and are deriv'd from principles, which, however common, are neither universal nor unavoidable in human nature. The *modern philosophy* pretends to be entirely free from this defect, and to arise only from the solid, permanent, and consistent principles of the imagination. Upon what grounds this pretension is founded must now be the subject of our enquiry.

(*T* 1.4.4.2; SBN 226. Original emphasis)<sup>94</sup>

Of course, *T* 1.4.4 is still relevant to *T* 1.4.7.4, and any reading that suggests otherwise would strain the text, since Hume references that section with his own footnote. To grasp how the passage can consistently cite “a natural and necessary operation” and the system of modern philosophy at the same time, we should read Hume as addressing the *general conviction* that there must be D&C existences. The system of modern philosophy represents *one way* of holding onto an internal/external distinction. Even though that system is neither natural nor universal, it is still relevant to the point at hand because the general conviction that it purports to satisfy is natural and universal. There is a further reason why Hume would cite *T* 1.4.4 at *T* 1.4.7.4. Hume’s *opponents* endorse the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and so *for them* a reference to *T* 1.4.4 in the context of the sceptical doubt of *T* 1.4.7.4 would be vexing.<sup>95</sup>

Further evidence that Hume refers back to his sceptical predicament at *T* 1.4.7.4 is found in Hume’s response to his own questions, “How then shall we adjust those principles

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<sup>94</sup> My reading of this passage is corroborated by Hume’s reference to the modern philosophy at *T* 1.4.2.13 (SBN 192–93), where he says: “Now ’tis evident, that, whatever may be our philosophical opinion, colours, sounds, heat and cold, as far as appears to the senses, exist after the same manner with motion and solidity ... [and] when the contrary opinion is advanc’d by modern philosophers, people imagine they can almost refute it from their feeling and experience, and that their very senses contradict this philosophy”.

<sup>95</sup> I am grateful to Louis E. Loeb for suggesting this last point to me in conversation.

together? Which of them shall we prefer?” Hume immediately observes that philosophers “successively assent to both”, but he does not accuse modern philosophers of successively assenting to anything in *T* 1.4.4. The only place where Hume mentions *successive assent* anywhere in the *Treatise* besides *T* 1.4.7.4 is in his discussion of the philosophical system in *T* 1.4.2. The passage is worth recalling. Hume presents *nature* and *reflection* as “enemies”, the first pushing us towards the belief in the D&C existence of perceptions and the second pushing us away from it:

Not being able to reconcile these two enemies, we endeavour to set ourselves at ease as much as possible, *by successively granting to each* whatever it demands, and by feigning a double existence, where each may find something, that has all the conditions it desires.

(*T* 1.4.2.52; SBN 215. Added emphasis)

Now, this is not directly framed in terms of causal reasoning and the belief in D&C existence, but the type of reflection Hume has in mind here is that of reflection upon the nature of perceptual experience, whereupon we may use causal reasoning to arrive at the falsity of the vulgar belief. Such reasoning clashes with “nature”, which is what pushes us towards the belief in D&C existence of perceptions.

Finally, consider how my suggestion that *T* 1.4.7.4 makes reference to Hume’s sceptical predicament would make sense of the last sentence of that paragraph. Hume criticises the move of successively assenting to causal reasoning and the belief in D&C existence by saying that it is a “manifest contradiction”, and that the philosopher has to forfeit the claim that he or she follows evidence, consistency, and the dictates of reason.

This coheres with the “absurdity” that Hume attributes to the philosophical system at *T* 1.4.2.56 (SBN 218), which is that it both affirms and denies the vulgar opinion.

At *T* 1.4.7.5, Hume moves on to yet another distinct worry, which is the dissatisfaction that results from his own causal theory.<sup>96</sup> Hume does not dwell on the non-justification of causal beliefs in this paragraph, but instead shows that there is a contradiction between our pretheoretical suppositions about the universe and the results of his theory. Such a contradiction results in disappointment, which, compounded on top of other sceptical worries, leads to “such sentiments, as seem to turn to ridicule all our past pains and industry, and to discourage us from future enquiries” (*T* 1.4.7.5; SBN 266).

The natural curiosity of our reason compels us to find the ultimate and most general principles that unite natural phenomena. Hume’s investigation in *T* 1.3, however, revealed that we do not have a clear meaning when we talk of causal power residing in objects. For Hume, any such idea of power, or necessary connection, is derived from the mental transition of anticipating an effect upon experiencing a cause.<sup>97</sup> Hume had previously alluded to the disappointment attached to his causal theory at *T* 1.3.14.24–27 (SBN 166–68). In this earlier section, Hume had defended the results of his theory, but in *T* 1.4.7 he himself laments over the disappointment attached to it:<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> De Pierris (2015, 285–86) emphasises the place of this sceptical worry in her reading of *T* 1.4.7.

<sup>97</sup> Hume offers several arguments for this. Hume argues that since we have no impression of power or *necessary connection* (he officially draws no distinction between these; see *T* 1.3.14.4; SBN 157), then we must have no idea (*T* 1.3.14.11; SBN 161). Hume also exploits the high demands that would be placed on an idea of power, in order to argue against any way of getting such an idea (*T* 1.3.14.13; SBN 161–62). An abstract idea for Hume depends on having a particular idea (annexed to an appropriate ‘revival’ set; see Garrett (1997, 103–04)), but the general idea of a power in a cause that makes it bring about its effect would entail the inseparability of the cause and effect in thought, and this is patently false. Hume considers that we misapply the word “power” when we apply it to external objects, because any such idea of power can only derive from the mere mental transition from an idea of a cause to an effect: the idea of power is, “nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another” (*T* 1.3.14.20; SBN 165).

<sup>98</sup> The first sentence of *T* 1.4.7.5 (omitted from the quotation) references *T* 1.3.14 in a footnote.

We wou'd not willingly stop before we are acquainted with that energy in the cause, by which it operates on its effect; that tie, which connects them together; and that efficacious quality, on which the tie depends. This is our aim in all our studies and reflections: *And how must we be disappointed, when we learn, that this connexion, tie, or energy lies merely in ourselves*, and is nothing but that determination of the mind, which is acquir'd by custom, and causes us to make a transition from an object to its usual attendant, and from the impression of one to the lively idea of the other?

(*T* 1.4.7.5; SBN 266–67. Added emphasis)

Evidently, our desire to understand the world better is thwarted when the search for causal principles leads us back to our own minds. As humans, we desire to extend our view further beyond ourselves, but the direction of our researches is entirely reversed when we discover the intimate connection between causal beliefs and our own human nature. The disillusionment of this passage represents a stark contrast between *T* 1.4.7 and the Introduction to the *Treatise*, since there Hume declared that directing philosophical research towards the human person would *advance* philosophy.

Next, Hume connects the disillusionment of *T* 1.4.7.5 to the status of the faculty of the imagination generally, prompting his consideration of “a very dangerous dilemma” (*T* 1.4.7.6; SBN 267). Hume recalls that the “deficiency” of failing to discover causal powers does not take hold of our minds in the course of ordinary or “common” life (*ibid.*). For Hume, we simply do not realise that our ignorance of such power in ordinary cases of cause and effect is on par with our ignorance in extraordinary cases. Hume is here pointing out that we are *as ignorant* of the power that resides in fire that makes it produce smoke as we are of, say, the forces that move celestial bodies. Hume calls the thought that we can discern causal

powers in some cases an “illusion”. He states a question that will soon lead him to his infamous dangerous dilemma:

This deficiency in our ideas is not, indeed, perceiv'd in common life [...] But this proceeds merely from an illusion of the imagination; and the question is, how far we ought to yield to these illusions[?]

(*T* 1.4.7.6; SBN 267)

This question may be read in different ways, depending on what falls under the scope of “these illusions”. The illusions may be a specific subset of products of the imagination, namely, those cases of imagining we are in touch with causal powers. We may also plausibly read “these illusions” as referring to *all* illusions of the imagination. The question, then, is whether “illusions” itself refers to all of the imagination or only a subset of it? The answer is found at the end of *T* 1.4.7.6 and the start of *T* 1.4.7.7: Hume presents a dilemma between assenting to “every trivial suggestion” and rejecting *all of them except* the understanding. Hume also presents the problem with the first option at the end of *T* 1.4.7.6:

[...] if we assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy; besides 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 [...] This has already appear'd in so many instances, that we may spare ourselves the trouble of enlarging upon it farther [...]

But on the other hand, if the consideration of these instances makes us take a resolution to reject all the trivial suggestions of the fancy, and *adhere to the understanding, that is, to the general and more establish'd properties of the*

*imagination*; even this resolution, if steadily executed, would be dangerous, and attended with the most fatal consequences.

(*T* 1.4.7.6–7; SBN 267. Added emphasis)<sup>99</sup>

Hume continues the rest of *T* 1.4.7.7 carrying on this distinction between trivial suggestions and established properties of the imagination. We should observe the way in which such a distinction sets aside the worry raised at *T* 1.4.7.3. There, Hume had established that all of the imagination – explicitly *including* the understanding – is founded on the trivial property of the enlivening of ideas. There was no suggestion that the understanding is either more general or more established than other aspects of the imagination. If Hume’s worry there was that the imagination is based on vivacity and that there is no link between the enlivening of ideas and truth, then how could signalling out a more established subset of products of the imagination be relevant? This is a sign of the fact that Hume expresses a compilation of doubts that generally pertain to the imagination in *T* 1.4.7. Close attention is required to perceive this, however, since the set-up of the dilemma suggests a reading of the dilemma as the culmination of sceptical doubt. But it cannot be considered a logical culmination.

It is not clear exactly what counts as a trivial suggestion and what counts as an established property of the imagination. As we have seen, Hume had called *all* products of the imagination “trivial” at *T* 1.4.7.3, and this itself was a new term, not directly drawn from a previous result that Hume had established in another section of the *Treatise*. Some clues as to what Hume means by the more “establish’d” products of the imagination can be ascertained from what he says later in *T* 1.4.7.7. For one thing, Hume says he dealt with general and established properties of “the understanding” in *T* 1.4.1 (“Of scepticism with

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<sup>99</sup> Hume uses the word “fancy” here as a synonym for “imagination”.

regard to reason”). The very beginning of that section reveals a rational requirement that goes on to directly feature in part of the dilemma:

In all demonstrative sciences the rules are certain and infallible; but when we apply them, our fallible and uncertain faculties are very apt to depart from them, and fall into error. *We must, therefore, in every reasoning form a new judgment, as a check or controul [sic] on our first judgment or belief*, and must enlarge our view to comprehend a kind of history of all the instances, wherein our understanding has deceiv’d us, compar’d with those, wherein its testimony was just and true.

(*T* 1.4.1.1; SBN 180. Added emphasis)

Hume evidently understands this rational requirement to be a general, “more establish’d” principle of reason. In *T* 1.4.1, Hume showed that a problem *would* arise, if, counterfactually, we followed this principle rigorously, and this fact will turn out to be one element of the second horn of the dangerous dilemma.

The difficulty with assenting to all of the suggestions of the fancy is that some individual ones are false and/or absurd, and sometimes they are collectively inconsistent. An example of conflict was given at *T* 1.4.7.4 (Hume’s sceptical predicament arises from a conflict between causal reasoning and the belief in external existence). Hume in fact says, “This has already appear’d in so many instances, that we may spare ourselves the trouble of enlarging upon it farther” (*T* 1.4.7.6; SBN 267). The problem with the first horn of the dilemma, then, is of the *multiplicity* of disreputable products of the imagination.

The other option is to use the understanding alone, but Hume thinks he has shown in *T* 1.4.1 that this would be destructive of all reasoning, since we would be constantly lowering our confidence in our beliefs to the point of “a total extinction of belief and evidence”

(T 1.4.1.6; SBN 182). This dire result is prevented only by a peculiar quality of our psychology kicking in. We carry on the sort of reasoning that diminishes our confidence in our beliefs, but, after an indeterminate while, our reasoning loses its force and we arbitrarily stop at some point. Hume tells us that the purpose of T 1.4.1 is to display the necessity of this property of our psychological lives kicking in:

[...] as the action of the mind becomes forc'd and unnatural, and the ideas faint and obscure; tho' the principles of judgement, and the balancing of opposite causes be the same as at the very beginning; yet their influence on the imagination, and the vigour they add to, or diminish from the thought, is by no means equal. Where the mind reaches not its objects with easiness and facility, the same principles have not the same effect as in a more natural conception of the ideas; nor does the imagination feel a sensation, which holds any proportion with that which arises from its common judgements and opinions.

(T 1.4.1.10; SBN 185)

In order to embrace the understanding and circumvent the extermination of our beliefs, we would have to endorse one of the trivial qualities of the imagination. *As a matter of fact*, our ideas lose vivacity as our reasoning becomes more elaborate, but Hume thinks to adopt this as a rule would amount to, “[establishing] it for a general maxim that no refin’d or elaborate reasoning is ever to be receiv’d” (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 268). Hume presents, in quick succession, three different problems with embracing the maxim:

By this means you cut off entirely all science and philosophy: You proceed upon one singular quality of the imagination, and by a parity of reason you must embrace all of



them: And you expressly contradict yourself; since this maxim must be built on the preceding reasoning, which will be allow'd to be sufficiently refin'd and metaphysical.

(T 1.4.7.7; SBN 268)

The first problem with embracing the maxim described above is that it would leave no room for science and philosophy. Hume would have to abandon his *science* of human nature in order to reject all refined reasoning. A second problem, which is by no means less dire, is that our endorsement of the requisite quality of the imagination would be *ad hoc* if we claim to reject all the trivial qualities of the imagination (“... by a parity of reason you must embrace all of them ...”). The third problem is that refined reasoning leads us to the opinion that we only need the understanding plus the maxim that no refined reasoning is to be received, and this is a blatant contradiction. So it turns out that, despite the result of T 1.4.1, there is no *principled* way of distinguishing better products of the imagination from worse ones.

The difficulty of the dilemma, in short, is that at least some of the influence of the imagination is necessary to sustain any belief at all, let alone for philosophy and science to continue, but some of the suggestions of the imagination are epistemically disreputable.

Hume says the problem can be forgotten about, but not solved:

We have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at all. *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 268. Added emphasis)

Hume's response to the dangerous dilemma leaves him (and his reader) in a cheerless situation, yet we are not even halfway through the conclusion at this point. In the next subsection, I turn to the task of interpreting Hume's response to the sceptical doubts that he has raised. At the very end of the explication of the problem of the dilemma, Hume recalls that:

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; which implies a manifest contradiction.

(*T* 1.4.7.7; SBN 268)

The first sentence of the next paragraph will involve Hume backtracking on this claim about "refin'd reflections".

