

The Title Principle (or Lack Thereof) in the *Enquiry*

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1. Introduction

Examine what Garrett (1997, p.234) calls the ‘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 upon us. (THN 1.4.7.11)¹

This seemingly innocuous principle is seen by a number of commentators as central to Hume’s epistemological resolution of sceptical doubts in THN 1.4.7, thus providing an answer to Kemp Smith’s (1941) famous worry regarding the tension between Hume’s scepticism and his naturalism. A few examples are Garrett (1997, 2005, 2013), Kail (2007, p.70), Allison (2008, pp.323-330), Qu (2014b), Schafer (2014), and Schmitt (2014, pp.368-375).² In similar vein, other commentators have treated the Title Principle as being pragmatically (rather than epistemically) crucial to Hume’s reply to scepticism, for instance Meeker (2013, pp.73-81).

However, in this paper I will argue that in the *Enquiry*, Hume rejects the Title Principle, which is to say he does not follow it as a doxastic policy; according to his framework in the *Enquiry*, it simply delivers the wrong results in ruling out his favoured ‘academic philosophy’, or mitigated scepticism. Those who think Hume’s treatment of scepticism does not turn on the

¹ In the references to Hume’s texts throughout, ‘THN’ refers to the *Treatise of Human Nature*, ‘EHU’ to the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ‘EMPL’ to *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, and HL to *The Letters of David Hume*. Arabic numerals refer to section and paragraph numbers (EHU); and book, part, section, and paragraph numbers (THN). EMPL numbers refer to pages in the Miller revised edition of the *Essays* (Liberty Fund Inc., 1987). HL Roman numerals refer to volume, and Arabic numerals to page numbers in the Greig edition of the *Letters* (OUP, 1932). Note also that in referring to the ‘*Enquiry*’ in this paper, I mean the first *Enquiry*, that is, the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*; in referring to the ‘*Treatise*’, I typically mean Book 1 of it.

² There is of course significant variation among these interpretations, and indeed not all these commentators are wholly sanguine about the prospects of such an epistemology. For instance, Schmitt (2014, p.369) finds the Title Principle to provide only a limited relief to Hume in THN 1.4.7, and Qu (2014b) argues that his offered interpretation of THN 1.4.7 (which rests heavily on the Title Principle) is problematic when considered in conjunction with Hume’s normative theses elsewhere in the *Treatise*.

Title Principle even in the *Treatise* will likely take this as grist for their mills. But for those who do think the Title Principle to play a significant role in THN 1.4.7, my argument, if cogent, presents an interpretive burden to provide some explanation as to why Hume might have become dissatisfied with this epistemic framework, abandoning it in his later work. Having raised this interpretive burden, my paper also seeks to bear it by providing such an explanation. Note that I will not spend much time extensively defending the Title Principle playing a significant role in THN 1.4.7 – I lack sufficient space to do so here, and I present a fuller textual case for such a view elsewhere in other work.³ Nevertheless, I hope that this paper will appeal to both commentators who accept and reject such interpretations. Those who reject such interpretations might relish my interpretation of the *Enquiry* as rejecting the Title Principle, while those who accept such interpretations may nevertheless find comfort in my account of why Hume might have changed his mind thusly.⁴

The paper will proceed as follows. In the next section, I provide an exposition of THN 1.4.7 that turns on the Title Principle. This is not to offer an exhaustive defence of such an interpretation, but to give the reader a concrete example of such views, as well as their textual basis. In the following section, I argue that Hume rejects the Title Principle in the *Enquiry*. In the section after, I then take up the burden of explaining why Hume might have come to be dissatisfied with such an epistemic framework. I then conclude with a final section voicing a few brief thoughts regarding the relation between the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*.

2. The Title Principle in THN 1.4.7.

Hume's aim in THN 1.4.7 is to drive a path between excessive scepticism and superstition, dismissing both while rescuing science and philosophy. This is easier said than done, however. We begin with the nexus of Hume's consternation in THN 1.4.7, that is, the 'dangerous

³ See my 'Hume's Practically Epistemic Conclusions' (2014b).

⁴ Indeed, the former might also find much to like in my account of why Hume might have changed his mind on this matter, since it points out various problems Hume might have had with such a framework in THN 1.4.7.

dilemma' (THN 1.4.7.6-7). Hume notes that we should not trust 'every trivial suggestion of the fancy', because 'they lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities' (THN 1.4.7.6), as he has shown in the course of Book 1 (c.f. in particular THN 1.3.13, 'Of Unphilosophical Probability'). Yet if we 'adhere to the understanding, that is, to the general and more establish'd properties of the imagination; even this resolution, if steadily executed, wou'd be dangerous, and attended with the most fatal consequences' (*ibid.*). This is the upshot of Hume's discussion in 'Of Scepticism with Regard to Reason' (THN 1.4.1): 'the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition' (THN 1.4.7.7). This is because the 'rules of logic' (THN 1.4.1.6) require that we continually make higher-order judgments on the reliability of our judgments:

