“THE PARTY OF HUMANKIND”: SOCIALITY AND MORAL REVISION IN DAVID HUME

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by
Ryan Pollock

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The dissertation of Ryan Pollock was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Emily Grosholz
Liberal Arts Research Professor of Philosophy, African American Studies & English
Dissertation Advisor
Chair of the Committee

John Christman
Professor of Philosophy, Political Science, and Women's Studies
Philosophy Interim Head

Chris Long
Professor of Philosophy and Classics
Associate Dean for Graduate and Undergraduate Education, College of the Liberal Arts

Jonathan H. Marks
Associate Professor of Bioethics, Humanities and Law
Affiliate Law Faculty

*Signatures on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

David Hume is one of the classic proponents of moral sentimentalism. According to this school of thought, our understanding of virtue and vice springs primarily from our capacity for feeling as opposed to reason. A standard worry about Hume’s account is that it produces an overly conservative theory of morality which blindly supports the status quo. This is because, for Hume, what makes some trait a virtue (or vice) is simply that it commonly garners sentiments of approval (or disapproval). If this is the case, then even traits that are only disapproved of due to prejudice, intolerance, and misunderstanding, must be counted as genuine vices. For example, if homosexuality produces widespread discomfort or distaste in society, then homosexuality must be seen as a vice. Thus, it seems that Hume’s moral theory, instead of providing a method for critiquing and revising prevailing discriminatory attitudes, would actually lend support to them.

My dissertation argues, however, that Hume’s distinctive understanding of sentimentalism provides a more robust method for revising existing moral views than the above sketch would suggest. Hume is not just concerned with providing a theoretically accurate explanation of how human beings distinguish virtue from vice. He also hopes that his work will strengthen our commitment to being a virtuous person by showing that our moral sentiments arise from the aspects of our nature we are most proud of. If we are in doubt about whether or not developing a praiseworthy moral character is worth the effort, Hume thinks we can renew our dedication by reflecting on the origin of our moral sentiments. Such reflection should reveal that our moral sentiments are the product, not of self-interest or the social conditioning of an oppressive political regime (for instance), but of what is best about human nature. Most important for the present purpose are those cases where we find our approval of some trait does not have an agreeable foundation. Although Hume suggests in some places that we will not find
anything negative lurking in the psychological foundation of our moral sentiments, at important points he expresses an ambivalent or even disapproving attitude about traits that are commonly praised. If our commitment to virtue depends upon seeing that our moral sentiments arise from an agreeable origin, then finding that our appraisal of some trait lacked that foundation should give us a reason to revise our feelings.

Pursuing this line of thought first requires getting clear on why Hume believes we will be pleased with the origin of our moral sense. I argue that, for Hume, the reason our moral sentiments garner such approval is that they represent the social nature of human beings. This can be seen in Hume’s explanation of what motivates us to make moral judgments. Hume notes that the sentiments particular to morality are only felt when we adopt a general point of view that allows us to recognize even the virtue qualities of our enemies. From this vantage point we set aside considerations of self-interest, and other aspects of our personal perspective that would render our moral evaluations idiosyncratic, and survey others in an impartial manner. One puzzling question regarding the general point of view is what motivates us to look at our peers in this specific sort of way. Hume is clear that, in general, we adopt this general perspective because it allows our sentiments to agree with the feelings of others. Yet this still leaves open the question of why agreement is sought in the first place. It is common to point out that Hume thinks we seek agreement because disagreement is inconvenient and uncomfortable. I contend, by contrast, that the inherent desirability of agreement is even more fundamental. By setting aside the particularity of our personal vantage point, we are able to preserve our identity as the species which is united by a common set of moral sentiments. This identity, which Hume states that we “cherish,” forms what he terms the “party of humankind.”
Thus, from the outset the process of feeling moral sentiments is imbued with our desire to unite with our fellow human beings. Given that we find it most satisfying to consider the social aspects of our nature, Hume believes we will be pleased with the origin of our moral sentiments. Thus, we should have a reason to modify our approval of some trait when we find that approval does not represent human sociality. I support attributing this claim to Hume by looking at a specific instance where he is uneasy about the fact that some trait garners widespread approval: our approval of military heroism. He notes that our propensity to be awestruck, or “dazzled,” by those who appear greater than common humanity makes us approve of military glory even though this trait has caused a great deal of destruction and harm. Since this quality meets general approval, Hume must classify it as a virtue. However, he is uneasy about doing so and does not seem content to allow our unreflective appraisal of this trait to stand. Particularly in his later work, Hume seeks to reform our sentiments by painting a less appealing picture of military glory that emphasizes to his readers its more ruthless and inhumane aspects. Significantly, Hume does not do something similar to counteract our tendency to praise those whose excessive benevolence ultimately leads to harm. He points out that their selfless display of concern for others is so engaging that we cannot help but praise it. In each case, then, a trait garners general approval despite the fact that it causes harm. Yet, it is only in the case of our approval of the military hero, where our sentiments lack a foundation in human sociability, that Hume attempts to reform our sentiments.

Having shown that Hume aims to modify moral approvals that do not arise from the social tendencies of human nature, I turn to considering how this account could be applied to Hume’s theory of justice. A number of commentators have criticized Hume’s account of justice for excluding the weakest members of society. For Hume, justice is comprised of a set of
property-regulating artificial conventions that are established in order to quell societal conflict. This implies (as Hume states in one important passage) that there would be no reason to include those who are too weak to pose a threat to the stability of society in these conventions. Consequently, it seems that small children, the elderly, those with disabilities, and distant future generations would all not deserve to be treated justly. Hume does point out that even those who lack coercive power have the ability to destabilize society by expressing resentment. Yet, this is problematic because genuine resentment must be expressed toward some wrongdoing. Hume is clear that moral disapproval of injustice only occurs when people fail to follow the relevant rules and he never discusses moral evaluation of the structures of justice themselves. This is a strictly prudential question about how to stabilize society. Thus, if including some powerless group is not necessary to preserve society, then it does not seem Hume’s theory would see their resentment as legitimate. I argue that the account outlined here can provide Hume with a response. Hume displays some ambivalence about the virtue of justice, in one place calling it a “cautious, jealous virtue.” This is because when we delve into the origin of justice we see it is essentially a remedy for the divisive effects of our tendency to partiality and selfishness. The powerless’ resentment, then, brings to our attention what is also revealed by delving into the origin of our moral sentiments: justice is largely representative of the unsociable aspects of our nature. Consequently, we have a reason to make the conventions of justice more inclusive and less representative of human egoism.

If these arguments are correct, then we are forced to reconsider the nature of Hume’s conservatism. I engage this question by considering Hume’s theory alongside another form of sentimentalism: Leon Kass’ conservative appeal to the “wisdom of repugnance.” Kass uses this idea to justify the moral wrongness of a variety of emerging biotechnologies (such as human
cloning) based upon the immediate disgust that “we” supposedly feel toward them. I argue that
Hume would see Kass’ particular form of sentimentalism, where our immediate feelings can be
seen as arising from the teleological structure of the universe, as a form of *philosophical
enthusiasm*. Philosophical enthusiasm, like religious enthusiasm, is driven by the tendency to
focus upon one’s own particular sentiments and, consequently, is not a product of the social
aspects of human nature. The conservative element of Hume’s thought, which encourage us to be
wary of the intrusion of speculative metaphysics into morality and politics, do not necessarily
require support for the status quo. This concern should make us skeptical both of attempts at
liberal reform and conservative entrenchment that are based upon a metaphysical picture of
human beings, and their place in society, which transcends our knowledge of common life.
Instead, Hume is concerned with conserving the “party of humankind” that is characterized by
our approval of traits signifying the social bonds of humanity. In those cases where our moral
approval is not based in human sociality, this particular conservation effort may require
reminding ourselves that benevolence, kindness and gentle concern for one another embody what
is best about human nature.
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CHAPTER 1
THEORY AND PRACTICE IN HUME’S SKEPTICISM AND SENTIMENTALISM

1. INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I discuss the theme of moral revision in the work of David Hume. As we will see, for Hume the fundamental purpose of moral philosophy is to explain how we make the distinction between vicious and virtuous character traits. Hume “catalogues” those traits we approve of as virtues and those we disapprove of as vices. Given this, what I mean by moral revision is the ability to criticize and reform such approvals. When there is approval, perhaps even widespread approval, of a trait that is harmful (or widespread disapproval of something that is not harmful and perhaps even beneficial), then what basis is there for criticizing and revising the current catalogue of virtues and vices? One possible answer is that Hume’s theory cannot provide any principled basis for reform. This attitude can be seen in the following passage from where John Stuart Mill takes Hume to task on this point.

This absolute scepticism in speculation very naturally brought him [Hume] round to Toryism in practice; for if no faith can be had in the operations of human intellect, and one side of every question is about as likely as the other to be true, a man will commonly be inclined to prefer that order of things which, being no more wrong than every other, he has hitherto found compatible with his private comforts.¹

In Mill’s view Hume’s skepticism about the role of reason, and his prizing of sentiment, provide the foundation for a moral and political conservatism that inevitably supports the status quo. If the distinction between virtue and vice is simply a matter of feeling, which is not susceptible to rational evaluation, then it does not seem we could ever be justified in criticizing another’s moral beliefs. In other words, we would be left without any theoretical basis that could justify legitimate moral criticism.

One well known passage from Hume’s corpus seemingly lends support to the above criticism from Mill.

To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very feeling constitutes our praise or admiration. We go no farther; nor do we enquire into the cause of the satisfaction. We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. The case is the same as in our judgments concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations. Our approbation is imply’d in the immediate pleasure they convey to us (T 3.1.2.3; SBN 471, original emphasis).

On the basis of such passages, and in the spirit of the passage from Mill above, Phillipa Foot has criticized Hume for supporting a highly subjective account of moral judgment where personal feeling is made the sole determinant of virtue and vice. While noting that Hume at times appeals to the “sentiments of the majority,” Foot argues that “in most places he accepts subjectivism with ease, and even with relish.”

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Fortunately, more recent readings of Hume have refined our understanding of Hume’s moral philosophy. As pointed out by Phillip Reed, many subsequent commentators have corrected this “facile” reading of Hume by pointing out that only feelings of a certain kind qualify as moral judgments. Only the sentiments of approval that we feel from a general and impartial point of view count as genuine moral sentiments. This is a point of view where we examine another’s character independently of how it affects our self-interest and other factors that are particular to our own situation. As I discuss in chapter 3, the very possibility of morality depends upon our adoption of this point of view. Thus, on Hume’s view, we can criticize those who evaluate others from their own partial perspective by pointing out that such evaluations do not qualify as genuine moral judgments. Still, it might seem that this is a rather thin view of moral criticism. Intuitively, even one who adopts an impartial vantage point can be lead astray in their moral judgments if they value the wrong sorts of things. In the second Enquiry, Hume imagines a “creature, absolutely malicious and spiteful” (EPM 5.40; SBN 226-227) and states that, were such a creature to exist, it would be “worse than indifferent to the images of vice and virtue” (ibid.) Such a being would disapprove of “[w]hatever contributes to the good of mankind” and praise “whatever is the source of disorder and misery in society” (ibid.). What is supposed to trouble us about this being is not that it fails to judge impartially. Rather, it is that this imagined being feels pleasurable sentiments upon surveying actions that we take to be vicious.

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5 Kate Abramson explicitly appeals to this idea in order to combat Foot’s reading of Hume (“Correcting Our Sentiments about Hume’s Moral Point of View,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 37.3 (1999): 333-361).
In this instance, Hume believes that there is no human being whose sentiments have been corrupted to this extent. “All mankind,” writes Hume, “so far resemble the good principle, that, where interest or revenge or envy perverts not our disposition, we are always inclined, from our natural philanthropy, to give the preference to the happiness of society” (EPM 5.40; SBN 226-227). Yet, as we will see, there are still legitimate conflicts of value that take place which the general point of view cannot adjudicate. This conflict occurs not only among contemporaries but also between those living in different historical eras. Intuitively, it seems there are many instances where what was upheld as virtuous in one era can now rightly criticized by us as vicious in the current era. If the following passage from Hume’s essay “Of Civil Liberty” accurately represents his position, then it seems this fact was not lost upon Hume.

I am apt, however, to entertain a suspicion, that the world it still too young to fix many general truths in politics, which will remain true to the latest posterity, We have not as yet had experience of three thousand years; so that not only the art of reasoning is still imperfect in this science, as in all other, but we even want sufficient materials upon which we can reason. It is not fully known, what degree of refinement, either in virtue or vice, human nature is susceptible of; nor what may be expected of mankind from any great revolution in their education, customs, or principles (EMPL 87-88).