#### 4.2.2 Hume's Slow Return to Philosophy

At *T* 1.4.7.8, Hume says that refined and metaphysical reasoning can indeed have an influence on him. The reasoning by which Hume has considered the products of the imagination to be epistemically disreputable is "refined and metaphysical", but it has a patently *negative* influence on him.<sup>100</sup> So, far from offering any solace from the dilemma – as if Hume had realised that some part of it was mistaken – by backtracking on the claim that metaphysical reasoning never has any influence on him, Hume is led to his most direct statement of sceptical doom expressed anywhere in his writings, the very nadir of his philosophical thought:

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<sup>100</sup> Hume describes some of his own philosophy as "metaphysical" in his 1737 letter to Michael Ramsay (cited in Mossner 1980/1954, 627). Hume also has a tendency to use "metaphysical" as a pejorative description (see *T* Introduction 3; SBN xiv–xv; *T* 1.4.2.51; SBN 214; *T* 1.4.5.35; SBN 250; *EHU* 1.12; SBN 12–13; *EHU* 2.9; SBN 21; *EHU* 7.2; SBN 61).

But what have I here said, that reflections very refin'd and metaphysical have little or no influence upon us? This opinion I can scarce forbear retracting, and condemning from my present feeling and experience. 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. Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? and on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me?

(*T* 1.4.7.8; SBN 269. Original emphasis)

Hume's self-conscious reflections on his own philosophy produce in him the view that "all belief" is to be rejected and that he cannot even be sure of what he is. Hume then immediately tells us how these dreadful thoughts are dispelled. He points to "nature", which can work to "obliterate" his despondency via, "some avocation, and lively impression of my senses" (*T* 1.4.7.9; SBN 269).<sup>101</sup> The word "nature" refers not just to human nature, but also to a natural, shared, social environment (as Maia Neto (1991, 42) observes). The famous illustration has a vivid social dimension:

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose [...] I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour's

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<sup>101</sup> Norton & Norton (2000, 573) define "avocation" as "distraction, diversion".

amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.

(*T* 1.4.7.9; SBN 269)

Here, nature steps in precisely where reason has fallen short and dispels the doubts that inspired the rejection of belief. However, the normative import of this is unclear. This ambivalence in Hume's response is at the heart of the challenge of reading Hume's scepticism: does being relieved of sceptical worries merely mean losing interest in them despite remaining normatively undefeated, or does it mean that there is a normative solution, after all, to the very problems that were raised? In what way does Hume's doubts appearing "cold", "strain'd", and "ridiculous" entail a different response to scepticism than he had offered to the dangerous dilemma, in which he explicitly distinguished "what is commonly done" from "what ought to be done" (*T* 1.4.7.7; SBN 268)? Hume has much more to say about his removal from extreme despair to a return to philosophy, to which we have to look to find an answer.

Although *T* 1.4.7.9 represents a fairly straightforward, if inchoate, response to scepticism, *T* 1.4.7.10 complicates the picture with some delicate ideas. In this paragraph, Hume emphasises the psychological pleasure that motivates doing philosophy, and he also suggests that admitting the irrefutability of scepticism does *not* entail that he must abandon philosophy altogether. It is in this paragraph that Hume's moderate, residual scepticism emerges. Hume both reminds his reader of the irrefutability of scepticism and describes his own, considered position as sceptical. It is vital to realise that Hume does not instantly develop a total psychological dismissal of scepticism, as if he were just expanding the same basic point of *T* 1.4.7.9.

Hume summarises the situation in which social preoccupations prompt his disposal of scepticism by saying he finds himself “*necessarily determin’d to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life*” – that is, like people who are not in a state of sceptical despair (*T* 1.4.7.10; SBN 269. Added emphasis). Hume adds that he has resigned himself “to this indolent belief *in the general maxims of the world*” (*T* 1.4.7.10; SBN 256. Added emphasis). He does not specify these maxims, but from the context, we can understand them to be those that lead him to assurance about the questions that he raised in *T* 1.4.7.8 (they are, in other words, maxims that “other people” would accept). Crucially, Hume is quick to observe that his previous, sceptical mood has not been entirely eradicated. Scepticism still lingers, and threatens his intellectual pursuits and personal happiness:

But notwithstanding that 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, I still feel such remains of my former disposition, *that I am ready to throw all my books and papers into the fire*, and resolve never more to renounce the pleasures of life for the sake of reasoning and philosophy. For these are the sentiments in that splenetic humour, which governs me at present. 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. Added emphasis)

Yet again, Hume here backtracks on what he previously said. Sceptical considerations do not seem cold, strained or ridiculous at all, if these are taken to signify that scepticism is irrelevant or unworthy of attention. To engage in philosophy, evidently, would involve a renunciation of the pleasures of life, because of the attendant sceptical worries. Hume

characterises this as a sceptical position: “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). The meaning of this sentence has to be grasped in the light of the remainder of the paragraph. Hume asks himself whether he needs to strive against the gloom of scepticism, and he finds that, even though scepticism has the philosophical victory, it cannot *require* him to struggle or battle against the indolent position to which he has returned:

But does it follow, that I must strive against the current of nature, which leads me to indolence and pleasure; that I must seclude myself, in some measure, from the commerce and society of men, which is so agreeable; and that I must torture my brain with subtilities and sophistries, at the very time that I cannot satisfy myself concerning the reasonableness of so painful an application, nor have any tolerable prospect of arriving by its means at truth and certainty?

(*T* 1.4.7.10; SBN 269–70)

Hume asserts a major point here: scepticism itself cannot say anything for the reasonableness of actively choosing despair and gloom (i.e. what Hume describes as “torture”) as a response to scepticism. In light of this, Hume then makes a claim about doing philosophy: he says if he is going to have follies, they are at least going to be natural and agreeable:

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? 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. Where I strive against my inclination, I shall have a

good reason for my resistance, and will no more be led wandering into such dreary solitudes, and rough passages, as I have hitherto met with.

(*T* 1.4.7.10; SBN 270. Original emphasis)

Evidently, Hume is committed to striving against his inclination *only if* he has good practical reason for it, and this precludes him from entering the delirious state of *T* 1.4.7.8. Therefore, this paragraph represents a dismissal of the practical influence of radical scepticism. Hume, in the course of his work, has stumbled upon the unsettling truth that our important beliefs and belief-forming mechanisms are founded on the imagination, and yet he thinks there is no way out of the epistemological worry that this engenders other than to say that we can push it aside.

At *T* 1.4.7.11, Hume says that philosophy has nothing to oppose the previously stated sentiments of spleen and indolence and that philosophy “expects a victory more from the returns of a serious good-humour’d disposition, than from the force of reason and conviction” (*T* 1.4.7.11; SBN 270). We alter our attitudes to philosophy in virtue of the following dual awareness: sceptical problems cannot be solved, and we are driven by nature to continue pursuing philosophy. Hume says:

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 on us.

(*T* 1.4.7.11; SBN 270. Added emphasis)

Here, Hume does not appeal to the pleasure attached to pursuing philosophy as a solution to sceptical doubt. He will indeed carry on philosophising, but he does so with an avowedly sceptical spirit.

Next, Hume emphasises the way in which he is inclined to think about philosophical topics, by saying, “I am uneasy to think I approve of one object, and disprove of another [etc.] ... without knowing upon what principles I proceed” (*T* 1.4.7.12; SBN 271). He will carry on with his project, investigating topics such as moral vice and virtue, the nature of government, and the passions belonging to human nature (*T* 1.4.7.12; SBN 270–71). He even goes so far as to say, “even suppose this curiosity and ambition shou’d not transport me into speculations ... it wou’d necessarily happen, that from my very weakness I must be led into such enquiries” (*T* 1.4.7.13; SBN 271). As much as the despair of scepticism threatens to creep in and undermine philosophy, the pondering of philosophical questions is natural, to the point of being inevitable. It turns out, then, that not only is the doom of sceptical despair impermanent, but the desire to reject philosophy is also unsustainable. Hume recommends that, since human nature will lead us to speculate beyond the realm of everyday experience, we might as well follow philosophy instead of superstition, because the errors of superstition are “dangerous” but the errors of philosophy are “only ridiculous” (*T* 1.4.7.13; SBN 272). This point about the consequences of pursuing philosophy versus superstition is an indication that pragmatic concerns are driving Hume’s return to philosophy.

In the last three paragraphs of *T* 1.4.7, Hume references the “true sceptic” and explicitly lowers his ambitions from seeking ultimate truth to merely bringing a certain style of philosophising into fashion. Hume moves on to the point about lowering his ambitions by rejecting the frivolity of assenting to beliefs merely because of their agreeableness:



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 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. Added emphasis)

Hume hopes that the brand of philosophy that emerges from his encounter with scepticism will at least be satisfactory to the human mind (this satisfaction requires, of course, that the temptation to relinquish all belief has dissipated). This passage indicates that Hume's scepticism is moderated instead of rejected.

There are a number of questions and issues that arise from Hume's response to scepticism, and different statements of Hume's push us in different directions. One part of the text that has been recently exploited by Ainslie (2015) is the reference to true scepticism, at T 1.4.7.14. The notion of true scepticism could suggest that Hume is reflexively applying sceptical doubts to scepticism itself. In other words, Hume's sceptical attitude towards the rational capacities of the human person could mean that even his sceptical musings are subject to doubt. I resist such a reading. In order to grasp the meaning of Hume's reference to "true" scepticism, we have to understand that that notion is connected in the text to Hume's statement about bringing a style of philosophising into fashion. Hume says:

Human Nature is the only science of man; and yet has been hitherto the most neglected. *'Twill be sufficient for me, if I can bring it a little more into fashion;* and the hope of this serves to compose my temper from that spleen, and invigorate it from that indolence, which sometimes prevail upon me. 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. Added emphasis)

We can see here that Hume's considered outlook is a result of his encounter with sceptical despair. Hume explicitly lowers his ambitions from the introduction to the *Treatise* (see especially T Introduction 10; SBN xix). Hume here also presents two attitudes towards philosophy: one is to reject the pursuit of philosophy on the grounds that human understanding is tainted by the imagination, and the other is to follow the natural inclination to wonder about the world and to pursue an experimental philosophy that takes human nature as its focus. Hume suggests a reason to prefer the second attitude, which is that the first dogmatically follows the conviction that the human mind is tainted and doomed to arrive at falsehoods. The second attitude represents a "true" scepticism since it holds nothing at all with certain conviction. I will return to the theme of Hume's "true" scepticism in Section 5.3.1.

Overall, my view is that Hume's final position should be characterised as residual scepticism, that is, a moderate form of scepticism that is the product of his encounter with extreme scepticism. Extreme scepticism, it turns out, is unliveable, but it leaves its mark, or its residue, on the way we go about in philosophy, science, and ordinary life. There are three textual elements that residual scepticism accounts for (see Section 4.1.2 above). Any reading of Hume's scepticism in *T* 1.4.7 needs to account for these. What is distinctive about my approach is that I hold that SC3 (Hume's statement of moderate scepticism) comes about as a product of SC1 (his sceptical worries) and SC2 (his rejection of the possibility of rejecting all belief). The sceptical considerations of SC1 are not rejected, except insofar as Hume decides that is impossible to live by the initial reaction that they prompt, which is the removal of all belief.

All interpretations agree that Hume moves, at least, from statements of extreme scepticism to statements of moderate scepticism. The divisive question – as Ainslie (2015, 226) has acknowledged – is in what way, if any, does Hume in the end accept the sceptical considerations of *T* 1.4.7.1–7 as his own view? Here, I have argued that Hume's final position emerges from his confrontation with extreme doubts: Hume arrives at his final, moderate sceptical position in virtue of accepting the insolubility of the sceptical problems that the doubts of *T* 1.4.7.3–7 engender, together with his awareness of the impossibility of rejecting all belief as a response to scepticism. Hume does not abandon investigation as a response to scepticism, but he does alter the way he pursues it.

If we read Hume as having a robust solution to sceptical problems, then it is not clear why he would adopt a moderate sceptical position. It could be replied that in moving from SC1 to SC3, *none* of SC1 is left behind. Thus, Hume would simply be a moderate sceptic. The problem is that this would be a distortion of the text. If Hume thought there was a normative response to the doubts that sceptical problems engender, then presenting SC2 as

his response would be a superfluity if not entirely misleading. If Hume had a normative reason to reject SC1 he would appeal to it in his extreme moment of despair, but this he does not do, or even hint at doing.

### 4.3 Hume's Scepticism in "Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy" (*EHU* 12)

#### 4.3.1 Hume's Consequent Sceptical Doubts

Hume's overt reflections on the nature of scepticism are more organised in the *Enquiry* than in the *Treatise*. In this later text, Hume does not express profound anxiety towards scepticism and he introduces new terminology that helps structure his discussion. Most helpful is Hume's distinction between "excessive" and "mitigated" scepticism. Hume explicitly endorses the latter of these. As in *T* 1.4.7, Hume's final sceptical position is a product of his encounter with extreme scepticism; Hume is pushed towards mitigated scepticism by the irrefutability of sceptical concerns and the impossibility of rejecting all belief. Hume states very clearly that the "chief" objection to excessive scepticism is the fact that the extermination of all belief is psychologically impossible and that, if it were possible, it would have disastrous practical consequences (*EHU* 12.23; *SBN* 159). Hume does not find a problem with the negative assessments that the sceptic expresses, but only with the implications that the excessive sceptic draws from these assessments.

Hume begins *EHU* 12 by declaring his intention to answer a couple of questions pertaining to scepticism. Ostensibly, Hume is prompted by the consideration that the sceptic is a feared and calumniated figure in philosophical literature, but seems to have no concrete reality:

[...] it is certain, that no man ever met with any such absurd creature, or conversed with a man, who had no opinion or principle concerning any subject, either of action

or speculation. This begets a very natural question; What is meant by a sceptic? And how far it is possible to push these philosophical principles of doubt and uncertainty?