In every judgment, which we can form concerning probability, as well as concerning knowledge, we ought always to correct the first judgment, deriv'd from the nature of the object, by another judgment, deriv'd from the nature of the understanding. (THN 1.4.1.5)

However, given the ineliminable possibility of error, Hume thinks this entails the persistent diminution and eventual extinction of our beliefs. In light of this, Hume claims that '[w]e save ourselves from this total scepticism only by means of that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things' (THN 1.4.7.7). In short, relying on the general and more established properties of the imagination while rejecting the trivial suggestions of the fancy will result in the extinction of our beliefs, thus falling on the 'no reason at all' horn of the dangerous dilemma; yet allowing the trivial suggestions of the fancy will lead us into absurdities, leaving us with only a 'false reason' (THN 1.4.7.7) and opening the door to superstition. Hume now fumbles around, desperately seeking some way to rescue science and philosophy while nevertheless excluding excessive scepticism and superstition.

Hume then dismisses a potential policy that hopes to carve a middle ground between the two horns, which is 'that no refin'd or elaborate reasoning is ever to be receiv'd' (THN

1.4.7.7), for three reasons. First, it would entail that we ‘cut off entirely all science and philosophy’ (*ibid.*); second, it would mean that we ‘proceed upon one singular quality of the imagination, and by a parity of reason must embrace all of them’ (*ibid.*); third, such a principle would be self-stultifying, ‘since this maxim must be built on the preceding reasoning, which will be allow’d to be sufficiently refin’d and metaphysical’ (*ibid.*). Given the untenability of this middle option, Hume thinks that we are threatened by a ‘dangerous dilemma’: either we allow all the trivial suggestions of the fancy and fall into error and absurdity, or we dismiss them and forfeit all our beliefs: that is to say, ‘[w]e have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at all’ (*ibid.*).

Hume then takes us on a personal tour of his emotional turmoil. First, he is beset with ‘melancholy and delirium’ (THN 1.4.7.9), which is dispelled by amusement and company (famously taking the form of dining with friends and playing backgammon). This engenders a period of ‘spleen and indolence’ (THN 1.4.7.11), in which Hume rejects philosophy. Near the end of this period, Hume comes to endorse the 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 upon us. (THN 1.4.7.11)

Hume’s passionate journey through melancholy and delirium, then spleen and indolence, enables him to realise that heeding the Title Principle excludes excessive scepticism. Indeed, only the passions could engender this realisation, since reason cannot:

These are the sentiments of my spleen and indolence; and indeed I must confess, that philosophy has nothing to oppose to them, and expects a victory more from the returns of a serious good-humour’d disposition, than from the force of reason and conviction. (THN 1.4.7.11)

Now, as the passions of curiosity and ambition surface in him, Hume is justified in returning to philosophy, in accordance with the Title Principle; such reasoning is lively in virtue of mixing with the propensities of curiosity and ambition. This is in stark contrast to Hume’s scepticism with regard to reason in THN 1.4.1, since the continued iteration of higher-order

judgments is ‘forc’d and unnatural, and the ideas faint and obscure’ (THN 1.4.1.10), and the Title Principle condemns such a course since it is unlively and mixes with no propensity. Therefore, Hume is licensed to pursue philosophy over excessive scepticism. False philosophy more generally (of which excessive scepticism is an instance) is dismissed on this basis, since it fails to excite our sentiments:

Philosophy... if false and extravagant, its opinions are merely the objects of a cold and general speculation, and seldom go so far as to interrupt the course of our natural propensities. (THN 1.4.7.13)

But this still leaves open the door to superstition, which is ‘often able to disturb us in the conduct of our lives and actions’ due to the strong sentiments it excites (THN 1.4.7.13). Hume notes that, even without the passions of curiosity and ambition, he would have no recourse but to return to philosophy anyway, since humankind cannot rest content with enquiries concerning common life. Given the choice between superstition and philosophy as a guide to such speculations, Hume chooses philosophy on the basis that it is the ‘safest and most agreeable’ option of the two: ‘the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous’ (THN 1.4.7.13).⁵

Hume concludes by endorsing mitigated scepticism, as McCormick (1999) argues: he advocates the limiting of our enquiries and the adoption of epistemic diffidence in the final two paragraphs of this section. Regarding the former, he hopes to point out to philosophers ‘more distinctly those subjects, where alone they can expect assurance and conviction’, emphasising that ‘Human Nature is the only science of man’ (THN 1.4.7.14). Regarding the latter, he inserts a ‘*caveat*’ that his works ‘imply no dogmatical spirit’, despite his occasionally forceful wording (THN 1.4.7.15). Importantly, in THN 1.4.7 Hume’s mitigated scepticism is motivated by his passions. His hope of limiting the enquiries of philosophers to the science of human nature and bringing it more into fashion ‘serves to compose my temper from that spleen, and invigorate it

