Donald C. Ainslie's *Hume's True Scepticism* presents the first book-length treatment of Book 1, Part 4 of the 1739 *A Treatise of Human Nature* by David Hume (1711–1776). In doing so, the volume represents an important accomplishment, and one can reasonably expect it to become required reading for those wishing to come to terms with Hume's skepticism. *Treatise* 1.4 marks perhaps the most literary account of skeptical crisis in the western philosophical corpus—and also one of its most difficult. It is perhaps for this reason that the crisis is not reprised in the *Enquiries* or other later texts. Unpacking the logic and upshot of the dense passages of T 1.4 remains one of the most controversial but also one of the most important tasks of Hume studies, as well as of the study of skepticism *per se*. Ainslie's contribution to that work is considerable.

Ainslie's line of interpretation is in the first place biographical. In 1734, Hume wrote to an unnamed physician in London how he had suffered "the Disease of the Learned," brought on by his immersion in philosophical work, and that he had sought therapy from his intellectual paralysis in "Business & Diversion" (Letter 1:14, #3, in *Hume 1932*). In Ainslie's view, the exposition of *Treatise* 1.4 was "inspired by the personal experiences detailed in" that letter (5). "The climax" of T 1.4, in Ainslie's medicalized reading, "amounts to a nervous breakdown" (218). Ainslie shows how "Medical theorists, from the Greeks onwards, linked scholarliness to melancholia" (12), and that "Hume would have known of a general link between melancholy, hypochondria, and the life of study from a variety of sources, both popular and more specialized" (13)—perhaps George Cheyne's *The English Malady* (1733) or, in John Wright's (1980) view, Mandeville's 1730 *Treatise on the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases* (Mandeville 1976). Hume would have also known that exercise and sociable concourse were commonly prescribed remedies. The idea that skepticism marks a kind of self-induced madness has also been advanced recently by Lisa Levers (2015), which for her explains why Hume answers the skeptical moment not with argument but with therapy.

More philosophically, Ainslie distinguishes his own reading from four other general lines of interpretation that have characterized the Hume literature. (1) "Skeptical" readings, such as that of James Beattie and most of Hume's earliest interpreters have in Ainslie's nomenclature argued that the skeptical subversion of reason and the senses is correct and that therefore we ought not to invest what they show us with belief—even though we cannot do so. (2) "Naturalistic" readings such as those of Norman Kemp Smith (1905) and Don
Garrett (1997) are, in contrast, anti-skeptical. In their view, Hume invests the way nature overwhelms skepticism’s negative conclusions with positive epistemic significance. Nature, properly mixed with reason, entitles reason and belief. (3) Dialectical readings such as those of Annette Baier (1991) and Donald W. Livingston (1984, 1989) read the skeptical crisis as a moment on the way to a better non-skeptical view. (4) Moral interpretations of Hume’s skepticism, such as those of Michael Ridge (2003) read Hume as advocating skepticism not because it is logically compelling but instead because it serves the moral projects of opposing religious and political pathologies.

Ainslie’s more “philosophical” interpretation of Hume’s true skepticism reads it as making positive discoveries about the epistemic and logical limits of philosophical inquiry that nevertheless endorse reason, science, and the vulgar beliefs of common life. Ainslie argues that Hume discovers that the traditional philosophical project of self-understanding through “reflection” is intrinsically problematic, that it cannot transcend common life and that attempts to surpass those limitations inevitably lead to incoherence, crisis, and “false philosophy.” It is a moral Ainslie emphasizes by placing François Lemoyne’s 1728 painting of “Narcissus” staring into his own reflection on the jacket of the book. Ainslie’s is, however, not an entirely new line of interpretation.

Barry Stroud preceded Ainslie in 1977, writing in a similar albeit narrower vein that for Hume, “Philosophical reflection on the nature of perception inevitably leads to scepticism” (115). Yves Michaud concurred in 1985 reporting that while he found at first blush that Hume’s “skepticism stemmed from the defects in the analysis of natural beliefs and from the deliberate attack against metaphysical systems,” he later came “to realise that it also is the result of this self-reference of philosophical research: we do not know how to assess our philosophical beliefs themselves” (36). Michaud followed this claim with another similar to Ainslie’s about Hume’s return to common life, maintaining that turning away from reflection “implies that we stop insisting on the radical unsteadiness of beliefs and that we do not scrutinize any longer the puzzling self-reference of philosophical statements. Actually, ...the escape from pyrrhonism requires a relative blindness to the question of the nature of philosophical inquiry and, on the contrary, a renewed dogmaticism [sic] concerning the certainty of the science of human nature qua empirical science” (46). Martin Bell in 2002 also diagnosed “the reflective standpoint” itself as the cause of “sceptical doubts” (184), but he maintained that at least in “one species” of philosophy (i.e., the natural science of the “anatomist”) “natural belief can be harmonized with profound reflection” (185).

Ainslie’s exposition exceeds these precedents, however, not only in the detail and complexity of his textanalyse but also in the way he distinguishes