(*EHU* 12.2; SBN 149)

Hume begins his answer by distinguishing two *species* (or kinds, or varieties) of scepticism. Hume identifies *antecedent* scepticism as the adoption of a sceptical position prior to any particular discovery. *Consequent* scepticism is the adoption of scepticism as the result of some discovery, and Hume turns to this at *EHU* 12.5 (SBN 150). Hume goes through two varieties of antecedent scepticism. The first involves an attitude of radical suspicion towards the truth of one's opinions and the "veracity" of the faculties (*EHU* 12.3; SBN 149). Those who take this stance, Hume says, do so in the hope of finding some indubitable principle that will eventually justify our original opinions and faculties. Hume, therefore, understands antecedent scepticism to be bound up with a foundationalist epistemological project, and he explicitly characterises it as Cartesian (*EHU* 12.3; SBN 149). This approach to philosophy is wrongheaded for Hume because (a) there just is no indubitable foundational principle, and (b) even if there were, we would need to use our faculties *to get beyond it*, and this would contradict the intentions of the radical antecedent sceptic. But even more, Hume thinks such radical antecedent scepticism is fanciful because sweeping doubt about all our faculties cannot actually be entertained: "The CARTESIAN doubt, therefore, *were it ever possible* to be attained by any human creature (as it plainly is not) would be entirely incurable" (*EHU* 12.3; SBN 150. Added emphasis).<sup>102</sup>

Hume favours a second, less radical, form of antecedent scepticism. He endorses assiduousness in the search for evidence and the active avoidance of common errors and

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<sup>102</sup> Buckle (2001, 298) suggests that this is an overly simplified presentation of Descartes' views and that, although that project is flawed in other ways, Hume's dismissal is "too swift to be compelling".

biases. He calls the adoption of such attitudes “very reasonable”, “a necessary preparative to the study of philosophy”, and says that it will have a positive effect on the search for truth (*EHU* 12.4; SBN 150). Hume does not attempt to justify this endorsement. Williams (2008) has observed that the attitudes Hume identifies are more appropriately understood as *consequent* to philosophy. Williams perceives that moderate scepticism does not represent “an attitude that we can just *take up* but rather one that we *induce*” (2008, 98). What Hume says later on in *EHU* 12 even confirms that such moderate scepticism is arrived after philosophising. What emerges from this later part of his text is *the reason why* moderate scepticism is appropriate, which is that the human person is naturally prone to error and arrogance, as sceptical considerations amply show. Hume’s view that such attitudes are necessary as a “preparative” to philosophy can be defended as an institutional or social fact: teachers of philosophy who have encountered scepticism can encourage their students to be careful in forming their opinions and wary of common errors and biases. But now, the moderately sceptical attitudes would not be totally independent of study and investigation, even if they precede investigation from the perspective of some individuals. Overall, I do not put too much weight on Hume’s endorsement of moderate antecedent scepticism, seeing it instead as a qualification of his total rejection of antecedent scepticism that he suggests by his criticism of Cartesian antecedent scepticism. Hume spells out a more robust and cogent account of moderate sceptical attitudes at *EHU* 12.24–34 (SBN 161–65) and this will be the topic of the next sub-section.

Unlike the radical antecedent variety, Hume has no sweeping dismissal of scepticism that is consequent to “science and enquiry” (*EHU* 12.5; SBN 150). Hume goes through a number of considerations in *EHU* 12 that fall under this heading. Before launching into these, we should observe a couple of differences between Hume’s encounter with scepticism in the *Enquiry* and *Treatise*. Firstly, *EHU* 12 does not, for the most part, involve turning back to

Hume's previous results and extricating potential sceptical consequences. The majority of sceptical considerations are being raised for the first time. Secondly, Hume does not directly refer to the faculty of the imagination in *EHU* 12. Despite this, there is a high degree of similarity between the doubts raised in the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*. Hume's prose in the *Enquiry* is less emotionally charged, but the philosophical significance of his sceptical doubts is in no way pared down. Although Hume does not actually use the term "imagination" in *EHU* 12, he does present the same *criterion challenge* as *T* 1.4.7.3 and this is drawn directly from the theory of causation Hume offers *EHU* 4–5. The challenge is expressed in the *Enquiry* in terms of uncertainty deriving from the role of *custom* in causal belief formation, and the similarity between this doubt and *T* 1.4.7.3 is unmistakable, as we will see shortly.

The most important commonality between the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* versions of the crisis is that Hume's doubts concern the mind naturally being led into falsities, absurdities, and uncertainties (as we will see with Hume's sceptical objections to the evidence of sense). Furthermore, Hume's sceptical predicament concerning external existence features in both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*. Hume clearly thinks it is an efficacious means for displaying the triumph of philosophical scepticism.

As in the *Treatise*, Hume moves between different sceptical doubts without dwelling too long on any particular one. But in the *Enquiry*, Hume provides examples of *weak* sceptical considerations (indeed, this is evident from the very outset with his dismissal of radical antecedent scepticism). Ultimately, the gravity of the doubts that Hume does take seriously is not something that changes between the texts; Hume does not think that sceptical doubts are innocuous, even if radical scepticism cannot be lived.

As recounted in Section 2.3.2 above, Hume first rules out the "trite" sceptical objections to the evidence of sense, before turning to a couple of efficacious sceptical doubts that pertain to "the evidence of *sense*" (*EHU* 12.6; SBN 151. Original emphasis). The first is

Hume's sceptical predicament concerning the vulgar opinion and the philosophical system. Hume shows the falsity of the vulgar opinion and the non-justification of the philosophical system. The outcome of Hume's first objection against the evidence of sense is a sweeping indictment against our natural, instinctive opinion of D&C existence and of the intuitive response to it. Hume is convinced that reflection on sensory experiences results in an insoluble epistemological predicament. When we reflect, we can easily perceive the fallacy of the vulgar opinion, and the most natural way to remedy it is to posit the double existence of perceptions and objects. But this system of double existence is devoid of justification and lacks psychological permanency. Hume also goes through a second objection to the evidence of sense, which is a reworked version of his argument concerning modern philosophy from *T* 1.4.4. Hume says that this argument "goes farther" than the argument concerning only the vulgar and philosophical systems, but, as argued in Section 3.4 above, this is a sign of the fact that Hume reveals that the *idea* of a bare something that is entirely different from our perceptions is compromised (which, in the *Treatise*, was established in *T* 1.2.6). It is worth observing that Hume does not repeat the sceptical argument from *T* 1.4.1, or anything like it, in *EHU* 12. This corroborates my view that the arguments in *T* 1.4.1 and *T* 1.4.2 do not necessarily have to be read together.

Hume next goes through sceptical considerations pertaining to "*abstract reasonings*" (*EHU* 12.18; SBN 156. Original emphasis). Hume finds that geometrical reasoning leads us to the conclusion that space and time are infinitely divisible, but that this means that our ideas of space and time must be full of "absurdity" (*EHU* 12.19; SBN 157). Hume actually thinks that such a sceptical consideration is rather weak, because the very thought that ideas that we otherwise take to be clear are so egregiously absurd is itself "absolutely incomprehensible" (*EHU* 12.20; SBN 157). Hume finds it intolerable to think that when a moment of time passes an *infinite number* of smaller moments could have passed each other in succession or,



likewise, that a visible extension could be made up of an *infinite number* of miniscule parts (see also *T* 1.2.1–2; SBN 26–33). Sceptical considerations pertaining to abstract reasonings, therefore, are more like the “trite” objections to the evidence of sense.

Next, Hume moves on to sceptical considerations pertaining to “*moral evidence*” (that is, matters of fact) (*EHU* 12.21; SBN 158. Original emphasis).<sup>103</sup> Hume draws a distinction between “popular” and “philosophical” objections against moral evidence. The latter are sceptical doubts deriving from Hume’s theory of causation, and the former are reminiscent of Pyrrhonian arguments concerning “the natural weakness of human understanding ... contradictory opinions, which have been entertained in different ages ... [and] the variations of our judgement” (*EHU* 12.21; SBN 158). Hume evidently does not think that variations in opinions means that no opinion is better than any other. He says that only the philosophical objections supply the sceptic with “ample matter of triumph” (*EHU* 12.22; SBN 159).

Hume first concedes the triumph of the philosophical objections to moral evidence before moving to his full rejection of radical consequent scepticism. The basic logic of this sceptical doubt is the same as that which Hume expresses at *T* 1.4.7.3, even though Hume refers to custom instead of the faculty of imagination:

Here he [i.e., the sceptic] seems to have ample matter of triumph; while he justly insists, that all our evidence for any matter of fact, which lies beyond the testimony of sense or memory, is derived entirely from the relation of cause and effect; that we have no other idea of this relation than that of two objects, which have been frequently *conjoined* together; that we have no argument to convince us, that objects, which have, in our experience, been frequently conjoined, will likewise, in other

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<sup>103</sup> Hume had drawn the distinction between matters of fact and relations of ideas earlier in the text (see *EHU* 4.1; SBN 25; *EHU* 4.18; SBN 35).

instances, be conjoined in the same manner; and that nothing leads us to this inference but custom or a certain instinct of our nature; which it is difficult to resist, *but which*, like other instincts, *may be fallacious and deceitful*. While the sceptic insists upon these topics, he shows his force [...].

(*EHU* 12.22; SBN 159. Added emphasis)

Hume is saying here that one of the sceptic's most incisive moves is to insist that our causal inferences are products of custom and that custom is not determined by evidence.<sup>104</sup> The sceptic has “ample matter of triumph” and “shows his force” by this consideration because there is no ready reply that we can make that will show the sceptic to be mistaken.

#### 4.3.2 Hume's Mitigated Scepticism

At the end of the same paragraph in which Hume concedes the philosophical triumph of scepticism, he also identifies that “the chief and most confounding objection to *excessive* scepticism” is its impracticability (*EHU* 12.23; SBN 159. Original emphasis). Hume says that “no durable good can ever result from it; while it remains in its full force and vigour” (*ibid.*). The paragraph as a whole makes clear that Hume has two thoughts in mind: excessive sceptical doubt is impermanent *and if it were permanent* it would have destructive results. Hume contrasts Pyrrhonism with other ancient and modern schools of thought when he says:

A COPERNICAN or PTOLEMAIC, who supports each his different system of astronomy, may hope to produce a conviction, which will remain constant and durable, with his audience. A STOIC or EPICUREAN displays principles, which may not only be durable,

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<sup>104</sup> De Pierris (2015, 290–91) claims that the paragraph does not only show that the enlivening of ideas *may* function independently of the truth of our ideas, but it also reveals that *some* instincts actually *are* fallacious (she claims that *EHU* 12.22 mirrors *T* 1.4.7.4 in this regard). I beg to differ, since Hume is just claiming that instincts “may be fallacious” here.

but which have an effect on conduct and behaviour. But a PYRRHONIAN cannot expect, that his philosophy, will have any constant influence on the mind: Or if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge any thing, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence.

(*EHU* 12.23; *SBN* 160)

Other schools of thought, Hume tells us, at least produce beliefs that have a lasting influence on the mind and that have identifiable practical consequences. If Pyrrhonism had a lasting effect on the mind, Hume thinks it would result in social breakdown, and eventually the termination of life itself. It just so happens, though, that nature always kicks in, and thankfully that, “so fatal an event is very little to be dreaded” (*EHU* 12.23; *SBN* 160). Hume says that any confrontation with Pyrrhonism cannot lead to the extermination of all belief; rather, the realisation of this very fact about continuing to believe in the face of sceptical argumentation is itself the lesson to be learned from Pyrrhonism:

[...] all his [i.e. the Pyrrhonist’s] objections are mere amusement, and can have no other tendency than to show the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they 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* 160)

The view Hume expresses here is that we always revert to having beliefs and acting in the world – just like those who never encounter sceptical argumentation – but that there is still no solid reply to be made when confronted with the Pyrrhonist’s arguments. Buckle (2001, 314) insists that this view of the “whimsical condition of mankind” is not Hume’s own, but that of the extreme sceptic when he or she realises the impossibility of their own purported way of life. According to Buckle, Hume accepting such a view is in conflict with the account of mitigated scepticism that Hume is about to develop in the text. In contrast to this, I maintain that Hume does indeed incorporate the fact that we cannot answer sceptical challenges into his final view. Hume’s final, moderate sceptical position is motivated by the very fact that we cannot adequately answer sceptical challenges. I turn now to Hume’s statement of his moderate scepticism.

In the last part of *EHU* 12 (paragraphs 24–34), Hume offers his positive interpretation of scepticism. Hume’s thought here revolves around “mitigated scepticism” (which he also identifies as “ACADEMICAL philosophy”; *EHU* 12.24; SBN 161. See also *EHU* 5.1; SBN 40–41). Striker (1996) and Annas (1994) have both argued that it is a mistake to align extreme scepticism with Pyrrhonism and mitigated scepticism with Academic Scepticism, but this is clearly how Hume himself takes the situation to be.<sup>105</sup> As per his description of Pyrrhonism at *EHU* 12.23, Hume understands excessive scepticism to entail the abandonment of intellectual pursuits. Mitigated scepticism, by contrast, allows us to carry on with science and philosophy: Hume introduces it as “both durable and useful” (*EHU* 12.24; SBN 161).

Hume recognises at least two “species” of mitigated scepticism, though he does not initially signpost this at the start. He also says, rather tentatively, that mitigated scepticism, “may, in part, be the result of this PYRRHONISM or *excessive* scepticism” (*EHU* 12.24; SBN

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<sup>105</sup> Striker (2010, 196) even labels this mistaken dichotomy as “the Humean distinction”.

161. Original emphasis). Hume says that the “undistinguished” doubts can be, “corrected by common sense and reflection” (ibid.).<sup>106</sup> Hume explicitly characterises each of the two species of scepticism as outcomes of sceptical reflection. This is indicative of Hume’s moderate scepticism being a residual product of his concession of the triumph of scepticism.

The first species is a curbing of the natural inclination towards hastiness in forming opinions and dogmatism of belief. We may summarise this as *epistemic modesty*. Hume distinguishes here between how the illiterate and the learned would each come to such modesty. The illiterate have two means: (i) becoming aware of the imperfections of human reasoning, and not just from careless errors, but even when reason is being used attentively, and (ii), somewhat more specifically, observing that the learned themselves are modest in their own opinions, even after a great deal more study than themselves. In describing how the learned come to epistemic modesty, Hume explicitly points out the role of sceptical doubts:

And if any of the learned be inclined, from their natural temper, to haughtiness and obstinacy, a small tincture of PYRRHONISM might abate their pride, by showing them, that the few advantages, which they may have attained over their fellows, are but inconsiderable, if compared with the universal perplexity and confusion, which is inherent in human nature.

(*EHU* 12.24; *SBN* 161. Caps in original)

For Hume, consequent scepticism reveals how confusion and error are ubiquitous in human reasoning. Hume does not cite any specific arguments, but the reference to “PYRRHONISM” indicates that he is hearkening back to those very arguments that he ran through earlier in

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<sup>106</sup> Beauchamp’s (1999, 270) gloss on “undistinguished” is “indistinct; confused”. This is a curious reading insofar as Hume does not hint at sceptical doubts being confused. In pure philosophical terms, they are potent, but they suffer psychologically and practically.