⁵ Note that Hume means by ‘superstition’ religion founded on ‘weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance’ (EMPL 74); in thinking superstition dangerous, Hume probably had in mind religious wars, religious persecution, and so forth.

from that indolence' (THN 1.4.7.14). Moreover, he invites the reader to follow him in his 'future speculations' about the science of human nature (viz. Books 2 and 3) only if the reader is 'in the same easy disposition'; if not, the reader should wait 'the returns of application and good humour' (THN 1.4.7.14). Similarly, Hume's caveat against dogmatism is very plausibly a result of his diffidence upon the emotional turmoil of his close brush with excessive scepticism, which chastens him and steers him away from epistemic arrogance.

Thus Hume's passionate presentation of the issues in THN 1.4.7 is not merely dialectical, as the passions are decidedly crucial to Hume's justification of science and philosophy in the face of scepticism: they lead him to discover the Title Principle, justify his pursuit of science and philosophy in conjunction with the Title Principle, and motivate his endorsement of mitigated scepticism. Here I am in agreement with Baier (1999, p.1), who claims that THN 1.4.7 is the moment in Hume's *Treatise* when he advocates turning away from a single-minded reliance on reason, allowing for the passions to play a crucial role in his philosophy. Hume realises that the 'understanding, that is... the general and more establish'd properties of the imagination' (THN 1.4.7.7) left alone leads to excessive scepticism; the only way to rescue science and philosophy is to grant the passions a justificatory role, hence the Title Principle.

3. The Rejection of the Title Principle in the *Enquiry*

However, the *Enquiry* seems to reject the Title Principle. Examine the beginning of Section 5:

THE passion for philosophy, like that for religion, seems liable to this inconvenience, that, though it aims at the correction of our manners, and extirpation of our vices, it may only serve, by imprudent management, to foster a predominant inclination, and push the mind, with more determined resolution, towards that side, which already *draws* too much, by the bias and propensity of the natural temper... There is, however, one species of philosophy, which seems little liable to this inconvenience, and that *because it strikes in with no disorderly passion of the human mind, nor can mingle itself with any natural affection or propensity*; and that is the Academic or Sceptical philosophy. The academics always talk of doubt and suspense of judgment, of danger in hasty

determinations, of confining to very narrow bounds the enquiries of the understanding, and of renouncing all speculations which lie not within the limits of common life and practice. Nothing, therefore, can be more contrary than such a philosophy to the supine indolence of the mind, its rash arrogance, its lofty pretensions, and its superstitious credulity. *Every passion is mortified by it, except the love of truth; and that passion never is, nor can be carried to too high a degree.* (EHU 5.1, emphasis added)

Hume begins the section by noting that the ‘passion for philosophy’ is liable to the ‘inconvenience’ of pushing the mind to the ‘biass and propensity of the natural temper’, before commenting that the ‘Academic or Sceptical’ philosophy is ‘little liable to this inconvenience’ (EHU 5.1). EHU 12 is titled ‘Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy’, suggesting that the academical philosophy is his settled view. Moreover, for Hume, the ‘academical philosophy’ is intimately linked with his mitigated scepticism; indeed, he uses ‘academical philosophy’ and ‘mitigated scepticism’ interchangeably:

There is, indeed, a more *mitigated* scepticism or *academical* philosophy, which may be both durable and useful, and which may, in part, be the result of this Pyrrhonism, or *excessive* scepticism, when its undistinguished doubts are, in some measure, corrected by common sense and reflection. (EHU 12.24)

And of course, mitigated scepticism is Hume’s resting epistemic framework in the *Enquiry*, being the form of scepticism he ultimately accepts (EHU 12.24-34). In short, Hume unqualifiedly endorses the academical philosophy. This is despite the fact that, as Hume notes in EHU 5.1, it ‘strikes in with no disorderly passion of the human mind, nor can mingle itself with any natural affection or propensity’, and despite the fact that ‘Every passion is mortified by it, except the love of truth; and that passion never is, nor can be carried to too high a degree’ (EHU 5.1). Recall Hume’s formulation of the 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 upon us. (THN 1.4.7.11)