In this passage Hume seems optimistic that, given sufficient time, we can refine and improve our understanding of morality. This suggests that the catalogue of virtues and vices we may subscribe to at any given time is subject to revision and criticism.

Yet, it is initially difficult to see how this could be the case. If morality is simply a matter of feeling, then (even if these feelings must be felt from an impartial perspective) it is not clear
how some feelings can be seen as better than others. Hume himself makes it clear that the sentiments which found our moral judgments are not themselves subject to truth evaluation—these sentiments may be “laudable or blameable” but cannot “be pronounc’d either true or false” (T 3.1.1.9; SBN 458). If this is the case, then how can the moral sentiments people feel at one time be subject to criticism and revision? Some commentators have held that Hume’s theory (as it stands) cannot support this sort of moral criticism, or at least does not allow us to criticize a given understanding of morality in all the ways we would like. As I will discuss further in chapter 4, Rachel Cohon argues that Hume provides no way for us to criticize widespread approval or disapproval of traits that is based upon immediate agreeability or disagreeability. For Hume and his contemporaries (as well as for many today) an example of a trait that was considered vicious solely because it was felt to be immediately disagreeable is homosexuality. In one place Hume explicitly supports the idea that homosexuality is vicious on these grounds (D 334). Cohon points out, then, that if we accept Hume’s moral theory that we must also accept the following evaluation of previous sentiments regarding homosexuality.

[W]e must conclude that the censure of homosexuals was justified, that children should have brought up not to be homosexual and to look down on homosexuals, and were rightly brought up if so, and that adults should have sought to overcome any such tendencies they found in themselves and were right to denigrate them in others.6

Cohon continues by pointing out that “this result will sit badly with many today” who “would like to say that the antipathy felt toward homosexuality was just a cultural prejudice.”7

Unfortunately, it is not clear that Hume’s theory can support this idea. If Hume and his

7 Ibid., 251.
contemporaries did indeed find homosexuality disagreeable, then (at least for them) it was a genuine vice.

Ultimately, Cohon does not believe that Hume is capable of providing a way of criticizing widely felt moral sentiments and that his theory must be amended in order to account for this.\(^8\) In this dissertation, however, I contend that Hume’s moral theory does contain further resources which allow us to criticize prevailing moral attitudes. While Hume was primarily concerned with describing how we determine what qualities belong in the “catalogue of virtues” (T 3.3.4.2, SBN 607-608), there are also important points where Hume criticizes the moral beliefs of his contemporaries and previous societies. From these I think we can derive a standard by which Hume judges various conceptions of virtue, or various ways of forming the catalogue of virtue. Specifically, Hume generally sees it as a sign of progress when the traits that some culture deems virtuous are based more upon social affections and less upon our selfish affections. Furthermore, I argue that this standard explains the fact that Hume has a certain amount of ambivalence toward the virtue of justice and can be used to extend and remedy his theory of justice in those places where it seems to fall short.

From the outset, it is important to recognize that the task of revising the catalogue of virtues is \textit{practical} in nature. In chapter two I defend the view that Hume’s standard of virtue is simply general consensus. Those traits which garner the approval of the majority of people when surveyed from a general vantage point are genuine virtues. This means that revising the catalogue of virtues requires modifying the sentiments that people feel about a given trait. This endeavour goes beyond theoretical description of what causes us to approve/disapprove of certain character traits. I hope to show in what follows that Hume’s attempt to modify the

\(^8\) \textit{Ibid.}, 266-267.
sentiments of his reader is guided by a theoretically coherent standard of revision. Still, when considered in itself, the goal of changing our approvals and disapprovals is fundamentally practical.

The fact that I am attributing such substantive practical goals to Hume’s work may seem controversial. This is because, in at least one place in the Treatise, Hume explicitly denies that it would be proper to pursue both theoretical and practical aims in serious philosophical work. In a number of places Hume draws a metaphorical distinction between a painter and anatomist which, as I discuss in the next chapter, originated as a response to a criticism made against him by Francis Hutcheson. Hume notes that both the painter and the anatomist are concerned with the human body, but for different reasons. The painter aims at depicting the human body with “Grace & Beauty,” while the anatomist pulls back the outer layers of skin in order to investigate the “most secret Springs & Principles” which explain how the body functions (HL1 32.). This anatomical investigation increases our knowledge, but at the expense of making even the most beautiful figures appear “trivial” (ibid.). It is only when the body’s inner workings are covered up that it can again appear “graceful and engaging” (ibid.).

Hume believes the same is the case with moral philosophy. The practical moralist and the theoretical philosopher are both concerned with morality. While the former aims to make a life of virtue appear attractive, the latter is concerned with explaining why humans evaluate certain qualities as virtuous or vicious. This philosophical anatomy can have consequences that are similar to its physical counterpart. Even though moral sentiments are among the “noblest Attitudes” (HL1 32) in human nature, they can also appear trivial upon critical examination. Thus, the theoretical philosopher can advise the practical moralist, but their respective endeavors should not be “united in the same work” (ibid.). Hume repeats this idea in the Treatise where he
urges that practical morality should be pursued in a “work a-part” (T 3.3.6.6; SBN 620-621). Given this rather explicit statement that theory and practice ought to be kept separate, further work needs to be done to show that Hume thought it was legitimate to pursue practical goals in a work of theoretical philosophy.

In this initial chapter I argue that Hume, despite his statements to the contrary, incorporated practical concerns into his work in the Treatise. In fact, I contend that theory and practice were not even completely separated in that aspect of Hume’s work which is most theoretical and abstract: his work on the understanding. While it was not until the first Enquiry that Hume himself seemed to recognize the extent to which his theoretical speculations were guided by practical matters, I hold that practice played a substantive role in Hume’s work from the beginning. If this is the case, then it is plausible to think that Hume would be receptive to adopting the practical goal of moral revision as well. At least, such an endeavor cannot be rejected at the outset as inimical to Hume’s understanding of the philosophical enterprise.

2. SENTIMENTALISM AND ALIENATION

Before proceeding, however, we might wonder what makes Hume’s moral theory worth defending from this charge. If the inability to critique prevailing moral attitudes constitutes an important disadvantage for any ethical theory, and the sentimentalist basis of Hume’s account leaves him vulnerable to this objection, then simply say “so much the worse for sentimentalism?” If other types of theories are more readily capable of criticizing prejudice and bias, then it seems that Hume’s sentimentalist view should have some other advantage attractive enough to warrant its defense. I argue here that one significant benefit of Hume’s view is that it is less likely to portray morality in a manner that will make us feel alienated from moral demands. Here I will discuss three different types of alienation.
(i) Alienation from the demands of morality that occurs as a result of seeing those demands as an external imposition.

(ii) Alienation from the demands of morality that occurs as a result of being unable to see how morality is connected to our species identity.

(iii) Alienation from the demands of morality that occurs as a result of seeing those demands as the product of a trivial source.

I hold that Hume’s brand of sentimentalism is attractive in that it does not present the threat of alienation in either sense (i) or (ii). I discuss (iii) as some have criticized Hume along these lines and I believe that overcoming such criticisms further motivates my work here.

2.1 Alienation and External Imposition

A significant aspect of the sense in which I understand alienation is outlined well by Peter Railton. According to Railton, alienation from morality occurs when we experience morality “as an external set of demands not rooted in our lives or accommodating to our perspectives.”

We may cease to find the demands of morality important, let alone overridingly important, if they are simply imposed upon us from without. Consider, for instance, the conception of morality provided by Divine Command Theory. This is a theory which can provide a rather straightforward account of when we ought to engage in moral revision. If our extant practices and approvals do not reflect God’s commands, then we have a reason to revise them. Of course, we might find this theory problematic from a theoretical point of view. What evidence is there that such a being exists and cares enough about what we do to prescribe certain rules of correct conduct? However, the problem with such a moral theory goes deeper than the possibility that there is a lack of evidence for a divine command-issuing being.

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This can be seen from the fact that a similar sense of alienation could result from moral theories that lie squarely within the confines of naturalism. In the *Treatise*, Hume takes aim at Bernard Mandeville’s view that morality is simply the product of manipulation by clever politicians. Hume admits that our commitment to justice can be “forwarded by the artifice of politicians” but denies that politicians could actually artificially impose morality upon us (T 3.2.2.25; SBN 500). The point here is that Mandeville’s account conceives of moral demands as a set of external commands without positing any transcendent or supernatural being. Thus, alienation through external imposition need not rely upon the claim that there is a transcendent being making demands upon us. The essential characteristic which ties each of these cases together, and causes each to pose the threat of alienation, is that each holds that moral rules have a source that is foreign to human nature. If all that can be said in favor of these demands is that they have been commanded by another who is in position to enforce them, then their connection to our desires, goals, and human concerns can only be accidental. It seems plausible that realizing morality is not, again using Railton’s description, “rooted in our lives or accommodating to our perspectives” would alienate us from those demands and lessen our motivation to follow them.

Hume’s naturalistic sentimentalism would seem to fare better in this regard by basing our moral approvals wholly upon human nature. Of course, Hume does hold that certain aspects of morality, such as justice, are externally imposed in a sense. It is the social conditioning of parental instruction, along with custom and habit, which readies us to follow a set of conventions that would seem unintelligible in our “wild uncultivated state” (T 3.2.2.4; SBN 486). Furthermore, in a passage I discuss in more detail in chapter 6, Hume recognizes that in certain

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instances the rules of property can seem as outlandish as religious superstition (EPM 3.37; SBN 198-199). The difference between them, however, is that the former can be traced back to our common human need to live together in peaceful social union. There is still a connection, albeit in a sense an indirect connection, between the externally imposed rules of justice and the concerns of common life. However, a theory of morality which appeals to the act of command the ultimate source of ethical ideas does not allow morality to become integrated in the pursuit of good human life. One might respond that God commands us to follow certain rules because doing so is best for us (we will see in the following chapter that Hutcheson adopts this line of defense) or that the clever politicians are manipulating us for our own good. 11 Yet, if this is the case, then we are using some standard independent of the command itself to evaluate the command. Consequently, morality would not be based upon commands after all.

2.2 Alienation and Species Identity

A second way in which we might become alienated from morality has to do not with what that theory identifies as the source of ethical ideals, but with what sort of person that theory encourages us to be. In other words, how does a given ethical theory conceive of the ideal moral agent? And, importantly, can we see that ideal moral agent as one of us (as a member of our species)? If morality demanded that we become someone who was barely recognizable as a human being, then it seems the risk of alienation would again present itself. The demands of morality would fail to have a sufficiently close connection with the type of being that we are and the types of lives we live. Here I have in mind moral theories of a rationalist bent. In the

11 E. J. Hundert notes that this is essentially Mandeville’s position: “[i]n his view the first unsocial and cognitively primitive brutes could never have knowingly entered into the morally informed agreements which characterized contemporary theories of contract. Mandeville insisted instead that societies could only have been formed by the artful manipulation of the passions of these unknowing primitives” (“Bernard Mandeville and the Enlightenment’s Maxims of Modernity,” Journal of the History of Ideas 56:4 (1995): 577-593, 587).
Treatise, Hume notes that holding morality is based upon reason is a philosophical, and even non-philosophical, common place.

Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates. Every rational creature, 'tis said, is oblig’d to regulate his actions by reason; and if any other motive or principle challenge the direction of his conduct, he ought to oppose it, 'till it be entirely subdu’d, or at least brought to a conformity with that superior principle (T 2.3.3.1; SBN 413).

Hume goes on to provide a number of arguments meant to counter the views of his rationalist opponents. What I want to consider here, however, is how thinking of the ideal moral agent as one determined solely by a species-transcendent faculty of reason could influence our outlook upon morality itself.

We can begin by considering in more detail Hume’s description of the position held by the moral rationalist.

Those who affirm that virtue is nothing but a conformity to reason; that there are eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, which are the same to every rational being that considers them; that the immutable measures of right and wrong impose an obligation, not only on human creatures, but also on the deity himself: All these systems concur in the opinion, that morality, like truth, is discern’d merely by ideas, and by their juxta-position and comparison (T 3.1.1.4; SBN 456-457).
What is essential in this passage is that virtue and vice will be perceived in the same manner by all rational beings regardless of that being’s species-specific psychological inclinations. We can see this view explicitly in Samuel Clarke.