*EHU* 12. Despite the fact that there is a “confounding” objection to Pyrrhonism (*EHU* 12.23; SBN 159), it is not the case that Pyrrhonian doubts play no role in philosophy. Indeed, they play a positive, motivating role for Hume’s epistemology.

The second species of mitigated scepticism is the restriction of philosophical inquiries “to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding” (*EHU* 12.25; SBN 162). Hume is quite vague on what this species of scepticism encompasses. It seems to be a general endorsement of the very methodology that Hume has followed throughout his entire philosophical career, namely, to study items that are directly given in experience rather than to proceed via *a priori* principles. Hume rejects the usefulness of speculating on “whatever is remote and extraordinary” and what belongs to “the most distant parts of space and time” (*ibid.*). Since we cannot appeal to our experience in dealing with such topics, we cannot make any progress at all. *A priori* reasoning is limited and fails to establish the existence of objects, much less any causal connection between objects (see *EHU* 4.13; SBN 31–32).

Hume says of this second species of mitigated scepticism that it “may be the natural result of the PYRRHONIAN doubts and scruples” (*ibid.*). Hume brings up a specific sceptical doubt here. He appeals to the fact that, since ordinary causal claims cannot be indubitably justified (as per the philosophical objections to matters of fact described at *EHU* 12.22), we ought to be suspicious of *extraordinary* claims. He also identifies the realisation that extreme scepticism is only defeated psychologically and not philosophically as most “serviceable” in bringing us to this species of scepticism:

To bring us to so salutary a determination, nothing can be more serviceable, than to be once thoroughly convinced of the force of the PYRRHONIAN doubt, and of the impossibility, that any thing, but the strong power of natural instinct, could free us

from it. [...] While we cannot give a satisfactory reason, why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall, or fire burn; can we ever satisfy ourselves concerning any determination, which we may form, with regard to the origin of the worlds, and the situation of nature, from, and to eternity?

(*EHU* 12.25; SBN 162)

Hume tells us that even given this narrow limitation, there is still room to investigate the human mind, which, indeed, Hume has already occupied himself with earlier in the book (*EHU* 12.26; SBN 163). Hume goes on to conclude his *Enquiry* by stating exactly what the proper subjects of “science and enquiry” ought to be (*ibid.*). The abstract sciences are to be concerned with quantities and numbers, and all other enquiries are to handle “only matter of fact and existence” (*EHU* 12.27–28; SBN 163–64). Hume also expresses his view of theology here, which is that it has a foundation in reason insofar as it is supported by experience, but that it is rightly based on faith and revelation (*EHU* 12.32; SBN 165). So here, Hume finally arrives at the goal that he set out in the Introduction to *Treatise* (even if expressed in highly general terms), namely, an analysis of all the sciences via a science of human nature.

Contrary to Qu’s (2017) interpretation of *EHU* 12, Hume does not appeal to his new vision of philosophy to reveal that the various sceptical problems he has run through have committed some fallacy or error. Rather, he uses sceptical concerns to *motivate* that very vision. According to Qu, all the sceptical considerations in *EHU* 12 involve “methodological mistakes” (2017, 6). Qu explains that there are two kinds of methodological mistakes the Pyrrhonist commits. The Pyrrhonist infers that our faculties are never to be relied on because they are *sometimes* fallacious. Hume does indeed think that such an inference is misguided, as his rejection of the “trite” sceptical objections at *EHU* 12.6 and the “popular” objections

(original emphasis) to matters of fact at *EHU* 12.22 reveals. Qu also attributes to the Pyrrhonist the mistake of stepping beyond the appropriate bounds of the faculties, as per Hume's second species of mitigated scepticism. Qu says that identifying this methodological error allows us to see how the reasoning against the justification of the philosophical system of double existence is fallacious (2017, 6). However, Hume thinks that the sceptical predicament concerning external existence is a "profound" sceptical objection, not a trite one. For Hume, the strongest sceptical arguments are based on experimental reasoning, and this is the very sort of reasoning driving the sceptical predicament. It only takes "the slightest philosophy" to reveal the falsity of the vulgar opinion (*EHU* 12.9; SBN 152). Hume even directly appeals to his own methodology of experimental reasoning to reveal the non-justification of the philosophical system: "How shall this question [of the truth or falsity of the philosophical system] be determined? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature" (*EHU* 12.12; SBN 153). Rather than dismissing the question of the causes our perception as inappropriate, Hume thinks the fact that experience "must remain silent" on the matter provides triumph to the sceptic, and so our awareness of this sceptical problem ought to humble us.

Wright (1986) pays careful attention to the way in which Hume continues to philosophise after his crisis. But Wright's interpretation does not recognise the role that the triumph of scepticism plays in inspiring Hume's final position. Wright employs the strategy of saying that Hume intended to replace reason with the imagination as the source of justification for belief. He says that, since the belief in causal connections is "firmly rooted in the principles of the imagination ... [it] obtains thereby some epistemic validity" (1986, 419). However, Hume directly tells us that the fact that causal inferences are based on "custom ... which it is indeed difficult to resist, but which ... may be fallacious and deceitful" is a matter which provides the sceptic with "ample matter of triumph" (*EHU* 12.22; SBN 159). It is not



any “epistemic validity” that custom or the imagination provides that inspires Hume to a position of moderate scepticism, but rather, it is the fact that we inevitably continue holding beliefs and pursuing philosophy despite the fact that “we cannot give a satisfactory reason, why we believe ... that a stone will fall, or fire burn” (*EHU* 12.25; SBN 162).

To sum up now. In this chapter, I have offered an argument about Hume’s sceptical crisis as it is expressed in his *Treatise* and *Enquiry*. Hume’s sceptical crisis is an encounter with a series of doubts, the compilation of which prompt a dire temptation to reject all belief. In both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, Hume’s sceptical predicament concerning the vulgar belief and philosophical system plays a key role. Also common to both texts is a criterion challenge that emerges from the fact that mental association can operate without regard for evidence; in the *Treatise*, Hume expresses this with reference to the faculty of the imagination, and in the *Enquiry* he expresses this with reference to custom or habit. The position that Hume ends up in is one of residual scepticism. Hume accepts the irrefutability of sceptical doubts, but insists that we cannot exterminate all belief as a result of them. Hume does not think that scepticism requires the extermination of belief anyway, since he thinks that a true sceptic will not be dogmatically dismissive of philosophy. Hume does not forget or leave behind radical sceptical doubt; on the contrary, he uses such doubt to motivate diligence and modesty in philosophy. In the *Enquiry*, this comes across as two *species* of mitigated scepticism; in the *Treatise*, it is framed in terms of the recommendation to not stray far from the realm of ordinary experience and to avoid dogmatic terms like “’tis evident, ’tis certain, ’tis undeniable” (*T* 1.4.7.15; SBN 178. Original emphasis). The residually sceptical interpretation of Hume offered in this chapter is a response to challenge of attempting to understand the relation between Hume’s scepticism and his positive philosophical program.

## 5. Responding to Hume's Predicament

### 5.1 The Problem of the Vulgar Belief

So far, we have seen that Hume encounters a sceptical predicament regarding external existence, that this forms part of his wider sceptical crisis, and that he carries on philosophising as a moderate sceptic despite his momentary temptation to reject all belief. In this chapter, I consider some prominent suggestions that challenge the interpretation of Hume that I have offered. I will also develop my thoughts on Hume's predicament in *T* 1.4.7 and *EHU* 12 in this chapter. I turn my attention first to my treatment of Hume on the vulgar belief. Some Hume scholars have suggested that we can *infer* something relevant about Hume's account of objects (*vis-à-vis* scepticism) from the fact that we can practically get by with just the strictly false vulgar belief in everyday experience.

Even though Hume's predicament is one element driving his sceptical crisis, he does not overtly reference external objects, body, the vulgar, or the philosophical system, in his *response* to his crisis at *T* 1.4.7.9–15 and *EHU* 12.23–34. Hume returns to the vulgar position after his crisis, just as how at the end of *T* 1.4.2 he carries on with the supposition that, “there is both an external and internal world” (*T* 1.4.2.57; SBN 218). We ought not read this as Hume coming to believe in the philosophical system of double existence. This is apparent from the context, since Hume had just reminded his readers of the fact that the philosophical system fully depends on the compulsion towards the vulgar belief for any of its psychological influence: “our philosophical system [...] is over-and-above loaded with this absurdity, that it at once denies and establishes the vulgar supposition” (*T* 1.4.2.56; SBN 218). Furthermore, we should recall that philosophers themselves resort to the vulgar view in the course of their ordinary lives (see *T* 1.4.2.36; SBN 205; *T* 1.4.2.53; SBN 216).

In the previous chapter, I argued that Hume thinks sceptical results are not defeated, but moderated: the very fact that they are undefeated leads *not* to the abandonment of philosophy, but to epistemic modesty and the eschewal of questions that pertain to issues far removed from ordinary experience. If we narrow our view to Hume's philosophy of external existence in particular, we can say the following on his behalf: the fact that we cannot find a satisfactory account of the external world should lead us to adopt moderately sceptical attitudes. However, we may now scrutinise more closely the logic behind this. How does the outright *falsity* of the universally held vulgar opinion leave us with a moderate form of scepticism? Recall that part of Hume's response to his crisis was that scepticism itself does not dogmatically tell against engaging in philosophy. Scepticism, correctly understood, makes no dogmatic claims at all. As a sceptic of the philosophical system of double existence, Hume does not dogmatically deny that objects specifically different from perceptions exist, only that we cannot confirm whether they do or not. However, such a move is not available for the vulgar position, because causal reasoning shows that to be false. Here we can see a tension in the sceptical predicament: one half of it is only "sceptical" in the sense that it involves a negative epistemic verdict on an important belief, but it is a verdict pertaining to the truth value of that belief. When we look at the full predicament, we see that the wider problem is our failure to remedy this false belief, so we shift our focus to the philosophical system, towards which Hume adopts suspension of belief. But part of the problem is that the philosophical system represents a departure from our naturally held belief anyway.

At this point, we may contrast the problem of the vulgar belief with other sceptical concerns expressed in *T* 1.4.7 and *EHU* 12. Hume worries that the propensity of the imagination to assent to lively ideas might not track truth (in the *Enquiry*, this is not explicitly framed in terms of the imagination, but in terms of our habit of forming causal beliefs; see

*EHU* 12.22; SBN 159). We consider some lively beliefs true and others false, but we have no principled way of distinguishing between them. Hume's final position differs from what he calls "Pyrrhonism" because he does not conclude that an appropriate response to the problem is to reject philosophy as a whole. In the *Enquiry*, Hume explicitly contrasts his position with Pyrrhonism in this regard (*EHU* 12.23–25; SBN 159–62) and even in the *Treatise* he stresses the way in which his position is "truly sceptical" (*T* 1.4.7.14; SBN 273) and that "philosophy has nothing to oppose" his intellectual pursuits (*T* 1.4.7.11; SBN 270). For Hume, scepticism does indeed present a challenge, but he does not think that we are obliged to refrain from intellectual pursuits even if we cannot adequately answer the challenge.

The logic that philosophy does not dogmatically oppose sceptical doubts cannot be applied to the problem of the vulgar opinion specifically. Philosophy does indeed oppose that belief, as the experiments against the vulgar opinion testify. Despite this, Hume happily returns to philosophy after his encounter with sceptical despair. Hume seems to get by with the vulgar belief. We must remember that, as I have insisted, Hume does not resort to mere practical or psychological facts to answer questions of epistemic evaluation. For Hume, we resort to the vulgar view, we mingle in society, and we are able to manipulate the world and engage in intellectual pursuits, but we can make no inroads towards solving the problem of the falsity of the vulgar belief.

At this point, two interpretive options for solving the problem of the vulgar appear. Firstly, an interpretive temptation may arise to seek for, on Hume's behalf, a philosophical theory that would explain why we can successfully engage with the world despite the falsity of the vulgar opinion. Maria Magoula Adamos (2014), while not actually advocating that we *read* Hume as endorsing the philosophical system, represents the issue at hand. In the following quotation, Magoula Adamos lumps together Hume's treatment of substance and modern philosophy, but the underlying point about the philosophical system is pertinent:

So, according to Hume, the vulgar is in contradiction when she ascribes identity to objects. If this is the case, I do not see what is wrong with the philosophical system, since to all appearances it seems to actually salvage the vulgar system from contradiction by creating the notions of *substance* and *prime matter*. For, according to Hume this is exactly what the philosophical system *ought* to be doing; namely, to “approach nearer to the sentiments of the vulgar” [T 1.4.3.9; SBN 222].

(Magoula Adamos 2014, 71. Original emphasis)

The philosophical system is an attempt to correct the vulgar belief. While it might be strictly unjustified, it is not provably false, and does it not at least explain the fact that we practically succeed in getting by in the world? Magoula Adamos cites Hume’s description of the true philosopher at T 1.4.3.9 as motivation for her complaint. The same point may be made with reference to what Hume says in the *Enquiry* about philosophical methodology (see Kail 2010/2007, 69). Philosophy, according to Hume, is to begin with observation and experiment and should aim to solve problems and resolve contradictions. Hume describes all philosophical inquiry when he says: “philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, *methodized and corrected*” (EHU 12.25; SBN 162. Added emphasis). Is it not the case that the system of double existence both methodises and corrects the vulgar system? As Hume says, the philosophical system tacitly confirms (or “establishes”) the vulgar system by admitting that there are some D&C existences (T 1.4.2.56; SBN 218). Should Hume not then admit that there is indeed an explanatory justification for believing in the double existence of perceptions and objects? Hume may still admit that we entertain the vulgar opinion, but the question at hand is whether Hume should officially endorse the philosophical system in order to explain our ability to seemingly manipulate the world and

engage with what seem to be real objects and other people. Hume could still admit that reason is not the source of the belief in body (as he says at *T* 1.4.2.14), but he could admit that there is a *post-hoc* justification for it, and this is all that is needed to silence the sceptic or satisfy those who wonder about the justification of the belief. Schnall (2004) makes the same point in different terms: rather than moving from the vulgar to the philosophical system, we should realise that that the vulgar belief in D&C existences is itself explanatorily justified, “because it provides a framework for explaining the constancy and coherence, as well as other aspects, of our experience” (2004, 46).

As much as Magoula Adamos, Kail and Schnall offer an enticing option, there is not the least suggestion in the text that Hume goes down this route. Magoula Adamos acknowledges this, since she accuses Hume of an oversight. Schnall also admits, “Perhaps Hume did not recognize this way of justifying a hypothesis” (2004, 46). There is a clear alternative that is textually supported, which is that Hume simply thinks the problem of external existence is one we cannot adequately answer. The problem of the vulgar opinion still remains, and the temptation to solve it may appear, but Hume does not ever hint at giving into this temptation himself.