Obviously, if Hume subscribes to the Title Principle in the *Enquiry*, it seems doubtful that he would endorse the academical philosophy, which he now recognises as being devoid of ‘any natural affection or propensity’ (EHU 5.1).⁶ Also worth noting is the similarity in language between EHU 5.1 and the Title Principle, which suggests that the former was written with the latter in mind: in EHU 5.1, Hume points out that the academical philosophy does not ‘mingle itself with any natural affection or propensity’, while the Title Principle advocates assenting to lively reason that ‘mixes itself with some propensity’. Hume does make a small concession in EHU 5.1 that the ‘love of truth’ (which Hume characterises as the passion of curiosity in THN 2.3.10) is not ‘mortified’ by the academical philosophy. However, this falls far short of claiming that it appeals to or is mixed with it; moreover, Hume is also quick to downplay the force of curiosity’s influence: ‘that passion never is, nor can be carried to too high a degree’ (EHU 5.1).⁷ Indeed, the claim that sound philosophy is incongruous with our sentiments is also present in Section 1: Hume pursues and recommends the ‘accurate and abstruse’ philosophy, despite recognising that the ‘easy and obvious philosophy... moulds the heart and affections’ while ‘the abstruse philosophy’ is ‘founded on a turn of mind, which cannot enter into business and action’; moreover, such a philosophy is incompatible with the passions: ‘The feelings of our heart, the agitation of our passions, the vehemence of our affections, dissipate all its conclusions, and reduce the profound philosopher to a mere plebeian’ (EHU 1.3).⁸

What is even more striking is that Hume actively describes the fact that the academic philosophy does not ‘mingle with any natural affection or propensity’ as an advantage of this

⁶ Why does the Hume of the *Enquiry* now think that mitigated scepticism is so devoid of natural propensities? Perhaps the poor reception of the *Treatise*, which he describes in his autobiography *My Own Life* as falling ‘dead-born from the press’, tempered his optimism that his brand of philosophy would appeal to the natural passions and propensities of the public.

⁷ In correspondence, the possibility has been raised that Hume here only means that one can never be *too* moved by curiosity, no matter how considerable its influence – in other words, it is normatively impossible to have ‘too much curiosity’ (flouting the adage that ‘curiosity killed the cat’). This reading is also plausible enough in context, but I think not too much to rest on this point. Thanks to Don Garrett, Jonathan Cottrell, Peter Millican, and Amyas Merivale for helpful discussion on this point

⁸ Of course, given Hume’s theory of motivation, any pursuit (including a pursuit of philosophy) must include some passions. But Hume gives no indication that he is advocating that we accept the pursuit of philosophy *because* of the passions, and my point is that it is telling that he deliberately emphasises that his academic philosophy is at least relatively independent from the passions. Moreover, he treats this as a laudatory feature, describing mingling with the passions as an ‘inconvenience’.

philosophy; this fact is precisely the reason that the academic philosophy is ‘little liable to this inconvenience’ of pushing the mind to the ‘biass and propensity of the natural temper’ (EHU 5.1). Moreover, Hume describes the non-mingling of his academic philosophy with the passions as ‘the very circumstance, which renders it so innocent’ (EHU 5.1). Why does Hume now consider the mixing with the passions as an ‘inconvenience’, and the lack of mixing as rendering ‘innocent’? This is because the passions ‘foster a predominant inclination, and push the mind, with more determined resolution, towards that side, which already *draws* too much, by the biass and propensity of the natural temper’ (EHU 5.1). The worry is that the passions have the capability to unduly affect our beliefs. The reason that Hume might consider this a problem seems is because it seems epistemically bad for our beliefs to be overly sensitive to elements that are not themselves responsive to truth (e.g. passions);⁹ the fact that the academic philosophy (unlike other forms of philosophy) escapes this ‘biass’ would be a mark in its favour. If this is the case, we see a possible reason why Hume might have thought the Title Principle an unsatisfactory epistemic policy: far from it being the case that beliefs that mix with passions are justified, such beliefs seem less likely to be justified at all. In any case, Hume’s lack of conviction in the appeal of his academical philosophy to our natural affections or propensities, as well as his viewing this fact as salutary, indicates that in the *Enquiry* he does not subscribe to the Title Principle.

Obviously, in the *Treatise* Hume expresses a different view of the effects of sound philosophy on our natural sentiments. Hume’s claim in EHU 5.1 that his preferred academical philosophy is the ‘one species of philosophy’ that cannot ‘mingle itself with any natural affection or propensity’ can be contrasted with his claim in THN 1.4.7.13 that ‘Philosophy... if just, can present us only with mild and moderate sentiments; and if false and extravagant, its opinions are merely the objects of a cold and general speculation, and seldom go so far as to

⁹ This is probably why Hume makes a concession to curiosity, since of all the passions, it would be the most truth-sensitive. That being said, it is not completely free of this worry – a strong desire to know the truth might lead one to prematurely jump to conclusions, thus causing one to believe disproportionately to the evidence (in contrast to the ‘wise man’ in EHU 10.4).

interrupt the course of our natural propensities'.¹⁰ In the *Treatise* Hume claims that sound philosophy excites our mild and moderate sentiments, while it is false philosophy that fails to stir our 'natural propensities'. However, in the *Enquiry*, Hume thinks that sound philosophy (viz. his academical philosophy) is the *only brand* (the 'one species') of philosophy that fails to excite 'any natural affection or propensity', although as previously noted, he does make a concession that the 'love of truth' is not 'mortified' by it (EHU 5.1).¹¹