The same necessary and eternal different relations, that different things bear one to another [...] with regard to which, the will of God always and necessarily does determine itself, to choose to act only what is agreeable to justice, equity, goodness and truth [...] ought likewise constantly to determine the wills of all subordinate rational beings, to govern all their actions by the same rules.12

Clarke believes that moral relations can be understood in the same way that we understand mathematical relations – through reason alone.13 The consequence of this is that “all rational creatures ought, that is, are obliged to take care that their wills and actions be constantly determined and governed by the eternal rule of right and equity.”14

Clarke’s point is that the capacity for deductive reason is sufficient to understand virtue and vice. As the development of technology attests, this is not a capacity that is inherently tied to the human species (in fact computers are much better at deduction than humans). For Hume, however, understandings of virtue and vice are inherently tied to the nature of the evaluating being. Whatever necessity or immutability applies to morality is derived from the immutability of psychological and emotional dispositions of the species in question. Jonathan Harrison

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12 Samuel Clarke, A Discourse of Natural Religion, in British Moralists, selected and edited with comparative notes and analytical index by D.D. Raphael (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 225, original emphasis.
13 Ibid., 226.
provides the following example: “That gases expand when heated is a mutable truth in that gases could change in this respect, but not in the sense that sometimes they do.”

For Hume it is not a conceptual truth, for instance, that injustice is a vice. He instead holds that given the basis upon which human beings judge of vice and virtue, and given that human nature will not radically change, this principle will not change. It may be the case that other rational, non-human beings may judge of injustice (if it would still be proper to call it that) differently, but humans will always disapprove of injustice. According to Hume it takes a species specific emotional apparatus, and not just some rational apparatus which could inhere in any species, in order to give moral approval or disapproval of actions. Consequently, the view that reason is sufficient for understanding morality effectively severs any substantive connection between human morality and human nature. If we think that the ideals which determine how we ought to conduct our lives should have some important connection to what is distinctive about human beings, then the rationalist view offered here would not be satisfying.

We can see something similar in Immanuel Kant’s particular brand of rationalism. In the *Groundwork*, Kant argues that we are only capable of acting morally insofar as we act autonomously or insofar as our “will […] is a law of itself.”

A necessary condition of autonomy, in Kant’s sense, is a particular sort of negative freedom: “freedom would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient independently of alien causes determining it.”

Importantly, the “alien causes” that Kant refers to here comprise just those elements that seem to

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constitute the identity of the human species. Kant holds that human beings are capable of adopting two different “standpoints” from which we can consider ourselves.

[H]e has two standpoints from which he can regard himself and cognize laws for the use of his powers and consequently for all his actions: first, insofar as he belongs to the world of sense, under laws of nature (heteronomy); second, as belonging to the intelligible world, under laws which, being independent of nature, are not empirical but grounded merely in reason.\textsuperscript{18}

We can understand ourselves as subject to empirically observable laws of nature, the inclinations and desires characteristic of the human psychological contagion, and the world of sensible objects. However, we can also understand ourselves as subject to laws that reason prescribes for itself. In other words, we are capable of understanding ourselves as beings who can determine our actions in accordance with practical reasons that are not reducible to the satisfaction of our desires.\textsuperscript{19}

If seeing morality as intimately connected to our human species identity is important for preserving our commitment to its demands, then it seems the Kantian view outlined here carries with it the significant potential for alienation. As argued by Mark Lebar, Kant’s distinction between our rational self and “what is alien to us” leaves “our embodied, animal selves, subjects of passions, desires, and other states animals experience – on the remote side of the line.”\textsuperscript{20}

Consequently, “the price of Kant’s alternative to Hume is seeing our animal selves and the

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 4:452.
\textsuperscript{19} It is, of course, this reduction of practical reason to reasoning about the best means of satisfying our contingently held ends that Hume famously advocates in the following famous passage: “[r]eason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions” (T 2.3.3.4; SBN 414-415).
natural world in which we live as fundamentally alien.” Kant is clear that seeing ourselves as subject to rational laws requires that one distinguish ourselves not just from “all other things” (inanimate objects, non-human animals, etc.) but even distinguish ourselves from ourselves insofar as we are “affected by objects.” On Kant’s account, then, it is difficult to square our moral selves (the side of our self that is capable of genuine moral action) with the conception of ourselves that is based upon our species identity.

As a final point, consider Kant’s description of what we might call the “begrudging philanthropist.”

Suppose, then, that the mind of this philanthropist were overclouded by his own grief, which extinguished all sympathy with the fate of others, and that while he still had the means to benefit others in distress their troubles did not move him because he had enough to do with his own; and suppose that now, when no longer incited to it by any inclination, he nevertheless tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without any inclination, simply from duty; then the action first has its genuine moral worth.

Karen Stohr notes that “[f]ew passages in moral philosophy have been the subject of as much scorn” as the above. It is a common criticism from virtue ethicists that the begrudging philanthropist fails to be motivated in the right sort of way. I want to suggest that the off

\[21\] Ibid., 171.
\[22\] Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:452.
\[23\] Ibid., 4:398.
\[25\] See, for instance, Michael Stocker, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 73:14 (1976): 453-466. There is some controversy regarding whether Hume can be read as holding duty itself is a deficient motive for the natural virtues. For instance, Charlotte Brown, argues that the motive of duty is “morally
putting nature of this passage derives not just from the fact that its protagonist is unfeeling, but that (on Kant’s construal) being motivated correctly requires alienating ourselves from that which makes us human. In this case, it requires parting ways with our natural concern and sympathy for others. Hume’s picture of the moral exemplar, on the other hand is meant to be the sort of person we would more readily accept as the human ideal. A person “of honour and humanity,” whose sharp mind promises “the greatest honours and advancement,” and whose “good manners” make her a pleasant conversationalist (EPM 9.2; SBN 269-270). As argued by Kate Abramson, Hume’s aim here is produce a picture of the ideal moral agent that his readers will be easily able to sympathize with.26

2.3 ALIENATION AND TRIVIALITY

The previous two senses of moral alienation both rely upon the idea that learning about the nature of morality makes it seem foreign, or apart, from us. There is, however, a third sense of alienation I would like to consider which is importantly different and will further motivate my work here. One salient aspect of morality is that it often makes demands that are challenging and require us to sacrifice our own interests. Hume famously addresses this phenomenon with his discussion of the “sensible knave” (which I address further in chapter 5). Hume’s sensible knave asks why he ought to abide by the conventions of justice in those instances when he knows he could break them without detection (EPM 9.22, SBN 282-283). In short, Hume’s answer is that one who was to act in this way would be unable to enjoy a “satisfactory review of his own conduct” (EPM 9.23; SBN 283). Of course, this solution only works if we indeed would feel second rate” (“Is Hume an Internalist?” Journal of the History of Philosophy 26:1 (1988): 85). Phillip Reed, however, argues that Hume does not adopt this virtue ethics position (“Motivating Hume’s Natural Virtues,” forthcoming in Canadian Journal of Philosophy).

ashamed with ourselves for not abiding by the demands of morality. At minimum, it seems this would require that reflecting upon the nature of morality does not produce a sense of alienation. The knave might conclude that the rules of justice were not worth following if, for instance, they arose simply from the whim of a capricious dictator.

However, it also seems possible that alienation from morality could occur even if reflection showed that the demands of morality were rooted firmly within human nature. This could be the case if reflection demonstrated that morality was the product of an aspect of our nature that was trivial or that we perceive as largely arbitrary and unimportant. This idea appears in Hume’s discussion of the effects of skepticism. Hume states that his skeptical arguments have shown that there is nothing lying at the foundation of our common sense beliefs besides “a strong propensity to consider objects strongly in that view, under which they appear” (T 1.4.7.3, SBN 265). The sole reason we believe, for instance, that there is an external world with causally coherent connections is because of an “illusion of the imagination” which arises from custom and habit (T 1.4.7.6, SBN 267).

Further reflection upon this fact threatens a “dangerous dilemma” where we must either “assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy,” which leads us into “errors, absurdities, and obscurities,” or “adhere to the understanding” (T 1.4.7.6-7; SBN 267-268). While adhering to the understanding would allow us to avoid following the arbitrary nature of the imagination, it would also destroy our common beliefs and be met with “the most fatal consequences” (ibid.). What troubles Hume about the nature of our common sense beliefs is not just that they are not based upon reason, but that the foundation they do have seems trivial. It is simply the tendency our imagination has to be enlivened by the way we are conditioned by custom and habit (which at first glance seems to resemble the socially conditioning that occurs in a cult). As I discuss further
below, this worry is only assuaged when this seemingly trivial aspect of our nature is shown to actually be vital for the acting in common life and uniting with our peers. The problem only resides once we combat the view that our common sense beliefs have a trivial foundation.

It is my contention in this dissertation that one of the important aims of Hume’s moral philosophy is to show that our moral sentiments are not the product of a trivial aspect of our nature. In fact, he aims to show that they arise from those aspects of our nature which incite the most pride and which we find most engaging. However, some have actually criticized Hume for failing in just this regard. Christine Korsgaard considers the following example which she describes as “a slightly more attractive version of Hume's sensible knave.”

Our knave is the lawyer for a rich client who has recently died, leaving his money to medical research. In going through the client's papers the lawyer discovers a will of more recent date, made without the lawyer's help but in due form, leaving the money instead to the client's worthless nephew, who will spend it all on beer and comic books. The lawyer could easily suppress this new will, and she is tempted to do so. She is also a student of Hume, and believes the theory of the virtues that we find in A Treatise of Human Nature. So what does she say to herself?

Korsgaard explains that, on the one hand, the lawyer knows she would feel bad about suppressing the will because the act is unjust. Yet, importantly, this lawyer (as a committed student of Hume) also understands the reason why she should disapprove of herself.

She would disapprove of herself because unjust actions have a tendency to bring down the system of justice. But she also knows that her distaste for such actions is

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28 Ibid., 86.
caused by their general tendency, not their actual effects. As Hume has shown, our moral sentiments are influenced by ‘general rules.’

Upon reflection the lawyer may conclude that the ultimate reason for herself disapproval is largely insignificant. Why let our reliance upon general rules, which Hume describes as an addiction at T 3.2.9.3 (SBN 551), dissuade us from performing an action that would benefit a great deal of other people? Korsgaard believes that this sort of reflection would lead one to take the following attitude: “[t]he lawyer does not believe that the claims her moral feelings make on her in this case are well-grounded. If she could cure herself of them then that is what she would do.”

Korsgaard’s claim that recognizing the influence that general rules has upon our moral sentiments within Hume’s account would make us want to reject morality is controversial. However, I think Korsgaard is right to hold that reflection upon Hume’s explanation of the conventions of justice does at least threaten a sort of alienation. This is not only because of the influence that general rules have upon our approval of the conventions of justice, but because these conventions are based upon self-interest. As we will see, for Hume (and other Scottish Enlightenment thinkers) our self-interested tendency is not the aspect of our nature which garners the most pride. As I discuss further in chapter 5, I believe Hume himself is aware that reflection upon the nature of justice does not always reveal what is best about human nature when he refers to justice as a “cautious, jealous virtue” (EPM 3.3, SBN 183-184). I bring up this

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29 Ibid., 86-87.
31 Korsgaard, The Sources of Normativity, 88.
sort of alienation, which Hume’s theory seems initially susceptible to in certain respects, because it points the way forward. I will argue here that Hume’s aim of demonstrating that morality arises from what is most praiseworthy about human nature also provides a standard for revising existing moral sentiments.

3. **The Practical Import of Hume’s Skepticism**

It is a somewhat commonplace observation that Hume thinks the demands of common life provide a remedy for the debilitating effects of total skepticism. The reflective philosopher, upon realizing the fundamental weakness of the human faculties, falls into despair. Fortunately, our need to act in common life proves too strong and brings us out of skeptical anguish. This may explain how Hume can continue to recommend our participation in the affairs of daily life, but where does it leave theoretical philosophy? Must the philosopher wholly forsake abstract intellectual pursuits if he or she hopes to achieve mental stability and tranquility? Given that, in the *Treatise*, Hume moves on from his discussion of skepticism to outline a theory of the passions and morality, it does not seem that Hume believes this is the case. He seems to be sufficiently optimistic that something good can come from further philosophical inquiry.