An alternative to positing an explanatory justification to circumvent the problem of the vulgar belief would be to analyse that belief in such a way that Hume would not find it to engender a sceptical problem. This is the route taken by Ainslie (2015), as he holds that Hume’s treatment of the vulgar belief “should not be construed as being essentially sceptical” (2015, 108). Even though he concedes that the vulgar belief is false for Hume, Ainslie draws a distinction between *constitutive* and *epistemic* errors in order to show that the belief is not problematic. Ainslie exploits the fact that the vulgar do not actively consider the immediate items of experience to be perceptions in order to make this distinction. For Ainslie, an epistemic error involves making a false claim about an object that one has in mind. A

constitutive error, by contrast, involves making a strictly false claim about the bare image content of a perception. Ainslie provides an illustration of a television set. By taking what are *in fact* mere digital pixels to represent a person or a place, we are committing a constitutive error. But it is not a regrettable fact about ourselves that we fail to distinguish individual pixels; it is precisely what enables the possibility of televisual communication.

Ainslie's illustration shows how a strictly false belief can still be practically beneficial. One limitation of the analogy, however, is that televisual technology is an invention that was designed with an end result in mind. To complete the analogy, then, we would have to read Hume as believing in the providence of nature for the vindication of the vulgar belief. As remarked in Section 1.1.3, such a view does not seem a satisfactory solution because it remains to be seen *what feature* of nature would ensure this providence? So, while Ainslie's suggestion is useful for explaining why Hume is not more perturbed by the falsity of the vulgar belief than he is, I reject Ainslie's inference that Hume's treatment of the vulgar belief is "not essentially sceptical". The falsity of the vulgar opinion is not a mere technical error for Hume. He appeals to the problem of the falsity of the vulgar belief in both *T* 1.4.7 and *EHU* 12 to motivate his moderate sceptical position. When Hume reminds us that "a small tincture of PYRRHONISM" (*EHU* 12.24; SBN 161) may abate our immodesty, he is referring to efficacious sceptical considerations, such as the "profound" objections to the evidence of sense (*EHU* 12.6; SBN 151). Hume's view, I maintain, is that we ordinarily believe in D&C existences because the vulgar belief is a universal belief. As a compulsive belief, the vulgar is believed despite the fact that we can easily become aware of its defectiveness. This very fact, Hume thinks, ought to inspire us to adopt moderately sceptical attitudes. In brief, Hume does not repudiate scepticism pertaining to systems of external existence, but he remains true to his intention to follow the rule that, "In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism" (*T* 1.4.7.11; SBN 270).

In the next section of this chapter, I will explore the possibility that a simple revision of Hume's philosophy allows him to avoid his sceptical predicament. Loeb (2002) has proposed that Hume can easily take the vulgar belief in the D&C existence of perceptions to be *true*. The relevance of Loeb's proposal for my thesis is that the sceptical predicament might actually be easily dispensable for Hume. As observed in Section 2.3.1, the inadequacy of Hume's reasoning against the vulgar belief has been commonly cited since Price's (1940) study of Hume's views of external objects. Loeb exploits the very fact of this inadequacy, and so I understand Loeb's proposal as putting flesh on the bones of a strategy that has been pondered by many of Hume's readers.

In the previous chapter, I defended my sceptical reading of Hume largely by paying close attention to the texts of *T* 1.4.7 and *EHU* 12. In Section 5.3, I will go through some prominent suggestions from the secondary literature on how we should read Hume's scepticism. For Ainslie (2015) and Garrett (1997), Hume finds a robust, normative solution to sceptical doubt in his response to his sceptical crisis. In Section 5.3.1, I will examine Ainslie's (2015) reading of Hume's *true* scepticism. This reading uses the tripartite distinction between a vulgar position, a false philosophical position, and a true philosophical position (which Hume draws at *T* 1.4.3.9 (SBN 222–23)) to read Hume's scepticism as a whole. Ainslie holds that the central advantage of his reading, in contrast to more sceptical readings, is that it solves the problem of integrating Hume's despairing sceptical moments into his philosophy as a whole (recall Section 4.1.2). Garrett (1997) blunts the force of scepticism by employing the following strategy on Hume's behalf: the *reflexivity* of scepticism means that it is self-defeating and this fact ought to give way to a non-sceptical approach to philosophy. I will address the issue of the reflexivity of scepticism in Section 5.3.2 below.



In Section 5.4, I will look at Hakkarainen's (2012a; 2012b) sceptical reading of Hume of objects. I take Hakkarainen to be representative of the position that Hume should simply be characterised as expressing different and inconsistent attitudes in different domains. According to Hakkarainen, the most basic interpretive challenge to do with reading Hume on objects is to reconcile seemingly inconsistent positions. Hume cannot both hold a belief and accept that a belief ought to be rejected at the same time. Hakkarainen argues that the only successful readings of Hume will be one that accounts for the possibility of Hume positing different views. These are what Hakkarainen calls 'no-single Hume' interpretations. I will object to some of the specifics of Hakkarainen's reading of Hume on objects and I will show the way in which the residually sceptical reading of Hume differs from, and fares better than, the approach according to which he has different views in different *domains* of inquiry, as Hakkarainen suggests. In Section 5.5, I will conclude with a recapitulation of my views and their significance.

## 5.2 Amending Hume's Metaphysics

Loeb (2002) presents an amended version of *T* 1.4.2 on which the vulgar belief is understood to be true for Hume. In proposing this amendment, Loeb frankly acknowledges that he is offering a revision of Hume's philosophy and not a reading of his actual position. Loeb's amendment is highly relevant because he claims that it is "by and large secured without abandoning principles fundamental to Hume's project" (2002, 214). If Loeb's proposal can be secured so easily, then Hume's sceptical predicament *could* have been fairly easily avoided, even if Hume himself did not realise how to do this. Loeb's amendment to *T* 1.4.2 involves exploiting the weakness of Hume's experimental reasoning against the vulgar belief.

According to Loeb, while there is ample textual and historical evidence that Hume rejected direct realism as a non-starter (that is, that he took it for granted that the immediate

objects of experience are perceptions only), only a single paragraph (*T* 1.4.2.45; SBN 210–11) establishes Hume’s commitment to perceptions lacking D&C existence (2002, 208–09). Hume is officially open to the possibility of perceptions enjoying D&C existence, as he explicitly states at *T* 1.4.2.40 (SBN 207–08). This possibility is a result of Hume’s conceivability principle (see *T* 1.1.7.6; SBN 19–20; *T* 1.2.2.8; SBN 32; *T* 1.4.5.5; SBN 233).<sup>107</sup> Since Hume is open to perceptions enjoying D&C existence and he offers only a weak argument against the fact that they do, Loeb suggests that making the vulgar belief true for Hume would not involve a farfetched distortion. Loeb maintains that an advantage of amending *T* 1.4.2 in this way is that it would solve the puzzle about Hume appealing to constancy and coherence as *separate* qualities of perceptual experience that give rise to the vulgar belief. In this section, I will argue that making the belief in the D&C existence of perceptions true would represent a contravention of the fundamentals of Hume’s philosophy. Opting out of the sceptical predicament is not as easy for Hume as Loeb suggests.

Recall that Hume appeals to both coherence and constancy as distinct qualities of our perceptions that explain the origins of the vulgar belief. It would be more parsimonious to identify a *single* quality of perceptions that explains the belief in body, and it seems plausible to count constancy as a type of coherence. The coherence of our perceptual experience means that any changes we observe in perceptions when they have been interrupted accord with our wider system of beliefs. In the case of interrupted but *constant* perceptions, there are no changes, but if this accords with our expectation that there *should be* no changes, then constancy just seems like a special case of coherence (Loeb, thus, describes constancy as “monotonous coherence” (2002, 179)). Loeb argues that Hume’s requirement that the vulgar belief be false prevented him from subsuming constancy under coherence (2002, 191–92).

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<sup>107</sup> Hume mentions this possibility at *T* 1.4.2.40 (SBN 207–08) while defending the claim that it is possible to mistakenly *think* that our perceptions enjoy D&C existence. It is not inherently contradictory for perceptions to have such existence, so it is both conceivable and possible.

The psychological process by which a mind moves from the coherence of perceptions to the belief in existence of D&C perceptions is a type of causal reasoning, which, under normal circumstances, produces justified belief for Hume (2002, 198–99).<sup>108</sup> But it would be intolerable for the vulgar belief to be knowably false *and* justified because of causal reasoning. Different psychological mechanisms, therefore, have to be in play in cases of the mind responding to the coherence and constancy of perceptions. Constancy and coherence have to be considered separate qualities that work in tandem to produce the vulgar belief. The psychological mechanism at play in cases of the constancy of our perceptions is not causal reasoning, but identity ascription (Loeb 2002, 139–47). Crucially, Hume is not committed to the identify-ascribing mechanism producing justified beliefs. Indeed, this mechanism tends to produce decidedly unjustified beliefs.<sup>109</sup>

Hume explains constancy by saying that objects with this quality, “present themselves in the same uniform manner, and change not upon account of any interruption in my seeing or perceiving them” (*T* 1.4.2.18; SBN 195).<sup>110</sup> He takes the example of “mountains, and houses, and trees” as such constant items (*T* 1.4.2.18; SBN 194). The quality of the coherence of our perceptions, by contrast, works in the following way. Loeb defines the “coherence” of perceptions as, “their conforming to a regularity in their temporal sequence irrespective of any interruptions in their observation” (2002, 178). This feature of our experience interacts with a psychological mechanism that Loeb calls “custom-and-galley” to make us believe that things exist and interact with other things in the world even when they are not currently

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<sup>108</sup> See Loeb (2002, 60–65) for an outline of his views on Hume on the justification of causal reasoning. On Loeb’s interpretation, Hume takes justification to depend on the *stability* of belief; so causal reasoning, for Hume according to Loeb, tends to produce stable beliefs under normal conditions.

<sup>109</sup> See Loeb (2002, 154–62) for his reasoning behind the claim that the identity-ascribing propensity tends to lead to produce unjustified beliefs. Loeb’s main evidence is taken from the section of the *Treatise* on the ancient philosophical view of substance (*T* 1.4.3).

<sup>110</sup> That *constancy* could play a role in explaining the vulgar belief occurs to Hume because it is a distinguishing feature of those perceptions to which the vulgar attribute D&C existence (recall that the vulgar admit that pains and pleasures lack D&C existence; see *T* 1.4.2.12; SBN 192).

perceived by us (2002, 186).<sup>111</sup> In a fairly detailed illustration, Hume shows how we come to such a supposition by reconciling otherwise contradictory aspects of experience. Hume supposes that he hears a knocking on a door and then sees a porter. He describes how his mind would immediately come to consider the existence of particular objects because of past experience: the door exists, even though he only hears a knock, and the porter must have climbed the stairs to get to the door. Hume then describes how he opens a letter, perceives the hand-writing, and thinks of the existence of his friend two-hundred leagues away, and how seas and lands must exist between him and them.<sup>112</sup> Hume generalises the point by saying, “There is scarce a moment of my life, wherein there is not a similar instance presented to me” (*T* 1.4.2.20; SBN 197).

Loeb holds that the experiments given at *T* 1.4.2.45 do not effectively secure the result that perceptions lack D&C existence because they fail to rule out a relevant metaphysical possibility. To quickly revise the one experiment that Hume takes time to explicate (see also Section 2.3.1), Hume tells us that when we press an eye-ball with a finger that a double vision is produced. Since we know that one of the visions definitely does not have continued existence – existing only for a moment and being entirely dependent on the manipulation of our organs – and that the original image and the duplicate must be of the same nature, we can conclude that all our ordinary perceptions lack continued existence (and therefore do not enjoy distinct existence either).<sup>113</sup> But Loeb thinks that the experiments only

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<sup>111</sup> The name “custom-and-galley” derives from the following remark of Hume’s: “the imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse. [...] The same principle makes us easily entertain this opinion of the continu’d existence of body. Objects have a certain coherence even as they appear to our senses; but this coherence is much greater and more uniform, if we suppose the objects to have a continu’d existence; and as the mind is once in the train of observing an uniformity among objects, it naturally continues, till it renders the uniformity as compleat as possible” (*T* 1.4.2.22; SBN 198).

<sup>112</sup> Hume also presents a simpler illustration: “When I return to my chamber after an hour’s absence, I find not my fire in the same situation, in which I left it: But then I am accustom’d in other instances to see a like alteration produc’d in a like time, whether I am present or absent, near or remote. This coherence, therefore, in their changes is one of the characteristics of external objects, as well as their constancy” (*T* 1.4.2.19; SBN 195).

<sup>113</sup> Hume claims that there are “an infinite number of other experiments of the same kind” as this double vision experiment (*T* 1.4.2.45; SBN 211).

show that particular perceptions are members of particular *bundles* at a given time, not that such perceptions are dependent on a mind for their very existence:

[...] we can form the following metaphysical picture: perceptions do have a continued and distinct or independent existence; some perceptions are members of a particular bundle of perceptions at a given time; and that a particular perception is a member of a particular bundle at a given time does depend, in part, on conditions internal to that bundle. In Price's [1940, 114–15] terminology, facts about the perceiver do not *generate* perceptions, they *select* perceptions for inclusion in a bundle. Though facts about the perceiver cause perceptions to be members of, to enter, a bundle, the existence of perceptions does not depend upon facts about the perceiver. This picture, in which perceptions do have a continued and distinct existence, is consistent with the "experimental" facts.

(Loeb 2002, 211. Original emphasis)

The essential idea behind this generation/selection distinction is that conditions about a percipient's organs may be a factor in determining *which* perceptions are given to the mind, but, according to this construal, it does *not* follow that the perceptions *do not exist unless* they are given to the particular mind for which they have been selected. Loeb insists that neglecting to consider this possibility is an oversight on Hume's part, especially considering that Hume's openness to the bare possibility of D&C perceptions was a distinctive feature of his philosophy (in contrast to Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, and Berkeley) (2002, 210).