Given that Hume's preferred academic philosophy would not be licensed by the Title Principle, it seems clear that Hume cannot simply adopt it as a doxastic policy *tout court*, on pain of inconsistency.¹² This is of course not to deny that Hume appeals to the passions to play a more limited role in his epistemology:¹³

The great subverter of Pyrrhonism or the excessive principles of scepticism is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life. These principles may flourish and triumph in the schools; where it is, indeed, difficult, if not impossible, to refute them. But as soon as they leave the shade, and by the presence of the real objects, which actuate our passions and sentiments, are put

¹⁰ Hume uses the term 'sentiments' frequently in his philosophical works in a variety of ways. He often uses it to indicate beliefs or opinions (e.g. THN 1.3.14.12), but he also often uses it to indicate emotions as well. For instance, he speaks of sympathy 'converting our ideas of the sentiments of others into the very sentiments' (THN 2.1.11.16); he also speaks of sentiments of 'friendship or enmity' (THN 2.2.2.2). Hume clearly uses 'sentiments' to indicate emotions rather than beliefs in THN 1.4.7.13 above, since he contrasts 'just' philosophy as providing us with 'mild and moderate sentiments', with 'false and extravagant' philosophy as seldom going 'so far as to interrupt the course of our natural propensities'; 'propensities' clearly indicate passions in this context, and so 'sentiments' likely refers to the calm passions here.

¹¹ It might be maintained that Hume is merely more selective in the *Enquiry* regarding which propensities should be mixed with reason – the academic philosophy is not 'mortified' by curiosity, and thus perhaps Hume's view is that we should assent to reason when it mixes with curiosity. Given how little Hume says regarding this matter in the *Enquiry*, it is difficult to say much that is textually grounded on this issue, but briefly, even this seems too forgiving. I might be curious about superstition, for instance, but Hume wouldn't want to allow for such enquiries. Indeed, it is precisely how little Hume says about such an account that seems the biggest objection. Although Hume notes that curiosity is not 'mortified' by his academical philosophy, there is no indication that this is offered as a *reason* to accept it, which is what the Title Principle (even this weakened one) requires. Indeed, in the *Enquiry*, Hume doesn't seem to obviously appeal to anything like the Title Principle, or curiosity, in order to provide epistemic justification for our beliefs; if Hume had such a framework in mind in the *Enquiry* for an issue that was so important, he would surely have said more. Thanks to an anonymous referee for this journal for pressing me on this issue.

¹² Of course, if one thinks that the Title Principle would trivially justify any proposition whatsoever (e.g. Meeker 2013, p.75), then this would not follow. This relies on a reading of 'mixes itself with some propensity' as merely referring to possessing liveliness or vivacity in general, rather than the reading I adopt in this paper as involving the passions.

¹³ Thanks to an anonymous referee for this journal for pressing me on this, and consequently helping me to clarify my views in this paper.

in opposition to the more powerful principles of our nature, they vanish like smoke, and leave the most determined sceptic in the same condition as other mortals. (EHU 12.21)

Here, Hume points out that when we are exposed to ‘real objects’, which stir ‘our passions and sentiments’, Pyrrhonian scepticism is driven away. This dismissal of Pyrrhonian scepticism certainly seems to involve the passions,¹⁴ although note that this is a pragmatic rather than epistemological response to Pyrrhonian scepticism (since Hume notes in the context of this passage that such principles are ‘difficult, if not impossible, to refute’). The point is that in the *Enquiry*, even if Hume thinks the passions play some role with respect to defeating Pyrrhonian scepticism, he nevertheless cannot accept the Title Principle, given that doing so would mean ruling out his own mitigated scepticism. While the Title Principle might deliver the right *negative* results, it fails to deliver the right *positive* results. Tearing down the unsightly will only do so much good if one has nothing to put up in its place! All in all, we have good reason to think that Hume rejects the Title Principle in this later work.

4. Explaining the Purported Change

Those who are opposed to readings of THN 1.4.7 as turning on the Title Principle might welcome this result, since it suggests that THN 1.4.7 espouses a similar position, on the assumption that the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* express the same viewpoint on this matter. If, on the other hand, one is to maintain that THN 1.4.7 does indeed turn on the Title Principle, then some account has to be given as to why Hume might have come to be dissatisfied with this account, thus explaining his volte-face in this respect. I look to offer such an explanation in this section.