At least one prominent commentator, Louis Loeb, has suggested otherwise. Loeb finds an important thread that unites Hume with Descartes, Sextus Empiricus, and Peirce: each of these four philosophers believes that we ought to seek “settled doxastic states.” In other words, each of these thinkers believes that the final objective of inquiry is a stable mental state. Loeb further argues that Hume, in one respect at least, is “odd man out” because “he claims to be pessimistic

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that the objective of inquiry he identifies can be achieved.” Hume agrees with the other three philosophers that inquiry should be directed toward achieving mental stability but, unlike the others Loeb discusses, he is pessimistic about our ability to achieve this end. This is important for the present purpose because if Loeb is right then there is some rather significant counter evidence to my claim that Hume had any strong practical concerns in his theoretical work. It is unlikely that philosophical thought can make any practical contribution if it is incapable of even producing stable beliefs (or mental stability more generally). I contend here, contra Loeb, that Hume was optimistic about the ability of philosophy to terminate in stable belief provided the subject matter of philosophy is properly delimited. Furthermore, I hold that Hume’s skepticism and practical concern are fully compatible. This is because Hume uses skeptical arguments, not to convince us that stable knowledge is impossible, but in order to further our knowledge of human nature. Thus, even Hume’s skepticism demonstrates his desire to produce a philosophical system that is practically useful.

3.1 Skepticism and the Return to Philosophy

The main evidence Loeb puts forth to support his pessimistic view of Hume is found in the final section of Treatise Book 1 (T 1.4.7; SBN 263-74). Here Hume explains the psychological effects of his skeptical arguments which call into question reason’s ability to justify its own efficacy (T 1.4.1; SBN 180-87) and justify the belief in mind independent external objects that is suggested by our senses (T 1.4.2; SBN 187-218). These considerations make Hume cognizant of the “manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason,” “ready to reject all belief and reasoning,” and unable to see any “opinion even as more probable or likely than another” (T 1.4.7.8; SBN 268-69). The realization that human reason is unable to establish the veracity of our

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knowledge-gaining faculties leaves the reflective person in a state of mental instability. Hume describes this as a state of “philosophical melancholy and delirium” (T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269). As mentioned briefly before, Hume does not believe that this state of mind can persist permanently. Nature “relax[es] this bent of mind,” and the practical affairs of common life make skeptical speculations seem so “cold, and strain’d, and ridiculous” that Hume cannot find it in his “heart to enter into them any farther” (*ibid*). At this point it seems that Hume *is* optimistic about the possibility of stable belief. The autonomous use of reason results in instability, but the inevitable influence of nature, and the need to act, reestablishes mental stability and common sense beliefs.36

Loeb, however, questions this apparent optimism. After becoming weary of the “amusement and company” which had diverted his attention from his skeptical doubts, Hume reports the following:

I cannot forebear having a curiosity to be acquainted with the principles of moral good and evil, the nature and foundation of government, and the cause of those several passions and inclinations, which actuate and govern me. I am uneasy to think I approve of one object, and disapprove of another; call one thing beautiful, and another deform’d; decide concerning truth and falsehood, reason and folly, without knowing upon what principles I proceed. I am concern’d for the condition

36 Specifically, the skeptic’s reflections are unable to displace, what has been termed in the secondary literature, the “natural beliefs.” These are beliefs which the human mind cannot resist holding despite the fact that they cannot be justified by reason (Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, (London: Macmillan, 1949), 124). As stated by J.C.A. Gaskin, “natural beliefs are beliefs of naïve common sense. They are non-rational but necessary as a pre-condition of action, and they are universally held,” and also that “natural belief is in a certain sense ‘non-rational’ but it is *not* irrational or unreasonable and it *does* have the very important practical justification that things ‘work out well’ if I have the belief and *cannot work out* if I do not have the belief” (“God, Hume, and Natural Belief,” *Philosophy* 49.189 (1974): 281-294).
of the learned world, which lies under such a deplorable ignorance in all these particulars. I feel an ambition to arise in me of contributing to the instruction of mankind, and of acquiring a name by my inventions and discoveries. These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition; and shou’d I endeavor to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I feel I shou’d be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy (T 1.4.7.12; SBN 270-71, original emphasis).

Here Hume finds, in what I will refer to as the “return to philosophy” (RTP) passage, that common life cannot provide a perpetual distraction from philosophy. The philosopher cannot forever distract him or herself through playing back-gammon and conversing with friends (T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269). Curiosity will eventually call the reflective person back to abstract thought, and, in Loeb’s view, this means that the inquirer will inevitably return to those skeptical reflections about the understanding which had previously been the cause of mental instability.  

To be clear, Loeb is not claiming that Hume thinks stable belief is completely out of reach. Hume’s “many honest gentleman” of England who are “always employ’d in their domestic affairs” and “have carried their thoughts little beyond those objects, which are every day expos’d to their senses” would not experience the mental disturbance caused by philosophical reflection (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272-73). The issue is that everyday life does not provide permanent solace for the reflective philosopher. The curiosity of the philosopher will inevitably draw him or her back to engaging in sustained, critical reflection, and, consequently, into a state of mental instability.

Loeb’s interpretation, however, does not notice the subtlety of Hume’s account. While it is true that, for Hume, the philosopher cannot keep his or her desire for reflection permanently in

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check, it is vital to notice that the *types* of questions which the philosopher is drawn toward in the RTP passage are different from the types of questions which caused mental instability. The skeptical arguments of the *Treatise* 1.4.1 and 1.4.2 respectively call into question the efficacy of our reasoning and sensing faculties, and thus attempt to undermine the very means of gaining knowledge. The outset of *Treatise* 1.4.7 confirms that the source of Hume’s mental anguish is lingering doubt about the veridicality of our knowledge gaining faculties. Hume is “diffident for the future” because of the “wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties, I must employ in my enquiries […] And the impossibility of amending or correcting those faculties” (T 1.4.7.1; SBN 263-64). These worries about the impotence of our faculties are the result of second-order questions about possibility of attaining knowledge.

The questions in the RTP passage which bring Hume *back to philosophy*, however, are fundamentally different. In the RTP passage, Hume’s curiosity extends to how we make determinations of morality and beauty, how government arises, and how the passions function. These are substantive *first-order* questions about why humans make judgments and act the way they do. It seems Hume is much more optimistic about these types of questions because they do not require calling into question the efficacy of our faculties. We don’t need to suppose that reflection upon, for instance, the principles of morality would degenerate once again into skepticism about the basis of our faculties.³⁸ In fact, these types of questions *presuppose* the efficacy of our faculties. Consider, for example, Hume’s attempt to demonstrate that some

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³⁸ As I will discuss in the following chapter, Hume actually thinks that our commitment to morality will be strengthened when we reflect upon their origin. In Christine Korsgaard’s view, however, Hume’s optimism about moral reflection is contrasted with a pessimism about the understanding which “‘subverts itself’ when reflecting upon its own operations” (*The Sources of Normativity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63). I agree on this last point to the extent that reflection upon the understanding signifies critical reflection upon the *foundation* of our understanding, and not its capacity to inquire into subjects that have a greater connection with common life (as will be argued).
character trait is deemed virtuous when it is useful or agreeable to oneself or others (T 3.3.1.30; SBN 591). He does this by applying this principle “to particular instances of virtue and vice, and showing how their merit or demerit arises from the[se] four sources” (T 3.3.2.1; SBN 592). Far from calling into question the efficacy of sense perception, first-order questions of this sort actually assume it. It would be impossible to make these sorts of determinations if we did not already place confidence in capacity for sense perception.

Once we place confidence in our faculties, we can be much more optimistic about the goal that Hume outlines for the remainder of the Treatise at the end of Book 1: to “contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge” (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272-73). Hume’s optimism can be seen most clearly in the outlook he has in approaching the subject of morality. The common interest we have in morality ensures that “our speculations [will] appear more real and solid” (T 3.1.1.1; SBN 455-56). If this is true, then returning to philosophy does not also imply a return to “philosophical melancholy and delirium.” The philosopher may, in fact, be able to return with the legitimate expectation of accomplishing constructive goals.

The natural response here is to point out that, in the RTP passage, Hume’s curiosity prompts him to consider not only questions of practical philosophy, but also the theoretical issue of how we “decide concerning truth and falsehood.” One may argue that this is the type of question which, as we saw from Treatise Book 1’s treatment of the human understanding, would lead to mental instability. This is the position taken by Loeb who notes that how we decide concerning truth and falsehood is “the very topic that has occupied Hume in Book I of the Treatise.” Certainly, Hume devotes Book 1 of the Treatise to this issue, but the more pressing

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39 For further discussion of Hume’s commitment to “advance knowledge,” despite the inability of reason to escape skepticism, see Anik Waldow, David Hume and the Problem of Other Minds, (New York: Continuum, 2009), 48-57.
question is whether reflection about truth and falsity requires *skeptical* questioning of our faculties. As Loeb himself argues elsewhere, much of Book 1 (Part 3 in particular) engages in constructive explanation of what makes beliefs justified, and not the inevitably destructive attempt to found our faculties upon reason.\textsuperscript{41} Thus, there is no need to conclude that questions dealing with what makes the mind denominate some ideas true, and others false, must lead to skepticism just because they are addressed in Book 1. The question concerning how we “decide concerning truth and falsehood” may mean, “what are the essential characteristics of those beliefs we denominate as ‘true’ or ‘justified?’” A perfect example of this can be found at T 1.3.15 where Hume outlines eight rules that should be followed when engaging in causal reasoning. This section shows that we can ask *first-order* questions about what constitutes correct reasoning without asking *second-order* questions about whether the faculties we use have a justifiable foundation in reason.

Hume, then, seems to be *optimistic* that even the reflective philosopher, and not just the unreflective person concerned only with the affairs of daily life (the “honest gentleman of England”), can achieve stable belief. In addition to the reasons already given, this interpretation also accords with Hume’s recommendation of philosophy over superstition in the paragraph following the RTP passage. There Hume again notes that it is “impossible for the mind of man to rest […] in the narrow circle of objects, which are the subject of daily conversation and action” (T 1.4.7.13; SBN 271-72). Because this reflection is inevitable (at least for the philosophically inclined), “we ought only deliberate concerning the choice of our guide” (*ibid.*). The question is, what sort of method is the “safe[st] and most agreeable” (*ibid.*.) for abstract inquiries. The choice Hume presents is between *philosophy*, which “contents itself with assigning new causes and

principles to the phenomena, which appear in the visible world,” and superstition, which “opens a world of its own, and presents us with scenes, and beings, and objects, which are altogether new” (ibid.). There are two important points here. First, we see that Hume again associates philosophy with observation-based explanation which, as discussed, presupposes instead of questions the efficacy of our sense faculties. Second, the fact that Hume is “bold” enough to recommend philosophy” (ibid.) shows his optimism for the philosophical method. Certainly philosophers can go astray by attempting to answer questions that exceed the reach of our comprehension and which are settled by nature anyway. However, unlike the errors of superstition and religion which Hume regards as “dangerous,” the errors “in philosophy [are] only ridiculous” (ibid.). Philosophy, when it goes awry, poses no real threat to common life because it is comprised of “cold and general speculation,” that is incapable of “interrupting the course of our natural propensities” (ibid.). We are justified, then, in pursuing philosophy. Philosophy only becomes “ridiculous” when one uses it to try and give a reason-based justification for our faculties, or to answer questions which lie beyond the reach of those faculties.42 Even if the philosopher is tempted to go further, and engage in destructive, skeptical reasoning, there is no genuine risk that doing so will undermine the stable beliefs of common sense.

This is not to say that, for Hume, this type of critical reflection has no value. As he argues in the first Enquiry, considering skeptical arguments can have indirect benefits. The intense reflection that ultimately leads to skepticism can make the common person, as well as the

42 On this point see also Annette Baier who writes writes that “[i]n the list of topics for the new reformed self-avowedly sentiment-based philosophy, metaphysics is a significant absentee. We are still to do some epistemology, to become aware of how we decide concerning truth and falsehood, but the question of what ultimately exists is not on the revised agenda” (Annette Baier, A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume’s Treatise, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 22-23).
dogmatic philosopher, reason in a more modest and careful manner (EHU 12.24-26; SBN 161-63). Additionally, as I discuss below, skeptical arguments can even play a productive role in philosophical inquiry when employed correctly. Attaining these benefits, however, does not require that one persist (if it were possible) in a state of skeptical reflection. Thus, Hume is pessimistic about the ability of philosophy to conclude in stable belief when it attempts to resolve second-order questions about the foundation of our knowledge gaining faculties. Nevertheless, a more nuanced reading of the *Treatise* shows that the more reasonable philosopher will leave such questions behind and focus on explaining how the principles of truth, morality, justice, government, the passions and beauty arise from human nature. This commitment can be seen from the following passage.

> While a warm imagination is allow’d to enter into philosophy, and hypotheses embrac’d merely for being specious and agreeable, we can never have any steady principles, nor any sentiments, which will suit with common practice and experience. But were these hypotheses once remov’d, we might hope to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for that, perhaps, is too much to be hop’d for) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272-3).