Loeb maintains that his amendment involves a minimal revision of Hume's overall metaphysics of perception. His amendment is designed to account for the belief in D&C existences while maintaining that our experiences are fleeting and interrupted. For Loeb,

instead of Hume saying, in a case of the constancy of our perceptions, that the imagination leads us to believe that a present mountain (for instance) is identical with a past mountain, Hume should say that we imaginatively *infer* the existence of D&C mountain. The same psychological mechanism would be at work, then, in the cases of constancy and coherence.<sup>114</sup>

I object to Loeb's suggestion on the following grounds. While Loeb's amendment makes the belief in the D&C existence of perceptions true, to suggest that the vulgar infer the existence of perceptions comes at the cost of misconstruing the vulgar belief itself. The vulgar sometimes infer the D&C existence of perceptions (such as in the case of inferring the existence of the porter and the stairs described at *T* 1.4.2.20), but it cannot be the case that the vulgar belief always works like this. The vulgar belief sometimes involves attributing D&C existence to immediately experienced *impressions*. By modelling the vulgar belief on inference, Loeb's amendment threatens to undermine this fact about the phenomenology of the belief. The vulgar believe that the immediate objects of their experience enjoy D&C existence: they ascribe identity to what are, in fact, resembling but numerically distinct perceptions. But on Loeb's amendment, the vulgar effectively believe in double existence. The vulgar belief would be *technically* true because the objects that are inferred to exist are themselves perceptions. Loeb even acknowledges that his amendment would entail a modification of Hume's explanation of the genesis of the philosophical system (2002, 212, n. 46). Instead of the philosophical system arising from the realisation of the falsity of the vulgar belief, it would have to arise from the philosopher's *mistaken* view that the vulgar is false. There is a deeper problem though, which is that, on Loeb's amendment, Hume thinks we can justifiably infer the existence of objects that are never the objects of experience. Consider Hume's own illustrations of the constancy of perceptions. Hume takes the case of

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<sup>114</sup> Since the inference to the D&C existence of perceptions is the product of an imaginative mechanism, and not the product of step-wise reasoning, Loeb's amendment can account for Hume's claim at *T* 1.4.2.14 that the vulgar belief is not the result of *argument*.

“mountains ... which lie at present under my eye” that do not change even though the experience of them is interrupted (*T* 1.4.2.18; SBN 194). Because of the resemblance between a present impression and past impressions, the vulgar hold that the present impression enjoys D&C existence. The vulgar do not imagine that there is *something over and above* their present impression.

An alternative to inferring the existence of unperceived perceptions would be to infer that the perceptions that the vulgar *do experience* enjoy D&C existence. Loeb could draw the following distinction in order to account for the *experience* of the vulgar being interrupted but the *objects of their experience* enjoying D&C existence. We may distinguish, on Hume’s behalf, between perception-objects and perception-activities, where the latter refers to the experiences that belong to a perceiver and the former refers to intentional objects of experience. Perception-activities can be interrupted, for example, by blinking or turning one’s head, but a perception-object could enjoy continued existence through this interruption. In a case of turning one’s head, the very same perception-object would be present both before and after the interruption. If we inferred the D&C existence of perceptions in this way, then the criticism about transforming the vulgar opinion into a double existence theory would no longer apply. But it comes at the cost of abandoning some of Hume’s other metaphysical commitments. In his account of the psychology of the vulgar belief, Hume proceeds on the basis that we experience numerically *different* and merely resembling perceptions. It is this that would have to be abandoned on the present suggestion. So Loeb could no longer claim to be amending an aberrant commitment to some fallacious experiments.

Overall, it is not so easy for Loeb to single out the falsity of the vulgar opinion as the result of neglecting the metaphysical picture he proposes. That picture is, essentially, orthogonal to the vulgar opinion. Loeb is right to realise that Hume offers a hasty argument for the falsity of the vulgar opinion (in Section 2.3.1, I claimed that Hume clearly fails to

attend to any differences between the double-vision experiment and what he calls the “infinite number” of perceptual relativity experiments). There is a leap being made, though, from realising a deficiency with Hume’s experiments, to offering a way for Hume to positively infer the D&C existence of perceptions. These D&C perceptions are either the direct items of experience or not. If they are not, then the vulgar belief is being amended into a double existence theory. If they are, then Hume is denying that we experience numerically different and merely resembling objects in experience.

Hume appeals to what seem to be perfunctory considerations to establish the dependency of perceptions. My diagnosis for this is that Hume’s conceivability principle forces him to concede that perceptions can exist independently of any given mind, but that he actually believes that the perceptions of any given mind must be dependent on that mind for their existence. One of Hume’s remarks in the *Enquiry* is enlightening here. As he disparages the philosophical system of double existence, he says that the manner in which external objects and minds are supposed to interact is inscrutable:

And nothing can be more inexplicable than the manner, in which body should so operate upon mind as ever to convey an image of itself to a substance, supposed of so different, and even contrary a nature.

(*EHU* 12.11; SBN 153).

Although this is officially presented as a problem with the philosophical system, I suggest that we can see a wider point here. Hume himself struggles to come to terms with *how* mind and objects outside the mind could interact. This problem does not arise with the vulgar, because the objects that are given D&C existence just *are* the direct perceptions of the mind. But they are *mind-dependent* perceptions. As I emphasised in Section 2.2, Hume appeals to



observation – what he would have considered *experimentation* – in order to establish the dependency of perceptions. We may consider these experiments to be cursory, but they express Hume’s conviction that a mind’s perceptions are dependent on that mind in the style of philosophical argumentation that he would have considered appropriate.

### 5.3 Hume’s “True” Scepticism

#### 5.3.1 The True/False/Vulgar Distinction

In this section, rather than considering a reinterpretation of the vulgar belief, I will consider whether any of the philosophical points Hume makes about scepticism might resolve his sceptical predicament (we may refer to Hume’s expressions of such points as his *philosophy of scepticism* or his views on the *nature* of scepticism). Ainslie (2015) offers an original and insightful treatment of *T* 1.4. For Ainslie, all of *T* 1.4 consists in a defence of a model of the mind on which we do not superintend over our beliefs, choosing which ones to accept and which ones to eschew, and also on which we do not normally cognise our perceptions *as such* in perceptual experience (2015, 7). Ainslie also holds that, in *T* 1.4, Hume makes a *metaphilosophical argument* concerning the urge that humans have to systematise and structure fundamental beliefs, such as beliefs about external objects, causation, and personal identity (ibid).

Ainslie analyses the structure of *T* 1.4 as follows: Hume first treats scepticism as it pertains to the faculty of reason and then of the senses in *T* 1.4.1 and *T* 1.4.2, and then deals with specific accounts of external and internal worlds in *T* 1.4.3–6.<sup>115</sup> Ainslie sees both *T* 1.4.1 and *T* 1.4.2 as revealing the imperviousness of belief to sceptical arguments by

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<sup>115</sup> The accounts of the external world investigated in *T* 1.4 are the theories of substance (1.4.3) and primary qualities (1.4.4). The accounts of the internal world are the immaterial soul (1.4.5) and the continuing self (1.4.6).

showing that those arguments depend on, and exploit, a false model of the mind (2015, 148–50).

Ainslie offers a modified version of a *dialectical reading* of *T* 1.4.7, which he dubs the “philosophical” interpretation. Ainslie’s reading is intended, in part, to diminish the influence of sceptical doubts on Hume’s final, considered position compared to the sceptical reading of that section (recall that Ainslie thinks such readings are hopelessly susceptible to the integration problem) (2015, 237). According to dialectical approaches to *T* 1.4.7, Hume reveals his central thesis rhetorically, by the movement of his thought – as if he takes his reader on a journey – rather than directly stating his view. The chief advocate of such a reading is Baier (1991).<sup>116</sup> Dialectical readings highlight the way in which philosophical reflection can move us from a *false* philosophical position to a *true* philosophical position (as Hume explicitly does at *T* 1.4.3.9 (SBN 222–23)). According to the dialectical approach to *T* 1.4.7, Hume shows us how we can be tempted towards a false philosophical outlook, but then reveals its erroneousness. By doing so, Hume reveals the need for an alternative, true philosophy. Ainslie maintains that his reading solves the integration problem, that is, the challenge of integrating Hume’s sceptical moments into his philosophy as a whole (described more fully in Section 4.1.2 above). There is a difference between the false philosophical position that reaches an entirely negative epistemic outlook on human reasoning, and the true philosophical position that avoids such a conclusion.

Ainslie’s *philosophical* interpretation sees Hume as showing in *T* 1.4.7 that we are not *normally* in a position in which we are aware of the imagination’s associative mechanisms and how they are responsible for our beliefs. For Ainslie, this is precisely why sceptical worries are impermanent. When we dine and play backgammon, we no longer cognise our

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<sup>116</sup> Ainslie (2015, 235) also briefly alludes to Morris (2000) as one who offers ideas suggestive of a dialectical interpretation.

perceptions *as such* (see *T* 1.4.7.9; SBN 269). The false philosopher thinks that we must find an answer to sceptical worries, or else reject our beliefs altogether. The true philosopher, by contrast, falls back on “indolence and pleasure” (*T* 1.4.7.10; SBN 270). Ainslie’s approach would allow that when Hume expresses his sceptical predicament, he is adopting the non-natural position in which we superintend over our beliefs. Correspondingly, the return to a belief in “both an external and internal world” (at *T* 1.4.2.57) would represent this rejection of a false model of the mind.

Ainslie concedes that, for Hume, the sceptical doubts of *T* 1.4.7.3–7 express unanswerable but still *legitimate* philosophical questions (2015, 240). Ainslie maintains, though, that the unanswerability of these questions is a problem for philosophy, not ordinary life (*ibid.*). My view is similar to Ainslie’s, insofar as I agree that Hume thinks it is impossible to repudiate all belief and that he continues to pursue philosophy after his sceptical crisis. I reject, however, Ainslie’s attempt to minimise the significance of scepticism for Hume’s final, considered outlook.

I proceed as follows in the remainder of this sub-section. Firstly, I show that there are substantial textual limitations to using the vulgar/true/false philosophy distinction to read *T* 1.4.7. Secondly, I explain how what Ainslie calls “the integration problem” is not a problem that applies to some particular interpretations of Hume’s scepticism; on the contrary, since Hume concedes the triumph of scepticism, some version of the integration problem can always be raised against him.

There is a substantial lack of textual evidence for Hume appealing to something like the vulgar/true/false philosophy distinction in *T* 1.4.7. There are two usages of the word “false” in *T* 1.4.7: in the despairing response to the dangerous dilemma at *T* 1.4.7.7 (SBN 268) (“We have ... no choice left but betwixt a false reason, and none at all”) and when Hume is contrasting philosophy with superstition at *T* 1.4.7.13 (SBN 272) (he says that even

when philosophy is “false and extravagant” it does not disturb our ordinary lives, but superstition does). There are no usages of the word “vulgar” in this section, even though, as I have shown in the previous chapter, the vulgar opinion in D&C existence features as part of Hume’s sceptical predicament in *T* 1.4.7.3–4. At *T* 1.4.7.14, Hume does indeed describe the *true* sceptic:

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 overwhelm’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 convictions; and will never refuse any innocent satisfaction, which offers itself, upon account of either of them.

(*T* 1.4.7.14; SBN 273)

The references to “truly sceptical” conduct and to a “true sceptic” who is *diffident* (apprehensive, or wary) of his or her sceptical doubts suggest that there is an authentic version of scepticism that emerges from *T* 1.4.7. The context indicates that Hume himself identifies with such a sceptic, so we cannot reject Ainslie’s approach by saying that Hume is describing a view that he does not endorse. At *T* 1.4.7.10–15, Hume recommends a return to philosophy with new, avowedly sceptical principles, and at *T* 1.4.7.11 he reveals how central scepticism is to his overall philosophical program. The natural implication is that, by describing the true sceptical attitude, Hume is describing the “proper” way of conducting philosophy that he endorses as he makes his return from sceptical despair (*T* 1.4.7.15; SBN 273).

We can perceive the substantial limitations to using the vulgar/true/false philosophy distinction to read *T* 1.4.7 by realising that there is a mismatch between the problems that Hume presents in *T* 1.4.7 and *T* 1.4.3.9 (which is the paragraph in which Hume actually draws the distinction). At *T* 1.4.3.9, Hume describes the true and false philosophical positions as responses to the vulgar supposition of causal realism.<sup>117</sup> At the point in question in *T* 1.4.3, Hume is discussing “*occult qualities*”, which are invisible and unsensed causal powers (*T* 1.4.3.8; SBN 222. Original emphasis). Hume says that these powers are posited by a false philosophical position, but are rejected by a true philosophical position.<sup>118</sup> Ainslie thinks that Hume presenting a movement from false philosophy to true philosophy in *T* 1.4.3 is the best corroborating evidence for the dialectical reading of *T* 1.4.7 (2015, 234). However, the resemblance between *T* 1.4.7 and *T* 1.4.3.9 is highly superficial. The type of difficulty encountered by realising the falsity of the vulgar supposition of causal realism is different in kind to the epistemological worries that trouble Hume in *T* 1.4.7. In both *T* 1.4.7 and *T* 1.4.3.9, Hume describes a return to “indolence”, but I claim that the indolence that we should understand to be present in *T* 1.4.7 is different to the indolence of the true philosopher in *T* 1.4.3.9.

To give the original passage full context, in *T* 1.4.3.9 Hume says that the belief in *substance* is related to the belief in “*occult qualities*” (original emphasis). He then details three positions. The vulgar mistakenly believe that they are unproblematically and directly aware of causal powers in their experiences of events. For Hume, this mistaken belief is a result of the mere custom of anticipating an effect upon experience of its cause. Both the *true and false* philosophers recognise that there are no *direct* experiences of causal powers. The false philosophers, however, desire there to be more to causation than the mind developing a

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<sup>117</sup> Causal realism in this context refers to the existence of *robust* causal connections or what Blackburn (2007/1990) calls “thick” causal connections (that is, causation that goes above mere regularity). See also *T* 1.3.2.9–11; SBN 76–77; *T* 1.3.14.3–6; SBN 156–58; *EHU* 7.3–5; SBN 62–63.