As recently as THN 1.4.4.1, Hume thinks he has the framework to distinguish epistemically justified principles of the imagination from unjustified ones.¹⁵ Hume argues that

¹⁴ Hume also points out that we should be once convinced that nothing except ‘the strong power of natural instinct’ (EHU 12.25) could free us from Pyrrhonian doubt. Any invocation of the passions is much less clear here, although this passage presumably refers to Hume’s argument in EHU 12.21 above, and so similar considerations apply.

¹⁵ The following discussion owes much to Peter Millican.

it is the ‘permanent, irresistible, and universal’ principles of the imagination (such as custom) that we ought to accept, and the ‘changeable, weak, and irregular’ ones (such as those utilised by the ancient philosophers) that we ought to reject:

BUT here it may be objected, that the imagination, according to my own confession, being the ultimate judge of all systems of philosophy, I am unjust in blaming the antient philosophers for making use of that faculty, and allowing themselves to be entirely guided by it in their reasonings. In order to justify myself, I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular; such as those I have just now taken notice of. The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ’d only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition. For this reason the former are received by philosophy, and the latter rejected. (THN 1.4.4.1)

Having offered this reply to his imagined interlocutor, Hume blithely proceeds for another three sections before realising the problem: he too has to rely on weak, changeable and irregular principles of the imagination, and the normative distinction he endorses in THN 1.4.4.1 no longer works for his purposes. This realisation manifests itself in the ‘dangerous dilemma’ (THN 1.4.7.6): should we ‘assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy’, which ‘lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities’ (*ibid.*), or should we reject them all, a course of action which is ‘dangerous, and attended with the most fatal consequences’ (THN 1.4.7.7)? The two horns of the dangerous dilemma correspond to the two sides of the normative distinction Hume drew in THN 1.4.4.1: the trivial suggestions of the fancy on the one hand (i.e. the changeable, weak, and irregular principles of the imagination); the general and more established properties of the imagination on the other (i.e. the permanent, irresistible, and universal principles of the

imagination). As mentioned earlier, the reason that relying solely on the latter principles does not work is that Hume realises that it contradicts what he says in ‘Of Scepticism with Regard to Reason’ (THN 1.4.1). He notes that ‘the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition’ (THN 1.4.7.7); the only way to avoid the complete destruction of all our beliefs is to allow for some trivial propensities of the imagination, that is, the inability of actions of the mind to influence the imagination when they become forced and unnatural:

... as the action of the mind becomes forc'd and unnatural, and the ideas faint and obscure; tho' the principles of judgment, and the ballancing 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 judgments and opinions. The attention is on the stretch: The posture of the mind is uneasy; and the spirits being diverted from their natural course, are not govern'd in their movements by the same laws, at least not to the same degree, as when they flow in their usual channel. (THN 1.4.1.10)

And indeed, although Hume only references THN 1.4.1 in discussing the dangerous dilemma, Hume makes a similar appeal to trivial propensities in order to avert scepticism in ‘Of Scepticism with regard to the Senses’ (THN 1.4.2):

Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy [from sceptical doubt regarding the external world]. For this reason I rely entirely upon them; and take it for granted, whatever may be the reader's opinion at this present moment, that an hour hence he will be persuaded there is both an external and internal world... (THN 1.4.2.57)

In short, Hume very much depends on the changeable, weak, and irregular principles of the imagination to avert excessive scepticism. Although the problem existed prior to THN 1.4.7,

Hume only seems to become aware of it at this point in Book 1, seeming utterly confident in his normative distinction in the sections before.¹⁶

Given Hume's sudden realisation of this fundamental worry that threatens to collapse the normative distinctions that he has erected, he is scrambling around in THN 1.4.7, desperately trying to find a solution so that he can proceed with Book 2 of the *Treatise*. He provides a *prima facie* convincing account in THN 1.4.7 founded on the Title Principle, which advocates allowing only the trivial propensities that mix with reason, such as curiosity and ambition. However, this is not a completely satisfactory resolution; for instance, it is telling that Hume does not provide a principled epistemic reason as to why we should allow only those propensities that mix with reason, perhaps because he could not give one. Allison argues that this means that in a sense, Hume is not 'entitled' to the Title Principle:¹⁷

The fact that Hume desires to continue on his voyage and cannot do so without the Title Principle no more entitles him to the principle than the fact that I cannot proceed with my life plans without helping myself to the crown jewels entitles me to abscond with them... (Allison 2008, p.327)

Garrett (2005) suggests that the Title Principle does not require further independent justification for us to accept it – in correspondence, he argues that we can confirm its acceptability *post hoc* by its recommending beliefs that we pre-philosophically think justified.