Once we move past the sort of destructive philosophical questioning that is motivated by “a warm imagination,” Hume is *optimistic* that we can achieve stable belief that can stand the test of criticism (provided that criticism remains within philosophy’s newly delimited boundaries). Philosophical investigation that is properly limited, and aided by further intellectual development, will be able to “bear the examination of the latest posterity” (*ibid.*). The main

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threat to attaining settled belief, then, is not our inherent curiosity. Instead, it seems that stable belief is threatened by “philosophical enthusiasm,”^44 or failing to keep philosophical reflection within its proper bounds. As Hume points out in his essay “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,”^44 and as I discuss further in chapter 6, our tendency toward immodest enthusiasm is caused by “[h]ope, pride, presumption, [and] a warm imagination, together with ignorance,” not by curiosity (EMPL 74). Fortunately, even if a philosopher is tempted to indulge his or her desire for enthusiasm, there is no reason to suspect that doing so will permanently prevent us from reaching stable belief. According to Hume, “enthusiasm produces the most cruel disorders in human society; but its fury is like that of thunder and tempest, which exhaust themselves in a little time, and leave the air more calm and serene than before” (ibid., 77). The sort of reflection which leads us to question our faculties is psychologically unsustainable, and therefore must eventually give way to a more productive line of inquiry.

### 3.2 THE POSITIVE ROLE OF SKEPTICISM IN PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

One might object, however, that Hume’s outlook is not so much one of optimism as it is one of confusion. Charles S. Peirce, commenting on Hume’s discussion of skepticism regarding reason in T 1.4.1, stated the following to this effect.^45

So that what Hume’s argument would lead him to is that reasoning is “illegitimate” because its premises are perfectly satisfactory. He [Hume] candidly confesses that they are satisfactory to himself. But he seems to be dissatisfied with himself for being satisfied. It is easy to see, however, that he pats himself on the

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^44 Hume makes use of this term in another context in “A Dialogue” (D 343).

back, and is very well satisfied with himself for being so dissatisfied with being satisfied (CP6.500).\footnote{Charles S. Peirce, \textit{The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce}, volume 6, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 500.}


Here we see Peirce claiming that it is actually Hume \textit{himself} who is most confused about T 1.4.1. This is because directly after arguing that repeated examination of the foundation of our faculty of reason results in a “total extinction of belief and evidence” (T 1.4.1.6; SBN 182-183), Hume states the following.

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 posset 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 and constantly of that opinion. Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin’d us to judge as well as to breathe and feel nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their
customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies, when we turn our eyes towards them in a broad sun-shine (T 1.4.1.7; SBN 183).

After explaining why it is that our confidence in the inferences we make through reason gradually degenerates, Hume then seems to retract his previous statements. Hume points to the fact that the skeptic’s doubts are artificial and that we cannot genuinely avoid making inferences any more than we can avoid breathing or thinking. Why does Hume seem to suddenly abandon his skeptical pessimism in favor of naturalistic optimism? If, as argued above, Hume believes that philosophical reflection must be limited from undermining our knowledge gaining faculties, then why does Hume “take such pains” to outline skeptical challenges to deductive reason?

I contend that Hume was philosophically serious and did not forsake his commitment that philosophy ought to pursue first-order questions by employing skeptical arguments. What Hume is actually doing here is demonstrating how skeptical arguments can be employed for a philosophically productive purpose. In T 1.4.1 there are two main questions are at issue.

Q1: Can our faculty of deductive reason stand the test of critical reflection?

Q2: How does our faculty of deductive reason generate beliefs?

Hume answers “no” to Q1. Repeated reflection upon the fact that any single deductive inference is dubitable gradually extinguishes our confidence in the veracity of that inference. However, because Q1 is a second-order question about the efficacy of our faculties, we should expect that answering Q1 is not Hume’s primary concern. In fact, this is just what we see from the below passage where Hume makes clear that the answer to Q1 is only valued insofar as it provides us with insight into Q2 – a first-order question about how human nature operates.
My intention then in displaying so carefully the arguments of that fantastic sect [the skeptics], 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 part of our natures* (T 1.4.1.8; SBN 183-4, original emphasis).

What Hume’s skeptical argument from T 1.4.1 really shows is that reason itself cannot produce belief without the aid of *sentiment*. Specifically, Hume finds evidence here of his prior claim that belief is an idea that feels a certain way in the mind, i.e. an idea that is lively or vivacious (T 1.3.7.5; SBN 98). This view is backed up by the following consideration: “If belief, therefore, were a simple act of thought, without any peculiar manner of conception, or the addition of a force or vivacity, it must infallibly destroy itself, and in every case terminate in a total suspense of judgment” (T 1.4.1.8; SBN 183-4). A purely rational mind, which had no sentiment-based attachment to certain ideas, would be incapable of attaining a state of belief. Our sentiments have to enliven the mind’s conception of those ideas which the mind reaches with “easiness and facility,” and “[t]he posture of the mind is uneasy” at the thought that our faculty of reason is groundless (T 1.4.1.10; SBN 185).

Something similar occurs in the first *Enquiry* regarding Hume’s well-known discussion of induction and causal inference. In section 4 of the first *Enquiry*, Hume undertakes the task of showing that “our conclusions” from causal inference are “not founded on reasoning, or any

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48 Ira Singer, “Hume’s Extreme Skepticism in Treatise I IV 7,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 25.4 (1995): 595-622 argues that this naturalistic investigation which identifies some single aspect of our psychology (the enlivening of our imagination) as the source of our beliefs may fuel further pessimism. Realizing that our entire network of beliefs rests upon the enlivening of our imagination may cause us to question its basis. This, however, would not contradict the account offered here which admits that Hume is pessimistic about the possibility of stable belief when we question the basis of our faculties.
process of the understanding” (EHU 4.15, SBN 32). He argues for this conclusion by showing that our expectation that future events will resemble past events cannot be based upon either demonstration or experimental reasoning (EHU 4.21; SBN 36-38). The following passage shows, again, that Hume employs this skeptical argument for the purpose of increasing our understanding of the human mind.

My practice, you say, refutes my doubts. But you mistake the purport of my question. As an agent, I am quite satisfied in the point; but as a philosopher, who has some share of curiosity, I will not say scepticism, I want to learn the foundation of this inference. No reading, no enquiry has yet been able to remove my difficulty, or give me satisfaction in a matter of such importance (ibid.).

Again, the purpose of Hume’s skeptical arguments is not to induce a lasting skepticism in the reader. Rather, Hume draws our attention to the force of skeptical arguments against causal reasoning for the purpose of explaining what, if not reason, provides the “foundation” of our causal inferences. It is true that two sentences later Hume does express some uncertainty about whether the arguments he has provided will ultimately “augment our knowledge” or merely make us “sensible of our ignorance” (ibid.). However, we see the former come to fruition in section 5 where Hume’s skeptical arguments have cleared the way for his positive conclusion about the role custom plays in human understanding. “Custom,” argues Hume, “is the great guide of human life” and that which “makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past” (EHU 5.6; SBN 44-45).

In addition to establishing that the majority of our beliefs are based upon sentiment and instinct, Hume has also made an important point about the philosophical enterprise itself by showing that skeptical arguments can be philosophically productive. Although, as Hume argues,
we can never have complete assurance in the reliability of our faculties—and so it is both unproductive and impractical to search for a reason-based justification for our knowledge gaining faculties—we nevertheless will continue to rely upon them in common life. Hume radically reconfigures the philosophical use of skeptical arguments from a tool of philosophical destruction to one that productively inquires into human nature. The skeptic’s arguments allow Hume to establish the central role that sentiment plays in human psychology.49 This, for Hume, is a significant point which provides an answer to a first-order question about how the human understanding operates and what philosophical questions are worth pursuing. Hume’s skepticism neither prevents the practically-minded “honest gentleman” nor the reflective philosopher from attaining stable belief— even while the latter are actively engaging in philosophical reflection. As long as skeptical arguments are employed in order to answer first-order questions about how our faculties operate, Hume remains optimistic about the ability of philosophy to terminate in stability.

3.3 UNITING PAINTING AND ANATOMY

If these arguments are correct, then even Hume’s abstract theoretical work in Book 1 of the Treatise was guided by substantive practical concerns. He sets aside the debilitating aspects of skeptical worries, not because he has a theoretical answer to those worries, but because doing so is necessary to serve Hume’s practical goal of advancing our knowledge. Hume may not have taken this fact seriously enough in the Treatise when he pronounced that practical concerns ought to be pursued in a “work a-part.” However, I believe that it does seem that he became

49 Others may take issue here with our view that the reason Hume introduces skeptical arguments is to demonstrate the sentimental aspect of human nature. For instance, both Baier, A Progress of Sentiments, and Barbara Winters, “Hume on Reason,” Hume Studies 5 (1979): 20-35, argue that Hume uses skepticism as a reductio ad absurdum against the rationalist notion of reason. For a good overview of some problems with this view see Michael Ridge, “Epistemology Moralized: Hume’s Practical Epistemology,” Hume Studies 29.2 (2003): 165-204, 176-178.
more explicitly aware of this aspect of his work in his treatment of the painter-anatomist distinction in the first *Enquiry*. In contrast to his earlier dismissive attitude of the painter, Hume concludes the opening section of the first *Enquiry* by stating that he will be “[h]appy, if we can unite the boundaries of the different species of philosophy” (EHU 1.17; SBN 16). Hume seems here to acknowledge more explicitly the connection between theory and practice that was lying in the background in his discussion of skepticism in the *Treatise*. Specifically, Hume provides a more explicit consideration of what makes participating in theoretical inquiry justified in the first place.

As we see from the following passage, Hume is aware that the justification for purely theoretical engagement is not obvious.

> [T]he abstruse philosophy, being founded on a turn of mind, which cannot enter into business and action, vanishes when the philosopher leaves the shade, and comes into open day; nor can its principles easily retain any influence over our conduct and behavior. 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 plebian (EHU 1.3; SBN 6-7).

The philosopher’s detailed explanations and fine distinctions seldom have much effect in common life. In one way, as we have seen, Hume thinks this is advantageous. Recall that because philosophy inculcates us with more moderate sentiments that “the errors in religion are dangerous” but “those in philosophy only ridiculous” (T 1.4.7.13; SBN 271-2). On the other hand, if philosophy really is so inefficacious, then why bother with it in the first place? Hume finds this attitude manifest in those who not only prefer the practical orientation of philosophical painting, but advocate for “the absolute rejecting of all profound reasonings, or what is
commonly called *metaphysics*” (EHU 1.7; SBN 9, original emphasis). For this reason, Hume finds it necessary to “consider what can reasonably be pleaded in their behalf” (*ibid.*) before launching into the philosophical rigor that is to come in the remainder of the first *Enquiry*.

The first point he makes is that philosophical anatomy does have some practical utility. Contrary to first appearance, philosophical anatomy can be “useful to the painter” (EHU 1.8; SBN 9-10). The painter can better move people to act virtuously when he or she has a proper understanding of human nature. Additionally, the anatomist’s attention to detail and accuracy can have positive effects for society. Making space for the anatomist to engage in theoretical reflection inculcates a “spirit of accuracy” which is useful in all professions. In Hume’s view, “the genius of philosophy, if carefully cultivated by several, must gradually diffuse itself throughout the whole of society” (EHU 1.9; SBN 10). As a result, the politician gains more foresight, the lawyer’s reasoning is improved, the military general becomes more “regular” and “calm” in executing “his plans and operations,” and government is rendered more stable (*ibid.*).

Philosophical anatomy, then, is not without practical value. What is most important for the present purpose, however, is the reason Hume provides for allowing philosophical anatomy that does *not* depend upon practical utility. Even if anatomy had no benefit except “the gratification of an innocent curiosity,” Hume still believes it should be allowed as one of “those few safe and harmless pleasures, which are bestowed on [the] human race” (EHU 1.10; SBN 11). Philosophical anatomy is also justified by its ability to satisfy our theoretical curiosity. Even though anatomy examines obscure issues which require tiring attention to detail and painful diligence, it can provide pleasure provided that one condition is met. “Obscurity,” states Hume, “is painful to the mind as well as to the eye; but to bring light from obscurity, by whatever labour, must […] be delightful and rejoicing” (*ibid.*). In order to provide “safe and harmless
pleasure’’ philosophy must help us overcome obscurity and uncertainty, not promote it. Mere exercise of our intellectual faculties provides no pleasure if that exercise cannot be brought to some satisfactory resolution.⁵⁰

At its surface, this may not seem like a very philosophically substantive point. Hume seems to simply urge those who prefer philosophical painting to allow the anatomists the innocent pleasures of speculation. However, from Hume’s remarks in the remainder of this section we see that this idea does not just provide a justification for engaging in anatomy, but also informs us of how we ought to do so. By doing philosophy in a way that is capable of satisfying our curiosity we can overcome the problem Hume identifies below that is common to abstract thought, or what is colloquially termed “metaphysics.”