<sup>118</sup> Specifically, the true philosopher holds that such powers are *inconceivable*.

customary inference between items that are frequently conjoined in experience. We may refer to *T* 1.4.7.5 to gain a fuller understanding of such a desire: Hume says that disappointment results when we discover that the “ultimate principle” in cases of cause and effect does not reside directly in objects at all (*T* 1.4.7.5; SBN 266). The false philosopher tries to satisfy him or herself by positing secret, invisible powers, but, according to Hume, we have no positive idea of such things and no reason to believe in them. The true philosopher, by contrast, draws a “just conclusion” from the realisation that the vulgar are in error, which is simply that we lack any idea of causal powers in objects (*T* 1.4.3.9; SBN 223). Hume says that the true philosopher “returns to” a similar position to the vulgar, since neither are troubled about the question of causal connections between objects: the true philosopher “[regards] all these disquisitions with indolence and indifference” (*ibid.*).<sup>119</sup>

The true and false philosophers are united by their realisation of the misplaced naïvety of the vulgar. However, the problem in *T* 1.4.3.9 is not analogous to the problem in *T* 1.4.7. The naïve vulgar view in *T* 1.4.3.9 is that we can directly perceive causal powers. This is swiftly resolved in the space of one paragraph, and Hume endorses the position of the true philosopher by calling the rejection of any clear idea of causal power a “just” conclusion. The various sceptical problems recounted in *T* 1.4.7, by contrast, offer sweeping, negative epistemic assessments of the products of the imagination. Although Hume does not identify any “vulgar” position in *T* 1.4.7, the most plausible candidate for a position that both true and false philosophers reject would be naïve confidence in the veracity of human psychological faculties. On Ainslie’s view, the false philosopher is supposed to represent the radical sceptic. A similarity between *T* 1.4.3.9 and *T* 1.4.7 is that Hume is content to regard disquisitions

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<sup>119</sup> In the context of *T* 1.4.3, the disquisitions concern questions about causal realism. Concerning causal realism, the vulgar naïvely imagine there are powers, the false philosophers posit occult qualities, and the true philosophers deny causal realism. The true and false philosophers share the rejection of naïve causal realism, but the true philosophers have “return’d” to situation of the vulgar because they are not fazed by the lack of discernible powers in objects.

about causal realism in *T* 1.4.3.9 with “indolence” and he describes his return to philosophy in *T* 1.4.7 as the result of “indolence and pleasure” (*T* 1.4.7.10; SBN 269). However, Hume does not dismiss the radical sceptic in *T* 1.4.7 in the same way that he dismisses the false philosopher and the theory of occult qualities in *T* 1.4.3.9. On the contrary, Hume holds that philosophy should become sceptical in virtue of the insolubility of the epistemological problems that he encounters in his sceptical crisis.

At *T* 1.4.7.5, Hume expresses the disappointment that is attached to the falsity of causal realism. But the problem of *T* 1.4.7.5 has to do with the negative *epistemological implications* of the conclusion of the true philosophy that is endorsed in *T* 1.4.3.9. At *T* 1.4.7.4, Hume cites the conflict between causal reasoning and the belief in the D&C existence (*T* 1.4.7.4; SBN 265–66). Hume begins *T* 1.4.7.5 by saying the conflict *would* be excusable if there were “solidity and satisfaction in the other parts of our reasoning” (*T* 1.4.7.5; SBN 266). Hume then goes on to reiterate how such satisfaction cannot be found. Our search for ultimate causal principles is simply thwarted when we arrive at the conclusion that we do not even have a clear idea of a causal power that could belong to an object (the very conclusion that Hume had called “just” in *T* 1.4.3.9). Hume, therefore, *compounds* the disappointment attached to our inability to discover ultimate causal principles on top of the previous worries raised in *T* 1.4.7 in order to draw a negative, epistemological result about the faculty of imagination. So, we may characterise the true philosopher in *T* 1.4.3.9 as one who does not pursue the search for what is not there, but, in *T* 1.4.7, Hume’s finds himself disillusioned with the true philosopher’s position.

It may be insisted that the upshot of Ainslie’s reading is that he offers a satisfactory response to the integration problem. Ainslie rejects sceptical readings of *T* 1.4.7 because, he claims, any version of such a reading will fail to solve this problem. Ainslie says (in the context of criticising Broughton’s (2004) reading, in particular): “[if] Hume is committed to

the negative verdicts about his beliefs ... [then] no amount of irony or detachment will avoid the integration problem” (2015, 228). For Ainslie, it will not work to say that Hume pursues philosophy but remains detached from his results because of his abiding scepticism. He thinks that Hume cannot seriously accept the negative assessments expressed in his sceptical crisis without compromising the integrity of his project.

Recall that the integration problem (in the context of the *Treatise*) encompasses the following issues: that Hume is not entitled to continue philosophising given his response to scepticism; that Hume is not entitled to not abandon the results already established in Book One of the *Treatise*; and that Hume does not refer to the sceptical worries of *T* 1.4.7 or his response to them again in Books Two and Three of the *Treatise*. Ainslie claims that these are problems that emerge for the sceptical reading of *T* 1.4.7 specifically, since, according to such readings, Hume finds no way to dismiss the insolubility of sceptical problems.<sup>120</sup> My response to the charge that the residually sceptical reading fails to solve the integration problem is that this reading captures Hume’s own response to scepticism, as expressed at *T* 1.4.7 and *EHU* 12. In both texts, Hume describes his vision for an experimental approach to philosophy (which, as I have emphasised, he takes to be an outcome of his confrontation with scepticism). As argued in Sections 4.2.2 and 4.3.2 above, when Hume responds to scepticism, he provides a rationale for rejecting Pyrrhonism (which is to say, he provides a rationale for rejecting the abandonment of belief as a response to sceptical problems). Hume thinks it is not even *possible* to abandon belief in the way that Pyrrhonists claim we must (*T* 1.4.7.9–10; SBN 269–70; *EHU* 12.23; SBN 159–60). He adds that philosophy brings psychological pleasure with it and that it has practical utility (*T* 1.4.7.10–11; SBN 269–70; *EHU* 12.24; SBN 161). In the *Treatise*, Hume also says that it is *inevitable* that we will wonder about

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<sup>120</sup> Ainslie acknowledges that he is burdened with addressing the integration problem because he wants to acknowledge that the sceptical reading gets *something* right about *T* 1.4.7 (as indeed do the naturalist and dialectical readings for him) (2015, 237). Ainslie thinks any reading of *T* 1.4.7 ought not diminish the place of Hume’s sceptical doubts too much.



answers to philosophical questions (*T* 1.4.7.12; SBN 270–71) and that we might as well pursue philosophy *instead of* superstition (*T* 1.4.7.13; SBN 271–72). In the *Enquiry*, Hume offers an explication of two species of mitigated scepticism (*EHU* 12.24–26; SBN 161–63) and a lengthier and more substantial description of philosophical methodology than he offers in the *Treatise* (*EHU* 12.27–34; SBN 163–65). We may find Hume’s attempt to legitimate his continuation of philosophy unsatisfactory. I think, however, that this should be considered a criticism of Hume’s philosophy, rather than a point against the correct interpretation of his philosophy. I maintain that we ought not appeal to a parallel to *T* 1.4.3.9 in *T* 1.4.7 since such a reading is not textually supported.

To understand the issue at hand, we may consider residual scepticism as applied to causal, inductive reasoning. Hume provides a psychological account of causal belief formation that makes custom the determining principle. The worry expressed at *T* 1.4.7.3 and *EHU* 12.22 is that custom is *all* there is to causal belief formation, even in cases in which we would normally take our causal beliefs to be in accordance with rational rules, such as those provided at *T* 1.3.15. In both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, Hume alludes to the worry that future connections between objects might not resemble our past experiences of connections between objects.<sup>121</sup> So, for Hume, the fact that our inductive beliefs are determined by custom provides the sceptic with fuel for an unanswerable challenge. In this way, sceptical doubt about induction remains part of Hume’s final, considered position, even as he continues to engage in such reasoning, and this engenders the question of the integration of Hume’s scepticism within his wider project. I hold that if questions persist about Hume’s position, they should be considered as engendering problems for Hume’s philosophy rather than as a problem for my

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<sup>121</sup> In the *Treatise*, Hume says: “Experience is a principle, which instructs me in the several conjunctions of objects for the past. Habit is another principle, which determines me to expect the same for the future [...]” (*T* 1.4.7.3; SBN 265). In the *Enquiry*, Hume says: “... [the sceptic] insists ... [that] we have no argument to convince us, that objects, which have, in our experience, been frequently conjoined, will likewise, in other circumstances, be conjoined in the same manner; and that nothing leads us to this inference but custom or a certain instinct of our nature ...” (*EHU* 12.22; SBN 159).

interpretation of Hume. Some version of the integration problem will always remain for the residually sceptical reading of Hume's philosophy, but any reading that rejects residual scepticism will fail to account for some part of the text.

With regard to Hume's sceptical predicament, the integration problem can be stated as follows: if Hume thinks that the vulgar belief is false and that we cannot justify a belief in D&C non-perceptions, then why does this not undermine philosophy altogether? Hume, of course, does not explicitly address his sceptical predicament in his response to his sceptical crisis, but he does explain his return to philosophy in terms of the pleasure that it brings and the practical utility it has over superstition and abstruse metaphysics. The understanding of Hume's return to philosophy, in relation to opinions of external objects, that emerges from the text is as follows: as a matter of psychology, we fall back on believing the vulgar opinion, but we remain aware of the problems with that opinion, and with the intuitive attempt to remedy it, and so we should be inspired to a position of moderate scepticism as a result. Again, Hume's response might be considered unsatisfying, but I maintain that the residually sceptical interpretation captures Hume's philosophical outlook and makes more sense of the text than the alternatives. The integration problem is not a problem for the sceptical reading of Hume's philosophy specifically, but it is an issue that applies to Hume's philosophy that emerges from his response to scepticism.

At this stage, we may also consider a point about philosophical scepticism that is relevant to the issue at hand. Most philosophers do not ever engage with radical scepticism as deeply as Hume does. Hume offers a novel philosophical system and *on top of it* he confronts radical sceptical doubts. Most of the time, we do not see it as a fault of a philosopher if he or she does not solve radical sceptical challenges, but since Hume chooses to deal with it, we always have the option of reading his response as unsatisfactory, in the same way that we might think that any other philosophical response to scepticism is unsatisfactory. Overall, I

hold that Ainslie and others may always insist that there is an unsolved problem deriving from Hume's response to scepticism but that this does not represent a defect of sceptical interpretations of Hume's philosophy.

### 5.3.2 Scepticism's Reflexivity?

Even if we do not interpret Hume as endorsing true philosophy in opposition to false philosophy in *T* 1.4.7, the reference to the "true sceptic" who is "diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical convictions" at *T* 1.4.7.14 (SBN 273) could still influence how we understand Hume's final position. By endorsing the position of the "true sceptic", Hume could be saying that *authentic* scepticism should entail suspicion of the considerations that lead us towards negative, sceptical evaluations. To illustrate: sceptical doubts about the vulgar and philosophical systems arise from causal reasoning, but causal reasoning itself comes into question in Hume's sceptical crisis (at *T* 1.4.7.3 (SBN 265) and *EHU* 12.22 (SBN 159)). If Hume refrained from endorsing the falsity of the vulgar opinion or the non-justification of the philosophical system, he would no longer have any rationale for his sceptical predicament concerning objects.

Garrett (1997) has offered up an interpretation of *T* 1.4.7.14 on which Hume exploits the reflexivity of scepticism. I do not intend to reduce Garrett's reading of Hume's response to his sceptical crisis to what he says about *T* 1.4.7.14, but I focus on what he says about this for present purposes.<sup>122</sup> Garrett perceives the challenge as being how the title principle ("Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to"; *T* 1.4.7.11; SBN 270) can stand up given that Hume's sceptical worries are not rationally defeated. Even if such worries do not lead to the extermination of belief, they still reveal the

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<sup>122</sup> Ainslie also appeals to the reflexivity of scepticism as part of the justification for the extenuation of sceptical problems (2015, 243–46). I focus on Garrett (1997) in this sub-section because he directly cites the reference to the "true sceptic" at *T* 1.4.7.14 as justification for this point. Ainslie, as we have seen, has a wider, more idiosyncratic take on Hume's "true" scepticism.

infirmity and imperfection of human reason (1997, 235–36). According to Garrett, the fact that “human reason judges itself to be imperfect” ought to give us “a basis to doubt” whether we should cast suspicion over the products of the imagination (1997, 236). Garrett explicitly mentions that we should consider “whether the mechanism by which we acquire belief in continued and distinct existence is not, after all, a veridical one” (ibid.).

Ultimately, however, it will not work to say that Hume forsakes his commitment to the falsity of the vulgar belief. Hume does not reject, but *moderates* sceptical doubts. As was established in Sections 4.2.2 and 4.3.2, Hume uses his encounter with scepticism to motivate his philosophical attitudes. Such a move would not be available to Hume if he summarily dismissed sceptical doubts because of their reflexivity. Hume certainly does not reject philosophy after his sceptical crisis, but his attitude remains avowedly sceptical. The challenge is to account for this balance, but to suggest that Hume dissolves his sceptical predicament by appealing to the reflexivity of scepticism would be to read Hume as having an ace up his sleeve that he brings out only in the penultimate paragraph of *T* 1.4.7.

We can understand the purpose Hume has in mind when referring to diffidence towards “sceptical doubt” if we pay careful attention to the context. At the start of *T* 1.4.7.14, Hume explicates his vision for philosophy, whereby philosophical theorising does not stray far from the bounds of ordinary life. In the middle of the paragraph, he expresses the point that his experimental approach will make slow progress, but will produce results that will be “satisfactory to the human mind” (*T* 1.4.7.14; SBN 272). When Hume says, “The conduct of a man, who studies philosophy in this careless manner” he is alluding to the manner described whereby one is not despondent as a result of not being able to solve sceptical problems (ibid.). In the very last sentence, where Hume describes the diffidence of the true sceptic, he says “[a true sceptic] will never refuse any innocent satisfaction, which offers itself, upon account of either of them” (ibid.). The phrase “either of them” refers to

philosophical doubts and convictions. So, the sentence that refers to the diffidence of the true sceptic reaffirms Hume's point about not abandoning investigation as a response to scepticism. Thus, the sentence is a reiteration of Hume's point that scepticism does not require one to jettison philosophical pursuits altogether. In other words, Hume's view is that we should be diffident of our philosophical doubts *insofar as* we do not overstate their potential implications. This coheres perfectly well with using those sceptical doubts to motivate a position of mitigated response.

I have observed that a sceptic about the imagination should be consistently sceptical about all of the imagination. Hume is a sceptic about all of the products of the imagination, but he thinks that this scepticism should inspire us to adopt a new outlook on philosophy. Within the context of philosophy, Hume distinguishes some beliefs as better and others as worse, and the ones that he says are better are those built on experimental reasoning. As I argued in Section 2.3, Hume's basis for holding the falsity of the vulgar belief is based on such reasoning (and his basis for holding the non-justification of the philosophical system is similarly based on such reasoning, as argued in Section 3.3 above). Overall, Hume does not think that his scepticism requires him to make no distinctions between different methods of belief formation, and so the suggestion that he solves his sceptical predicament by repudiating the causal reasoning that drives it is spurious.