¹⁶ I think it seems quite clear that Hume does treat carelessness and inattention as falling under the changeable, weak, and irregular principles of the imagination. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why the dangerous dilemma would be so problematic for him, as there would be a simple solution already there in his framework – simply trust the permanent, irresistible, and universal principles! Less clear is why exactly carelessness and inattention are classified as changeable, weak, and irregular, since they seem fairly universal and irresistible. One thing that could be said is that carelessness and inattention are certainly irregular and changeable in their effects on us – they are certainly nowhere near as systematic or invariant as reason or custom with regard to how they affect our beliefs. Although carelessness and inattention do not obviously seem 'weak', perhaps this is enough for Hume to class them as changeable, weak, and irregular. Thanks to an anonymous referee for this journal for pressing me on this.

¹⁷ Allison does qualify this position immediately after, arguing that 'Hume is not introducing an external principle such as divine veracity, but merely affirming the norm that is already implicit in his cognitive faculties as he has analyzed them... all that the Title Principle does is to allow Hume to proceed in philosophy as he does in common life, albeit with a clear epistemological conscience' (Allison 2008, p.327). Of course, this does raise the question of whether Hume is *entitled* to this clear epistemological conscience.

But this strategy of ‘throwing things at the wall and seeing what sticks’ is clearly a second-best state of affairs. Much better, much more systematic, would be an epistemology for which Hume would be able to provide principled reasons.

Another reason Hume might have had to revise the treatment he provides in THN 1.4.7 was his dissatisfaction with his treatment of superstition. Durland (2011, p.81) and Winkler (1999, p.211 fn.21) argue that the Title Principle cannot recommend philosophy over superstition. Proponents of the Title Principle in THN 1.4.7 may offer some defences against this accusation.¹⁸ However, regardless of whether the Title Principle can handle superstition or not, what is undeniable is that Hume does not explicitly appeal to the Title Principle in refuting superstition, instead appealing to superstition’s dangerous consequences:¹⁹

Since therefore ’tis almost impossible for the mind of man to rest, like those of beasts, in that narrow circle of objects, which are the subject of daily conversation and action, we ought only to deliberate concerning the choice of our guide, and ought to prefer that which is safest and most agreeable. And in this respect I make bold to recommend philosophy, and shall not scruple to give it the preference to superstition of every kind or denomination. For as superstition arises naturally and easily from the popular opinions of mankind, it seizes more strongly on the mind, and is often able to disturb us in the conduct of our lives and actions. Philosophy on the contrary, if just, can present us only with mild and moderate sentiments; and if false and extravagant, its opinions are merely the objects of a cold and general speculation, and seldom go so far as to interrupt the course of our natural propensities... Generally speaking, the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous. (THN 1.4.7.13)

¹⁸ See for instance Garrett (2013) and Qu (2014b, p.507).

¹⁹ This is not to commit to a reading of THN 1.4.7 as turning on considerations of usefulness and agreeableness (e.g. Ridge 2003). What seems uncontroversial is that Hume clearly does appeal to considerations of safety in THN 1.4.7.13, whether or not one takes this to be Hume’s main epistemological thrust against superstition or not. Schafer (2014, p.9) takes this passage merely as providing a supplementary argument against superstition. But if one adopts this position, then there is a burden of proof to explain two things: first, why Hume doesn’t explicitly address superstition before this; second, why Hume would feel impelled to offer a supplementary response that he was clearly dissatisfied with (as I argue shortly), if he had a better response already.

Even if the Title Principle were able to reject superstition, it is very much unclear whether Hume recognised that it could; this lack of recognition would have forced him to instead appeal to the dangers that superstition poses.

However, there is a worry that justifying beliefs on properties which are not themselves intimately related to truth (such as safety) is somewhat philosophically unsatisfying. Indeed, Hume seems to share this worry, explicitly stating in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* that we should not refute theories on the basis of their dangerous consequences:

There is no method of reasoning more common, and yet none more blameable, than in philosophical debates to endeavour to refute any hypothesis by a pretext of its dangerous consequences to religion and morality. When any opinion leads us into absurdities, 'tis certainly false; but 'tis not certain an opinion is false, because 'tis of dangerous consequence. (THN 2.3.2.3; cf. EHU 8.26)

This signifies a dissatisfaction with Hume's own treatment of superstition in THN 1.4.7. Given this, perhaps one of the reasons Hume in the *Enquiry* jettisons the epistemic framework of THN 1.4.7 is in order to provide a framework that can provide a more well-founded rejection of superstition.

Indeed, on my account, Hume's reluctance to rely on the Title Principle would be perfectly continuous with his dissatisfaction with THN 1.4.7's treatment of scepticism. Like his appeal to the relative safety of philosophy, the Title Principle can seem to justify beliefs on factors which are not inherently truth-responsive (such as our propensities). If Hume was dissatisfied with the former (as indicated by THN 2.3.2.3 and EHU 8.26), then we have reason to think that he would be dissatisfied with the latter as well. And indeed, it is perhaps telling that Hume thinks it an advantage of his mitigated scepticism (or academic philosophy) that it 'strikes with no disorderly passion of the human mind', stating that his brand of philosophy is 'little liable to this inconvenience' (EHU 5.1). As argued above, this seems an 'inconvenience' precisely because we do not want our beliefs to vary due to factors that are not truth-responsive. Thus, on my reading, a common theme emerges from Hume's treatment of scepticism in THN

1.4.7, Hume's abandonment of the Title Principle in the *Enquiry*, and Hume's treating the relative independence of his mitigated scepticism from the passions as an advantage. These changes are parts of Hume's attempt in the *Enquiry* to wean off his epistemology from epistemically irrelevant factors that are insensitive to truth.