Here indeed lies the justest and most plausible objection against a considerable part of metaphysics, that they are not properly a science; but arise either from the fruitless efforts of human vanity, which would penetrate into subjects utterly inaccessible to the understanding, or from the craft of popular superstitions (EPM 1.11; SBN 11).

The reason why metaphysical reasoning commonly leads to “uncertainty and error” can often be traced back to a lack of intellectual humility or restraint in the people doing the metaphysical reasoning. This problem is found in dogmatic philosophers whose vanity causes them to inquire into questions which the human mind is incapable of answering. Their curiosity tempts them into inquiring into questions that lie beyond the reach of human reason, and thus they become forever

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⁵⁰ Hume does argue in the Treatise that our “love of truth” arises from the pleasure that comes from exercising our faculties (T 2.3.10.3; SBN 449). However, he also notes that feeling this type of pleasure requires some sense that the end of our theoretical inquiry has some import (T 2.3.10.4-6; SBN 449-51), and also some measure of success in achieving that end (2.3.10.7; SBN 451).
perplexed by abstruse questions regarding “the origin of worlds, and the situation of nature, from, and to eternity” (EHU 12.25; SBN 162). In each case, Hume believes the same remedy is required: “[t]he only method of freeing learning, at once, from these abstruse questions, is to enquire seriously into the nature of human understanding, and show, from an exact analysis of its powers and capacity, that it is by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse subjects” (EHU 1.12; SBN 12-13). By showing that human reason is incapable of achieving the aims sought by superstition and dogmatism, we can also inculcate a healthy sense of intellectual humility.  

Thus, (apart from considerations of utility) abstract theoretical inquiry is also justified insofar as it satisfies our curiosity. Yet, this can only occur if such inquiry terminates, not with complete uncertainty, but with some stable conclusion. This, of course, returns us to the point made previously that philosophical inquiry ought to be kept within the bounds that allow it to produce stable beliefs. In the first Enquiry we see Hume using this idea as the basis for the following recommendation.

Indulge your passion for science, says she [nature], but let your science be human, and such as may have a direct reference to action and society. Abstruse thought and profound researches I prohibit, and will severely punish, by the pensive melancholy which they introduce, by the endless uncertainty in which they involve you, and by the cold reception which your pretended discoveries shall meet with, when communicated. Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man (EHU 1.6; SBN 8-9).  

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51 As noted by Robert Butts, this is also part of Hume’s effort to combat the rationalists (“Hume’s Scepticism,” Journal of the History of Ideas 20:3 (1959): 413-419, 413).

52 While, given the reading I have provided here, this expresses nicely the idea that even the theoretical inquirer must have some practical concern, others have read this passage as not conveying Hume’s own view (see Stephen Buckle, Hume’s Enlightenment Tract: The Unity and Purpose of An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding,
Hume urges the theoretical philosopher to pursue his or her curiosity in a manner that preserves the ability to pursue the practical concerns inherent to human life. For the theoretical philosopher this means not only taking a respite from skeptical reflection to play backgammon with friends, but consciously conducting philosophical inquiry in a manner that will have some positive practical benefit.

4. Conclusion: Summary of Chapters

The preceding shows that Hume was open to pursuing practical ends in the midst of his theoretical philosophy. In the chapters which follow I will provide evidence that among his practical aims was not only ensuring that his philosophical work was capable of producing stable convictions in the human mind, but also reforming our catalogue of virtues. In chapters 2 and 3 I provide evidence that there is a standard of revision in Hume’s work that can be employed to modify the sentiments we feel about a given trait. In the former, I begin by discussing Hume’s standard of virtue. Following Phillip Reed, I argue that in Hume’s view some trait qualifies as a virtue provided that it meets approval from the general consensus. At first glance it seems this would not enable revision of our catalogue of virtues. If some trait is approved by the majority, and thus qualifies as a virtue, then what reason could we have for modifying our approval of it? I hold, however, that in addition to this standard of virtue that Hume also had a standard of revision which provides a principled reason to change our present feelings about some character trait (and, in doing so, change that trait’s status as a virtue or vice).

I contend that what lies behind this standard of revision is Hume’s hope that when we delve into the origin of our moral sentiments we will be pleased with what we find. When we see

that our moral sentiments are based upon an agreeable foundation we will be more likely to develop the sort of character they approve. On the other hand, if we find that our moral sentiments are not based upon an agreeable foundation (or upon a foundation that makes us ashamed of our nature), then this can provide us a reason to modify those sentiments and revise the catalogue of virtues. To see this I begin by examining the set of four essays that Hume wrote on happiness: “The Epicurean,” “The Stoic,” “The Platonist,” and “The Skeptic.” One of the central themes arising from these essays (particularly from “The Skeptic” which most closely resembles Hume’s own view) is that genuine happiness comes not from the objects we pursue, but from the passions that make us pursue those objects. Hume holds that those who are motivated by social and benevolent passions will be happiest. Importantly, this is largely because these individuals will be “entertained” by when reflecting upon their benevolent disposition.

The idea that we are pleased when reflecting upon our social sentiments can be seen more explicitly in the *Treatise* where Hume outlines, to use Christine Korsgaard’s terminology, an explanation of the “reflexive approval” of our moral sense. In the conclusion to Book 3 of the *Treatise* Hume responds to a criticism made by Francis Hutcheson that his moral philosophy lacked “Warmth in the Cause of Virtue.” Hutcheson’s complaint was that the reader of Hume’s *Treatise* would not be motivated to be more virtuous and could even have their commitment to virtue lessened. The basis of Hutcheson’s worry was that Hume (because he explained the moral sense as a concatenation of various elements of human psychology) made our moral sense artificial. Hume responds in two ways. First, he argues that there is no need to worry that his readers will become less likely to inculcate a virtuous character. This is because his reader should see that our moral sense is based upon sympathy (or our ability to feel the sentiments of others) and that sympathy represents what is best about human nature. To use Hume’s words, it
demonstrates both the “generosity and capacity of our nature.” Reflecting upon the nature of sympathy shows both that we have the generosity to take an interest in others’ well-being and the capacity to connect with others on a more intimate level by sharing their sentiments. Thus, it is because sympathy is representative of our social nature that Hume thought we should be pleased to see that it is the basis of our moral sentiments. In other words, our moral sense engenders reflexive approval.

Second, Hume further argued that his theory of morality actually better served the “cause of virtue” than the theory provided by Hutcheson. This is because, in Hume’s view, his sympathy-based theory establishes a more direct connection between our moral sentiments and the social passion of benevolence. For Hutcheson, our moral sense is a product of God’s concern for us (i.e. God gave us a benevolence-approving sense because having such a sense is more likely to work to our advantage than, for instance, a malevolence-approving). Hume does not seem to think such an explanation will be as likely to serve the cause of virtue as his own. I contend this is because Hume did not think we could have any knowledge of the sentiments of God. Thus, Hume actually thinks his theory, which provides a naturalistic explanation of the connection between our moral sentiments and human sociality via sympathy, is more likely to strengthen our commitment to virtue.

If this account is sound, then Hume has an answer to how we can commit ourselves to being virtuous when we question whether the demands of morality make an important claim on us. By recognizing that our moral sentiments arise from what is best and most agreeable about human nature, we should see that inculcating virtue is a worthwhile endeavour. In chapter 3 I further develop this idea by tracking its development in the second Enquiry. There again Hume argues that reflection upon foundation of our moral sentiments should make us approve of their
origin. However, there is an important difference in Hume’s second *Enquiry* articulation of this idea. Instead of the communicative mechanism of sympathy, Hume argues that what should please us about our moral sentiments is that they are based upon the sentiment of humanity. Hume understands humanity as our “cool preference” for the well-being of others. This emphasis on humanity adds an important conceptual layer to Hume’s account. While, as explained above, sympathy is an important impetus of social connection, it can also be a source of division and faction. This is largely because our sympathy is greater with those who are closest to us, and with those of our immediate social group, than those who are foreign to, and more widely removed from, us. Although our sentiment of humanity is not as strong as the feelings we get from sympathizing with those closest to us, Hume does think the “cool preference” we feel for the well-being of our fellow humans is much more uniform and universal. The sentiment of humanity, then, is not likely to be the basis for social division. Consequently, Hume’s emphasis upon our sentiment of humanity in the second *Enquiry* better serves Hume’s goal of showing that our moral sentiments are thoroughly social.

In chapter 3 I examine this shift from sympathy to humanity by discussing Hume’s explanation of moral judgment and what has been termed in the literature as the *general point of view*. According to Hume, a sentiment only qualifies as a genuinely moral sentiment if it is observed from a more impartial vantage point where self-interest and other circumstantial factors are set aside. Commentators have addressed a number of interpretive issues surrounding the general point of view. Here I focus on the question of why Hume thought we are motivated to examine the character traits of other people in this very distinctive way in the first place. Hume holds that we adopt the general point of view in order to secure agreement with others. However, it is not immediately clear what is driving us to seek agreement with one another. I contend that
Hume offers a different answer to this question in the second *Enquiry* that is not present in the *Treatise*. In the latter work Hume appeals to what I term a social-conflict motive. The reason we seek agreement with others through the general point of view is that doing so enables us to avoid the conflict caused by evaluating others from our own immediate perspective. In this respect, Hume’s explanation of why we adopt the general point of view mirrors his explanation of why we establish conventions of justice. Each is a tool designed to mitigate some sort of conflict.

This conflict-based explanation remains in the second *Enquiry*; however, it is supplemented by another motive which I term the social-confirmation motive. According to this explanation, because we recognize that moral sentiments are the product of the universal sentiment of humanity, we expect that others will agree with our character evaluations. Furthermore, because this is an expectation that we desire to have fulfilled (we have a desire to have our opinions “seconded” by others) we adopt a point of view which will allow that to occur. In addition to resolving a number of difficulties that are present with the social-conflict interpretation, this reading also shows how Hume sought to demonstrate the thoroughly social nature of morality in the second *Enquiry*. The very act of moral judgment itself represents our desire for connection with others or, as Hume puts it, our desire to form the “party of humankind.” By evaluating one another from a general point of view, and ensuring that our moral sentiments are in accordance with the sentiments of others, we preserve a common human identity based upon our moral sentiments. This means that not only the sentiments which determine whether or not we approve or disapprove of some trait, but the very motives which cause us to evaluate the character of others in the first place are representative of human sociality.
This more robust understanding of what causes our moral sentiments to receive reflexive approval also provides a sharper critical edge for moral revision. If we will reflexively approve of our moral sentiments insofar as these sentiments are communicated through sympathy, then our moral sentiments will be found pleasing regardless of the nature of the trait we are approving. This is because all approval of virtue and vice, in fact all awareness of the sentiments of other people, requires sympathetic interaction. However, if the reason we reflexively approve of our moral sentiments is based upon the agreeability of the sentiment of humanity, then not all of our approvals will pass the test successfully. In chapter 4 I begin outlining how Hume applies this standard of revision. After showing that Hume appeals to the prevalence of benevolence and humanity when evaluating the progress of human civilization from ancients to the moderns, I then turn to examining Hume’s discussion of traits that garner approval based upon their immediate agreeability. That is, traits that we approve of as soon as we consider them without any reflection upon their wider consequences. It is these sorts of approvals, along with our approval of the artificial virtues as I discuss in chapter 5, which seem as though they are most likely to need moral revision.

I focus my attention on Hume’s discussion of military heroism or the sort of courage that is shown on the battlefield. Hume noted that we find the courage of the military hero immediately agreeable even though the military hero is often the cause of widespread deleterious consequences for society. Insofar as military heroism garners the approval of the majority, it must be considered a genuine virtue. However, Hume does not seem completely comfortable with this. I argue that, particularly in the second Enquiry, Hume adopts the role of the painter and attempts to portray military courage to his readers in a way that brings more of its negative aspects to light. In doing so, his aim of modifying the immediate sentiments we feel from being
awe struck by military heroism relies upon the humanity-based standard of revision I outlined in chapters 2 and 3. When discussing one whose benevolence exceeds its proper bounds and actually causes harm, Hume does say that we should redirect this person’s benevolent disposition toward more beneficial ends, but he does not attempt to modify our sentiments of immediate agreeability toward benevolence. It is only when our approval of some trait conflicts with our approval of benevolence, such as when our approval of military heroism blinds us to the violence and inhumanity often associated with it, that Hume attempts to reform our sentiments. It is because what we find lying behind our approval is not our concern for humanity but our tendency to be blindly awed by those who have what Hume terms “greatness of mind.”