#### 5.4 Hume's Inconsistency: The 'No-single Hume' Interpretation

Hume sometimes treats the distinction between external objects and perceptions as unproblematic, but at other times he castigates such a distinction for its absurdity (as at the end of *T* 1.4.2.2; SBN 188) and employs the language of a strict phenomenalist (e.g. "properly speaking, 'tis not our body we perceive, when we regard our limbs and members,

but certain impressions, which enter by the senses” (*T* 1.4.2.9; SBN 191)).<sup>123</sup> While Hume declares early on in the *Treatise* that he will suspend belief on what the causes of our impressions might be (*T* 1.1.2.1; SBN 7–8; *T* 1.3.5.2; SBN 84), he does not foreground this important point and he slips into the tendency of suggesting that the relevant “objects” that we might encounter in space and time, or that might enjoy causal relations, are objects specifically different from perceptions.<sup>124</sup> Back in Section 1.1.1, I suggested that we could make sense of Hume being a sceptic about non-perceptions and contrasting internal perceptions with external objects by realising that the vulgar themselves make a distinction between the internal and external. With this in mind, we could say that Hume himself contrasts internal and external entities without cognising his perceptions *as such* because this is precisely what the vulgar do. In this sub-section, I object to the usefulness of distinguishing between Hume the common-man and Hume the philosopher. Making such a distinction is tempting precisely because it would allow us to say that Hume uses phenomenalist language in virtue of adopting a sceptical attitude towards non-perceptions, and that since he does not sustain such scepticism he does not consistently employ such language.

Hakkarainen (2012a; 2012b) defines a “no-single Hume” interpretation of Hume’s account of objects as any, “according to which more than one position ought to be attributed to [Hume’s] thinking in some respect” (2012a, 285). Hakkarainen’s particular version of a no-single Hume interpretation posits two *domains* in which Hume expresses different views. For Hakkarainen, *Realism* is the position that, “there are ontologically and causally (human) perception-independent, continued and absolutely external entities” (2012a, 284).<sup>125</sup> These

<sup>123</sup> See also *T* 1.2.6.7–8; SBN 67; *EHU* 12.9–12; SBN 152–53).

<sup>124</sup> Notable instances are *T* 1.2.3.2; SBN 33; *T* 1.2.3.7; SBN 35; *T* 1.2.5.9; SBN 57; *T* 1.2.5.24; SBN 63; *T* 1.3.2.2; SBN 73–74; *T* 1.3.3.5; SBN 80–81; *EHU* 1.13; SBN 13; *EHU* 2.7; SBN 20; *EHU* 4.7; SBN 28; *EHU* 4.9; SBN 29; *EHU* 4.13; SBN 31–32). See also Grene’s (1994, 177, n. 4) catalogue of references to external, mind-independent existences in the *Treatise*.

<sup>125</sup> Hakkarainen follows Michael J. Loux’s (2002) usage of “Realism” and “Real”.

objects that are independent of human perception may be either what I have identified as objects *specifically different from* perceptions or D&C perceptions themselves (see 2012a, 284, n. 3).<sup>126</sup> Hakkarainen takes Hume to believe in Realism in the domain of common life and to hold that one ought to suspend belief about it in the domain of philosophy. This philosophy/common life distinction corresponds to different standards of justification for Hakkarainen (2012a, 303). In the domain of common life, Hume does not consider whether or not there are reasons for suspending the belief in Realism (he still does not actively consider it justified, but he finds no reason to repudiate it).<sup>127</sup> Hakkarainen's motivation for thinking that Hume cannot simply always suspend judgement on the matter is that there is ample textual evidence that Hume took the belief in Realism to be psychologically irresistible (Hakkarainen calls Hume's various statements of such irresistibility the "*involuntariness passages*" (2012a, 289. Original emphasis)). Hakkarainen contends that reading Hume as drawing a distinction between philosophy and common life is more textually supported than a distinction between different moods (as in Popkin (1951)), different perspectives (as in Fogelin (1998)), or different kinds of assent (as in Baxter (2008)) (2012a, 301).

It may be thought that some no-single Hume interpretation best characterises Hume's philosophy because Hume sometimes analyses objects strictly in terms of perceptions but other times does not. However, the no-single Hume interpretation omits what I see as a vital element for understanding Hume's account of objects, which is that Hume's philosophy of objects involves a sceptical *development*. It is not merely that Hume adopts a position in one domain (or mood or perspective) and goes in and out of it. Hume is still aware of the

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<sup>126</sup> Hakkarainen (2012b, 146) contends that this understanding of Realism is consonant with Hume's own usage of the word "real": Hakkarainen cites Hume's apparent usages of "real" at *T* 1.4.2.9–10 (SBN 190–91), *T* 1.4.2.20 (SBN 195–97), *T* 1.4.2.24 (SBN 199) and *T* 1.4.4.5 (SBN 227). Hakkarainen also contends that his understanding of 'Realism' corresponds to Hume's definition of body at *T* 1.4.2.1–2 (SBN 187–88) corresponds to the Humean definition of "body" at the start of *T* 1.4.2.

<sup>127</sup> I am grateful to Jani Hakkarainen for clarifying this to me in response to a question.

sceptical result that he reached concerning opinions of external existence even *after* the despair of his sceptical crisis, and he uses this to motivate his moderate sceptical position. Hakkarainen explains Hume's seeming inconsistency by saying that in the domain of philosophy Hume subjects even his natural beliefs to scrutiny, and that once he does so he realises that he must disavow all and any belief in D&C existence.<sup>128</sup> This is an acute observation insofar as Hume does indeed criticise opinions of D&C existence only once he enters a philosophical investigation into the nature of perceptual experience (I characterised this as *reflecting* on the nature of perceptual experience in Section 2.4.1). However, Hakkarainen's position misrenders the situation because, even in the context of philosophy, we do not forsake all belief in D&C existences. Hume is very clear that we are led to the philosophical system precisely because we cannot jettison the vulgar belief even once we realise that it is false. He says that those who pretend to reject all belief in D&C existence when confronted with the falsity of the vulgar opinion are merely "a few extravagant sceptics; who after all maintain'd that opinion in words only, and were never able to bring themselves sincerely to believe it" (*T* 1.4.2.50; SBN 214).

Boehm (2013) also raises a relevant criticism that can be applied to Hakkarainen's domain distinction. Boehm criticises the tendency to simply read Hume as adopting a phenomenalist position on objects only in the context of philosophical theorising (2013, 210–11). Boehm identifies that Hume uses the realist-sounding language *when he is philosophising* in Parts 1–3 of Book One of the *Treatise*. There is not a clear-cut distinction between the theorising that Hume does in those sections of his text and what he does in *T* 1.4.2 and the end of *T* 1.2.6 when he uses more phenomenalist-sounding talk. I have said that Hume engages in a specific *kind* of reflection, namely, on the nature of perceptual

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<sup>128</sup> It is unique to Hakkarainen's reading that Hume suspends judgement about D&C existences in virtue of the second objection against the evidence of sense in *EHU* 12 (recall Section 3.4.2).



experience. This means that Hume engages in phenomenalist-sounding language in *some* philosophical contexts and not others, which means that the distinction between philosophy *tout court* and common life is not apt. So, although Hume engages in a particular investigation when he examines opinions of D&C existence at *T* 1.4.2 and *EHU* 12, it is not accurate to say that he disavows the vulgar belief whenever he is engaged in philosophy.

At this point, we may also consider some wider limitations of simply taking Hume to be inconsistent. Hakkarainen thinks that the no-single Hume reading has the advantage that it does not attribute a contradiction to Hume (2012a, 298). However, while a ‘no-single Hume’ reading might *explain* why Hume says different things at different times, or in different domains, a separate question needs to be asked of what *justifies* this. To illustrate, I will consider what Hakkarainen says about Popkin’s (1951) reading. Hakkarainen characterises Popkin’s reading of Hume as making him a “consistent Pyrrhonian” (2012a, 298). Popkin reads Hume as suspending all beliefs except for those which nature compels him to hold; the Pyrrhonists suspend belief in this matter too, but the difference is that Hume was more realistic about how many beliefs we will be left with (see Popkin 1951, 403–05). Popkin’s reading falls within the category of ‘no-single Hume’ interpretations because Hume believes different things at different times, depending on whether Hume is in a mood in which “[sceptical] difficulties overcome him” or in which the “necessities” of nature prevail (1951, 407). Hakkarainen accepts that Popkin’s Hume successfully avoids contradiction in the same way that the Pyrrhonists themselves do, and so he offers a different line of objection:

Another circumstance with respect to which Hume is also a consistent Pyrrhonist is that since he does not suspend judgement and believe at the same time, but only

during different periods of time, he is not subject to any contradiction. The problem with Popkin's reading is that it is trivial or too simplistic.

(Hakkarainen 2012a, 298)

According to Hakkarainen, to suggest that Hume has different moods in which different philosophical outlooks prevail is too coarse-grained. Hakkarainen goes on to highlight the way in which Hume allows for rational reflection, which would be precluded if Hume only passively accepted the products of nature (Hakkarainen cites *EHU* 10.4; SBN 110–11; *EHU* 12.25; SBN 162). Hakkarainen accepts that Popkin's reading at least salvages Hume from flagrant inconsistency. However, Hume's situation would still be problematic if he *sometimes* rejects the belief in Real entities in virtue of some reasons, but at *other times* ignores those reasons. Obviously, it would be good to explain *why* Hume's beliefs change at different times, and indeed, Hakkarainen is aware that he needs to provide a rationale for positing different domains of belief for Hume and that he has to indicate what prompts Hume to move in and out of them. But the problem still remains, namely, that Hume *ignores* what he believes in the domain of philosophy when he is in the domain of common life.

According to my interpretation, Hume does not take it as a requirement that he should suspend belief about all D&C existences, even in the domain of philosophy. In contrast to Hakkarainen, I hold that Hume does not think he *can* suspend the vulgar belief even in the domain of philosophy. Hume is aware that the vulgar belief is false, but when he uses the sceptical predicament to motivate his moderate scepticism, he does not *ignore* the fact that he will go on to adopt the vulgar belief. Hume accepts that the vulgar belief is false and cannot be improved upon. This is one of several sceptical considerations that serves as a reminder to be more cautious and reserved when nature inevitably leads him back to philosophy.

## 5.5 Overall Conclusion

In the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, Hume only discusses the topic of external objects at length under the heading of *scepticism*. Accordingly, Hume's theory of objects cannot be grasped or fully appreciated without reference to his sceptical attitudes. Both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* express sceptical predicaments pertaining to opinions of external existence. The predicament arises because the natural, vulgar belief is found to be false, but the intuitive response, which is to posit the double existence of perceptions and objects, is psychologically weak and entirely unjustified. In *T* 1.4.7 and *EHU* 12, Hume cites this predicament as an example of a serious sceptical problem. Together with a number of other sceptical problems, Hume is driven by the predicament to a sceptical reassessment of philosophy as a whole. After this reassessment, Hume decides to continue philosophising, but he keeps sceptical doubts close at hand.

Given that the insolubility of the predicament inspires his residual scepticism, the predicament is an integral component of Hume's epistemology. In this chapter, I have discussed various ways in which the essential elements of Hume's predicament might be modified. Ainslie (2015) has attempted to explain that the vulgar opinion is not ultimately flawed because it involves only a constitutive error about the bare image content of perceptions, and not an epistemic error about an item that is actively cognised *as* a perception; other scholars have looked for an explanatory justification of the philosophical system (Magoula Adamos 2014; Kail 2010/2007) or the vulgar belief (Schnall 2004) on Hume's behalf. My prime objection to these proposals has been that Hume continues to consider the sceptical predicament a problem after his sceptical crisis. In opposition to Loeb (2002), I have maintained that the essential elements of Hume's metaphysics would have to be contradicted for him to reject his rationale for the predicament. Ultimately, Hume does not give up his metaphysics of perception: he analyses objects in terms of perceptions because he

is an experimental philosopher and he takes perceptions to be the objects of experience. Rather than rejecting the sceptical position he arrives at, he utilises it to motivate his vision for philosophy in general. In this chapter, I have also argued against Hakkarainen's (2012a; 2012b) proposal according to which we should think of Hume as holding different attitudes towards external existence in different domains of inquiry. Essentially, such a proposal is not as rich as the dialectic of a sceptical predicament that features in a sceptical crisis. Hume takes troubling sceptical questions seriously, even as he desires to establish a positive, experimental science of human nature. He does not forsake or forget about sceptical doubts, but moderates them. Hume's engagement with scepticism represents an original and insightful attempt to understand how far we can pursue intellectual enterprises in the face of sceptical doubt.

If we extenuate Hume's sceptical predicament, we threaten to undermine the functional role that it has in motivating Hume's residual scepticism. I have argued that the residually sceptical reading of Hume's philosophy best accounts for the textual evidence. It makes sense both of Hume's expressions of sceptical doubts (at *T* 1.4.7.1–8 and *EHU* 12.6–22) and his avowedly sceptical return to philosophy (at *T* 1.4.7.9–15 and *EHU* 12.23–34).

Hume offers his analysis of external existence in the context of a science of the human person, in which he pays attention to our actual attitudes and beliefs. For Hume, we derive a belief in D&C existence from the constancy and coherence of resembling but numerically different perceptions. Hume's sceptical crisis is driven, in part, by the fact that *what we actually believe* is strictly false and *our intuitive attempt to remedy it* cannot be justified or permanently believed. Hume does not dogmatically affirm a perception-only ontology: Hume's scepticism about double existence reveals that he officially adopts suspension of belief when pressed on the question of what there is beyond perception. Since the vulgar belief is natural and compulsive, Hume thinks that we do not ordinarily wonder

about non-perceptions at all. So Hume himself believes there are D&C existences, just like everyone else who relapses to the vulgar position. The analysis offered here of Hume's sceptical predicament explains the relevance of this relapsing, and the relevance of Hume's awareness of scepticism about opinions of external existence, for his wider philosophical outlook.

Hume is a sceptic about external existence. We have to understand this scepticism with reference to his sceptical predicament, and we have to understand that this predicament features in a more general sceptical crisis. Hume is a sceptic about objects specifically different from perceptions, but his verdict on the psychological weakness of the philosophical system is as important as his negative epistemic assessment of it. This is one aspect of Hume's sceptical predicament. The other is the problem of the vulgar belief: it is false, but psychologically irresistible. The predicament is the result of our failed to improve on this belief. In this way, Hume's philosophy of external existence is not only sceptical, but is a manifestation of a raw *struggle* with scepticism. Hume's philosophy of external objects is a case study in taking seriously sceptical doubts that pertain to a significant, continuing philosophical issue.

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