In sum, we have two possible reasons for Hume abandoning in his later work an epistemic framework that leans on the Title Principle. First, because Hume does not seem able to provide a principled reason for the Title Principle; second, because he does not seem confident in its ability to adequately handle superstition, being forced to appeal to superstition's dangerous consequences instead, which is an argumentative strategy that Hume himself finds 'blameable' (THN 2.3.2.3; EHU 8.26).

5. Conclusions

An important question now arises. Say Hume in the *Enquiry* does abandon the epistemology espoused in THN 1.4.7. What epistemic framework does he provide in its place? The task of elucidating this is a major one, and beyond my means in this paper. In my 'Hume's Internalism in EHU 12' (Draft), I scrutinise EHU 12 in detail, and provide an interpretation of the epistemic framework within; a briefer and earlier account can be found in my 'Hume's Positive Argument on Induction' (2014a). However, it is enough for now to conclude that Hume does indeed reject the Title Principle in the *Enquiry*. If I am right, commentators who endorse the Title Principle as playing a substantive role in THN 1.4.7 will have to provide some account of why Hume changes his mind; above, I looked to provide some reasons as to why this might have been the case.

Against those who believe that Hume endorses an epistemology founded on the Title Principle in THN 1.4.7 despite his dropping such a framework in the *Enquiry*, one might question the plausibility of the view that Hume changed his mind between the *Treatise* and the

Enquiry.²⁰ After all, Hume does note in the autobiographical ‘My Own Life’ that his ‘want of success in publishing the Treatise of Human Nature, had proceeded more from the manner than the matter’, and so he ‘cast the first part of that work anew in the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding’, and moreover he states the ‘the philosophical principles are the same in both’ works (HL i.158). All this suggests that the latter work differs from the former in style rather than content.

In response to this, it suffices to say that the phrase ‘more in the manner than the matter’ surely allows for *some* changes in matter. I believe that there are indeed many points of similarity between the two works, even with respect to their treatments of scepticism. Notably, Hume ultimately endorses the same mitigated scepticism in both works as well, while still rejecting excessive scepticism, superstition and false metaphysics, as McCormick (1999) argues. Add to this that many of the arguments elsewhere in the first *Enquiry* have their genesis in Book 1 of the *Treatise*,²¹ and it certainly seems fair on the whole to say that the two differ *more* in the manner than the matter, while still allowing for some crucial changes to the matter at some significant points. Thus, Hume’s comments in ‘My Own Life’ do not seem disingenuous on my reading. Similarly, the core principles may be the same in both works (e.g. the principle that we should be guided by mitigated rather than excessive scepticism or superstition), and yet the two may differ in their arguments for these core principles.

There are also independent reasons for thinking that Hume might have changed his mind thusly. First, one might point to Hume’s infamous ‘Advertisement’ to the volume of *Essays and Treatises* that contains his two *Enquiries*, the *Dissertation on the Passions*, and *The Natural History of Religion*, which claims that these works should ‘alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles’, suggesting that Hume’s later works differ in some meaningful degree from his earlier. Second, Hume states that this Advertisement

²⁰ Millican (2002) and Buckle (1999) also argue convincingly for the first *Enquiry* being both distinct from and superior to Book 1 of the *Treatise*.

²¹ Although some, like his discussions of induction and free will, are noticeably developed and arguably improved in his later work.

‘is a compleat Answer to Dr Reid and to that bigoted silly Fellow, Beattie’ (HL ii. 301). Insofar as Reid and Beattie read Hume as an unmitigated sceptic (and indeed the crude sceptical reading of Hume has come to be known as the ‘Reid-Beattie interpretation’), it is not a stretch to think that Hume wrote the Advertisement with his discussion of scepticism in the *Enquiry* in mind, among other things. We might also note that Hume’s emphasis on the role of the passions in THN 1.4.7 is perhaps symptomatic of the important role that they play in his early philosophy, while his later philosophy very much downplays their significance; for instance, Book 2 of the *Treatise* is far longer and more complex than the *Dissertation on the Passions*. Far from being an outlier, this change seems part of a general trend.

In closing, it seems clear that in the *Enquiry*, Hume rejects the Title Principle; any interpretation of Hume’s epistemologies in THN 1.4.7 and EHU 12 must accommodate this.²²

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