In chapter 5 I turn to another sort of virtues that may seem a likely candidate for moral revision: the artificial virtues. The virtues in this category, most notably represented by justice, are established as mutually advantageous conventions that then garner moral approval based upon their tendency to be publically useful. While Hume himself did not apply the standard of revision to this sort of virtue, I argue here that he could have done so and that doing so could rectify certain conceptual problems within his theory of justice. One such problem, which has been identified by a number of commentators, is that Hume’s theory of justice seems to exclude those who are not powerful enough to pose any threat to society. If the conventions of justice, which for Hume are largely constituted by the laws of property, are only put into place in order to quell conflict in society, then those who are too weak to create any conflict will not be included. In one notorious passage, Hume states that those who “cannot make their resentments” felt deserve to be treated “according to the laws of humanity,” but that it would be useless to treat them with justice. In applying this principle Hume states that an imagined species of creatures which, although rational, could not make their resentments felt and non-human animals
would not warrant inclusion in the scope of justice. On the other hand, women and Native Americans would warrant inclusion in the scope of justice (despite Hume’s perception that they lack power to oppose those who would treat them badly).

There are two main problems which arise from this passage. First, there is the problem of exclusion. Many have criticized Hume for excluding from the scope of justice those who ought to be included. For instance, this might include distant future generations, the elderly, or those suffering oppression at the hands of those who are more powerful. One reply here is that Hume seems to think that even if some individual/group lacks the power to directly pose a threat to others that the ability to express resentment can allow one to pose a threat to existing social arrangements (and therefore gain inclusion in the scope of justice). This seems to be why Hume believes that women and Native Americans warrant inclusion despite their perceived lack of power.

I argue that it may be problematic for Hume to appeal resentment as a catalyst for inclusion of the powerless, and that this problem could be rectified by applying the standard of revision I have identified here. However, seeing why this is the case requires first considering a second problem which has been identified by Michael Ridge: the problem of paternalism. Because those who are excluded from the scope of justice still warrant benevolent treatment, some have argued that this passage is actually not problematic at all. Exclusion from the scope of justice is only morally problematic if the way that those who are excluded from it should be treated is problematic. Ridge argues, however, that this response gives those who are excluded the wrong sort of moral protection. Paternalism, insofar as it attempts to enhance another’s well-being, cannot be seen as a violation of the “laws of humanity.” Thus, despite the fact that the imagined species Hume mentions is rational, his theory seems to imply that we ought to treat
them paternalistically. The fundamental problem here is that our justification for treating this species paternalistically is merely that they are powerless to resist. I argue, however, that once we understand what this species would have to be like in order to be excluded from the scope of justice, that we should not see the sort of paternalism that Hume’s theory justifies as problematic. By considering why it is that Hume believes non-human animals ought to be excluded from the scope of justice, I argue that the reason the imagined species is excluded (the reason they cannot make any resentment felt about exclusion) is that they cannot feel what I term the pain of dependence (the specific psychological pain we feel when a disparity of power places us in a situation of dependence on someone else). Because the imagined species cannot feel this specific sort of psychological pain, they would not see inclusion itself as constitutive of their well-being, and consequently would have no reason to resent the fact that someone else has the power to make decisions for them (assuming that decision served their best interest).

Contrastingly, those who can feel the pain of dependence will have a reason to feel resentful toward their exclusion from the scope of justice. Insofar as feelings of resentment can threaten the stability of society, there will be a reason to include such individuals in the scope of justice. Yet, once we put aside the problem of paternalism we should be able to see that an underlying issue remains with the problem of exclusion. For Hume we only approve of justice, and disapprove of injustice, after the relevant conventions have been put into place. Once those conventions have been established, we then praise (or blame) people on the basis of whether they follow the established rules. However, Hume never explicitly outlines a procedure for evaluating the manner in which they conventions of justice themselves have been formed. Thus, it is not clear exactly what those who lack coercive power would be resenting about their exclusion from the scope of justice. They might be displeased about having to feel the pain of dependence, but
genuine resentment is not just displeasure. Generally we think that resentment is a specific sort of displeasure expressed against moral wrong doing. Yet, moral wrong doing associated with justice can only occur after the mutually advantageous conventions have been put into place. Thus, it does not seem that Hume’s moral theory has the resources to explain why the complaints of those excluded powerless should be seen as genuine resentment.

However, it is not clear whether in the relevant passage Hume understands resentment in the moralized sense outlined above or if he understands resentment in a non-moralized sense where it serves as a synonym for anger. If we take resentment in this second sense (as it seems Adam Smith did at times), then I contend there is a response available to Hume. Seeing this requires appreciating that, for Hume, justice is a conditional virtue. Part of what is implied by the fact that justice is artificial is that it is only useful under certain conditions which are generally referred to as the “circumstances of justice.” For instance, the conventions of justice are only useful given that human beings have limited benevolence and exist in a situation of moderate scarcity. It is only in such situations that there is a conflict that could be ameliorated by the conventions of justice. Hume believes that these are the conditions that human beings almost always find themselves in. However, it is instructive to consider how Hume describes the hypothetical situations which fall outside of the circumstances of justice. He speaks quite favorably of a situation where human beings were so benevolent that they never thought to harm one another, or where resources were so abundant that there was no need to compete for them. What this suggests, borrowing a phrase from Michael Sandel, is that for Hume justice is a “remedial virtue.” It does not necessarily represent what is best about human beings, but instead is necessary to make up for some our deficiencies (i.e. our propensity to allow our self-interest to outweigh our benevolent concern for others).
The reason why the resentment of the powerless can be effective, then, is that it forces us to confront the less appealing aspects of justice. Upon reflection, we should see that the manner in which we have structured the conventions of justice is responsible for producing sentiments of anger in those who are excluded because of their powerlessness. Just like Hume believes we will modify our sentiments about military heroism once we appreciate its connection with inhumanity, he could also point to how the conventions of justice (in their current exclusionary structure) are the catalyst for the unsocial passions of resentment. This should provide us with a reason to make those structures more inclusive, especially given (as argued in chapter 3) that we cherish our common human identity as the species with moral sentiments that represent the social nature of human beings.

In Chapter 6 I conclude by briefly considering two implications this work has for how we should understand the conservative aspects of Hume’s thought. I engage this question by considering Hume’s theory alongside another form of sentimentalism: Leon Kass’ conservative appeal to the “wisdom of repugnance.” Kass uses this idea to justify the moral wrongness of a variety of emerging biotechnologies (such as human cloning) based upon the immediate disgust that “we” supposedly feel toward them. I argue that Hume would see Kass’ particular form of sentimentalism, where our immediate feelings can be seen as arising from the teleological structure of the universe, as a form of *philosophical enthusiasm*. Philosophical enthusiasm, like religious enthusiasm, is driven by the tendency to focus upon one’s own particular sentiments and, consequently, is not a product of the social aspects of human nature. The conservative element of Hume’s thought, which encourage us to be wary of the intrusion of speculative metaphysics into morality and politics, do not necessarily require support for the status quo. This concern should make us skeptical both of attempts at liberal reform and conservative
entrenchment that are based upon a metaphysical picture of human beings, and their place in society, which transcends our knowledge of common life. Instead, Hume is concerned with conserving the “party of humankind” that is characterized by our approval of traits signifying the social bonds of humanity. In those cases where our moral approval is not based in human sociality, this particular conservation effort may require reminding ourselves that benevolence, kindness and gentle concern for one another embody what is best about human nature.
CHAPTER 2
REFLEXIVE EVALUATION, SYMPATHY AND THE STANDARD OF REVISION

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I turn to identifying the standard of revision which informs Hume’s practical goal of revising (when necessary) our catalogue of virtues. I noted last chapter that, for Hume, moral revision would have to involve modifying the sentiments that (at least currently) we feel upon surveying some character trait. At this point, however, it is not clear how this should work. I hinted in the previous chapter that Hume believes a trait deserves to be termed a virtue (or vice) as long as it garners widespread approval (or disapproval). If this is the case, however, then it might seem that there is no room left for criticism. If it is true that a trait ought to be considered vicious if it is disapproved, and it is true that (to use a previous example) homosexuality meets disapproval, then it follows that homosexuality should be considered a genuine vice. Yet, if some trait genuinely warrants the title of virtue or vice, then how could our approval of that trait be criticized? It is easy to see how we could criticize those who include some trait in the catalogue of virtues that fails to garner approval. In fact, this is precisely what Hume does when he criticizes the “monkish virtues” of “[c]elibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude” (EPM 9.3; SBN 270). He notes that these are “every where rejected by men of sense” (ibid.). It is because these traits to do not enjoy widespread approval that those of certain religious persuasions are incorrect to classify them as virtues. But if a trait legitimately meets the requirements for being a virtue, then what more is there to say about it?

I contend that, for Hume, the fact that a trait is a legitimate virtue or vice does not disqualify it from criticism. In this chapter I outline the elements of what I term a “standard of revision” in Hume’s work. As I discuss below, I think the standard of virtue for Hume is simply
general consensus. Any trait that meets widespread approval is a genuine virtue and, consequently, equally legitimate formations of the catalogue of virtues can include different qualities insofar as people will approve (and disapprove) of different qualities at different times (and in different places). However, I argue that Hume also employs a standard of revision that can allow us to judge some understandings of virtue and vice as better than others. This more fundamental standard provides, in certain cases, a principled reason for us to change how we presently feel about some character trait. Later I will discuss how this standard underlies Hume’s attempt to change common sentiments about military heroism (chapter 4), and how it could be employed in order to render the virtue of justice more extensive and inclusive (chapter 5).

In this chapter, however, I will discuss the foundation which makes such revision coherent. My contention is that Hume’s standard of revision is not based upon the characteristics of the traits themselves that garner our approval or disapproval. Instead, it is based upon the aspects of human nature cause us to approve or disapprove of a certain trait. Ideally, our catalogue approvals and disapprovals would represent the benevolence and fellow feeling that human beings are capable of. Hume thinks we should be pleased to find that our moral sense is based upon these sorts of social affections, and that we can be convinced to change our approvals (and disapprovals) when we recognize that they are not based upon these types of affections.

2. Hume’s Standard of Virtue

Before explaining Hume’s standard of revision, it is first necessary to discuss Hume’s standard of virtue. I have suggested thus far that Hume thinks any trait which meets widespread approval is a legitimate virtue. This interpretation, however, is somewhat controversial and requires defense. Hume’s primary purpose in his work on moral philosophy is to provide an explanation of how we make the distinction between virtue and vice. His account has a number of important
details which will be examined in more detail in the following chapter. A brief explanation will suffice at present. When we distinguish between virtue and vice, Hume believes that what we evaluate are not primarily actions, but instead the character traits which lie behind that action (T 3.2.1.4; SBN 478). Hume concludes that because reason is not the source of these moral evaluations (T 3.1.1; SBN 455-471), the judgments we make about another’s character traits must arise from our sentiments or feelings (T 3.1.2.1; SBN 470). Character traits that produce pleasure in an observer (T 3.1.2.3; SBN 471) when surveyed from a general point of view (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471-472) are denominated virtues, while character traits that produce pain when surveyed in that manner are denominated vices.

In addition to describing how it is that we make distinctions between virtue and vice, Hume also makes judgments regarding the improvement (or worsening) of our moral evaluations. One important example, which I discuss further in chapter four, is the place of courage in a culture’s catalogue of virtues. In the second Enquiry Hume notes that it is only “among all uncultivated nations, who have not as yet had full experience of the […] social virtues” that “courage is the predominant excellence” (EPM 7.15; SBN 255). Hume thought the lesser place that courage has in the modern catalogue of virtues (when compared to the ancients) constituted a moral improvement. In other words, the modern view of courage was an instance in which our understanding of morality had progressed over the understanding of the ancients.

What is it that allows Hume to judge to make this sort of judgment? A coherent account of moral progress must employ some standard against which we can judge the morals of different times and places. Seemingly the most straightforward way of supplying such a standard is by identifying some ideal catalogue of virtues and vices, or some list of traits which perfect moral agents would find praiseworthy or blameworthy. According to this ideal standard account, a
society’s understanding of morality improves as it more closely approximates the ideal catalogue by approving of the correct qualities to the correct degree.

Yet, this method of explaining moral progress does not fit well with Hume’s philosophical outlook. As argued by Phillip Reed, Hume simply does not have a very robust account of the standard of virtue. Whenever it is controversial whether or not some character trait should be seen as a virtue or vice, Hume suggests that common consensus should decide the controversy. I will not rehearse all of Reed’s arguments here, but there are a few passages where Hume seems to support this view rather explicitly. In the Treatise Hume states the following.

For it must be observ’d, that the opinions of men, in this case, carry with them a peculiar authority, and are, in a great measure, infallible. The distinction of moral good and evil is founded on the pleasure or pain, which results from the view of any sentiment, or character; and as that pleasure or pain cannot be unknown to the person who feels it, it follows, that there is just so much virtue or vice in any character, as every one places in it, and that ‘tis impossible in this particular we can ever be mistaken (T 3.2.8.8; SBN 546-547).

In a footnote to this passage Hume notes that the question of “right and wrong taste in morals” is “of but small importance” (ibid.). Hume repeats this idea even more forcefully in his essay “Of the Original Contract” stating that “in all questions with regard to morals, as well as criticism, there is really no other standard, by which any controversy can ever be decided” other than “an appeal to general opinion” (EMPL 486). Consequently, Hume thinks that a philosopher can have

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1 Phillip A. Reed, “What’s Wrong with the Monkish Virtues? Hume on the Standard of Virtue,” History of Philosophy Quarterly 29.1 (2012): 39-56. Rachel Cohon adopts a similar view with the exception that something can only genuinely count as a virtue if it garners approval from moral sentiments that are triggered by accurate factual beliefs (Hume’s Morality: Feeling and Fabrication, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 245-249).
“sufficient assurance, that he can never be considerably mistaken in framing the catalogue” (EPM 1.10; SBN 173-175).

Still, a number of commentators have not interpreted Hume as holding that consensus forms the standard of virtue. In Hume’s explanation of how we make moral evaluations he identifies four different qualities of character traits that arouse our approval: usefulness to others, usefulness to the possessor, agreeableness to others, and agreeableness to the possessor (T 3.3.1.30, EPM 9.1; SBN 591, 268). Some have held that Hume thought these qualities of usefulness and agreeableness formed the standard of virtue. Even if a trait garnered universal praise within some society, it is not a genuine virtue if it is not either useful or agreeable. There is some support for attributing this view to Hume in the following very utilitarian sounding passage.

In all determinations of morality, this circumstance of public utility is ever principally in view; and wherever disputes arise, either in philosophy or common life, concerning the bounds of duty, the question cannot, by any means, be decided with greater certainty, than by ascertaining, on any side, the true interests of mankind (EPM 2.17; SBN 180).

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To illustrate this, Hume points out that at various times people have held false beliefs about the social utility (or disutility) of almsgiving, tyrannicide, liberality in princes, and luxury (EPM 2.18-21; SBN 180-181). As I discuss further in chapter 4, Hume disagreed with those who thought the more luxurious way of life engendered by commercial society was ruinous. Nevertheless, it is important to pay close attention to what Hume is saying here. He does not say that the approval which results from more accurate knowledge constitutes the standard of genuine virtue. The rest of the above passage makes clear that he is simply making a factual statement about what happens to our approvals and disapprovals when we realize they have been based upon inaccurate factual beliefs.

If any false opinion, embraced from appearances, has been found to prevail; as soon as farther experience and sounder reasoning have given us juster notions of human affairs; we retract our first sentiment, and adjust anew the boundaries of moral good and evil (EPM 2.17; SBN 180).

Once we realize that a previous approval was based upon a false factual belief, we tend to feel differently than we did before. This does not, however, imply that actually useful (or agreeable) traits are genuine virtues. It is still how we feel about some trait that determines whether or not it is virtuous or vicious.

There is another reason it is problematic to attribute to Hume the view that utility and agreeability constitute the standard of genuine virtue. We can see this from considering the following well known passage from Hume’s Treatise rejection of moral rationalism.

Take any action allow’d to be vicious: Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you

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3 See Reed, “What’s Wrong with the Monkish Virtues? Hume on the Standard of Virtue,” 42-45, on this issue.
call vice. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it (T 3.1.1.26, SBN 468-469).

The quality which makes some action virtuous or vicious is not anything inherent to the action itself, but instead the sentiment of pleasure or pain felt by the spectator. As Christine Korsgaard puts it, “we do not disapprove the action because it is vicious; instead, it is vicious because we disapprove it.” This does not imply that there is no distinction between virtue and vice, “[n]othing can be more real, or concern us more, than our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness” (T 3.1.1.26, SBN 468-469), but it does imply that virtue and vice cannot exist independent of our approval and disapproval. Yet, if utility and agreeableness themselves constituted the standard of virtue, then we could conceivably make moral distinctions by “considering the object.”

Thus, it seems there are good grounds for thinking that Hume held that general consensus constitutes the standard of virtue. Unfortunately, the consensus standard does not seem to explain

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5 See Cohon, *Hume’s Morality*, 96-125, for an excellent discussion of the various meta-ethical issues that arise for Hume on this point.
how it is possible for moral progress to occur, or how there could be any principled grounds for revising our catalogue of virtues. If the ancients really did feel the highest sentiments of praise for courage, then for them courage was the highest virtue. For the moderns, who Hume states do not esteem courage as highly, courage really is a lesser virtue. Hume can account for the descriptive aspect of progress here (i.e. that some change has occurred), but seemingly would be unable to account for the normative aspect of progress.\(^6\) It does not seem that there is any principled way to say whether either view of courage is better or worse. Hume’s most explicit treatment of cultural differences in conceptions of virtue, found in the appendix to the second Enquiry entitled “A Dialogue,” seems to support this conclusion. The Dialogue’s skeptic Palamedes holds that “fashion, vogue, custom, and law” are the “chief foundation of all moral determinations” (D 333). Hume responds, in the voice of the narrator, that we can find a common basis for virtue by “tracing matters […] a little higher, and examining the first principles, which each nation establishes, of blame or censure” (ibid.). In this regard, Hume compares our moral sentiments to functioning of gravity.

The Rhine flows north, the Rhone south; yet both spring from the same mountain, and also actuated, in their opposite directions, by the same principle of gravity.

The different inclinations of the ground, on which they run, cause all the difference of their courses (ibid.).

Divergent cultural conceptions of virtue can still count as genuine moral sentiments, unlike the “artificial lives” that Hume discusses toward the end of the dialogue (D 341-343).\(^7\)


\(^7\) As argued by James King, these artificial lives are not “an alternative morality but an alternative to morality” (“Hume on Artificial Lives with a Rejoinder to A.C. MacIntyre,” Hume Studies 24.1 (1988): 53-92, 83).
However, it doesn’t seem that Hume is interested in adjudicating between different evaluations of virtue and vice in “A Dialogue.” “That they all reason aright with regard to this subject,” states Hume’s narrator, “it is not incumbent on any moralist to show” (D 336).

Interestingly, this response seems to actually ignore one of the questions that Palamedes poses to the narrator: “[h]ow shall we pretend to fix a standard for judgments of this nature” (D 333)? It seems that, at least in this piece, Hume is content with showing that different cultural values have a common basis and does not feel the need to adjudicate these conflicts. For this reason, a number of commentators have seen Hume as a pluralist who recognizes that there are multiple, sometimes irreconcilable sources of value. Consider Hume’s discussion of the different views that the English and French had regarding the “free commerce between the sexes” (D 339), and the more liberal attitude that the French took toward marital infidelity. Hume states that “[i]t is needless to dissemble […] We must sacrifice somewhat of the useful, if we be very anxious to obtain all the agreeable qualities” (ibid.). It is simply unrealistic to think that we can “reach alike every kind of advantage” (ibid.).

3. **OBJECTS AND PASSIONS: HUME’S CONCEPTION OF HAPPINESS**

If Hume is content to let conflicts of value stand, then it might seem as there is little room for moral criticism, and little reason to think that our approvals and disapprovals should ever be revised. However, there are other places Hume seems much less complacent about conflicts of value. In Hume’s *Treatise* discussion of “military glory” which I have hinted at previously, he notes that although “military glory, is much admired by the generality of mankind” those of

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While most people are awe struck by the “dazzling [sic]” character of the military hero, those who reason more carefully (or perhaps reason at all) always “paint of out the evils” of this “suppos’d virtue” (ibid.). This includes “the subversion of empires, the devastation of provinces, [and] the sack of cities” (ibid.). Insofar as it is approved of by the “generality of mankind,” Hume must admit it into his catalogue of virtues.

Thus, Hume is uneasy about military heroism despite the fact that it qualifies as a genuine virtue within his account. I contend that it is just where these sorts of tensions appear in Hume’s thought that it is possible to derive a standard of moral revision that can explain when moral progress has occurred and how it could occur in the future. An analogy can help make this point. For Hume, progress in morals has essentially to do with the progress of our taste. We commonly think that as we age our tastes become more refined. For instance, a small child might enjoy watching cartoons, while an adult has the ability to enjoy historical documentaries. Assuming that this is an instance of progress, one way of explaining why is that the object of the adult’s enjoyment is simply better. For whatever reason, historical documentaries have greater inherent value than childish cartoons. Yet, this object-centered view is not the only option. Instead of judging progress by the inherent worth of the object that one finds enjoyable, we might instead look at what approving of that object demonstrates about the evaluator. The ability to enjoy a historical documentary might signify that one has more complex and highly developed mental capacity or a greater attention span. According to this explanation, it is not the historical documentary itself we approve of, but the capacities needed to take pleasure in it.

The same sort of reasoning can be applied to the issue of moral progress. Instead of asking whether the virtues exalted in the modern catalogue are inherently more valuable than
those of the ancient catalogue, we could ask what approval of either catalogue says about the nature of our moral capacities. This is just the sort of shift that Hume’s moral sentimentalism makes possible by placing the locus of value in the sentiments and feelings of the observing subject. When judging current moral views against those of the past (or when considering how they could be revised), our view turns from the qualities of the trait being evaluated to the dispositions of those doing the evaluating. I contend that this idea can be seen in Hume’s four essays on happiness: “The Epicurean,” “The Stoic,” “The Platonist,” and “The Sceptic” (EMPL 138-180). Hume makes his intention in these essays clear in a footnote to “The Epicurean.”

The intention of this and the three following essays is not so much to explain accurately the sentiments of the ancient sects of philosophy, as to deliver the sentiments of sects, that naturally form themselves in the world, and entertain different ideas of human life and of happiness. I have given each of them the name of the philosophical sect, to which it bears the greatest affinity (EMPL 138n).

In each of these essays Hume outlines a different view, roughly corresponding to a different philosophical school, about how to best achieve genuine happiness. John Immerwahr has argued, correctly I think, that none of the four essays completely captures Hume’s own view. In fact, it seems that Hume intended each of these essays to be read as a dialogue, modeled after the dialogues of Cicero, with each participant giving a different point of view.

Still, Hume’s own thought has the largest affinity with “The Sceptic” and thus most of my examination will be focused upon that essay. The Sceptic can be seen as a response to each

of the conceptions of happiness that are outlined in the other three essays. The first two essays, “The Epicurean” and “The Stoic” stage a conflict regarding whether it is nature or artifice that produces happiness. The Epicurean takes the former view arguing that true happiness is found by following the immediate inclinations of our nature. According to this perspective, the “utmost art and industry can never equal the meanest of nature’s productions, either for beauty or value” (EMPL 138). This leads the Epicurean to recommend the enjoyment of present pleasure, “if life be frail, if youth be transitory, we should well employ the present moment, and lose no part of so perishable an existence” (EMPL 145). The artifice that the Epicurean is most concerned about is one that is popular among the “severe philosophers” who aim at producing “an artificial happiness, and making us be pleased by rules of reason, and by reflection” (EMPL 139). This is the idea that reason and philosophical thought alone could make one happy without the need for any external objects – that we could be “happy within ourselves” by “feasting on our own thoughts” (EMPL 140). The Epicurean argues that human nature would have to be created “anew” for such a life to make us happy (EMPL 139).

The Stoic, on the other hand, esteems exactly that which the Epicurean denigrated. It is only through “skill and labour” that the “rude and unfinished” materials of nature can be refined and fitted “for human use and convenience” (EMPL 147). Unlike the Epicurean who urged us to unreflectively indulge in our natural appetites, the Stoic prizes “the true philosopher, who governs his appetites, subdues his passions, and has learned, from reason, to set a just value on every pursuit and enjoyment” (EMPL 148). Ultimately, this leads the Stoic to reject pursuing all enjoyments having to do with external objects. We should escape the “instability of fortune”

(EMPL 150) by living the life of the sage who “looks down with pleasure, mixed with compassion, on the errors of mistaken mortals, who blindly see for the true path of life, and pursue riches, nobility, honour, or power for genuine felicity” (EMPL 151). Instead, the sage seeks the glory which is the “sweet reward” of a life of virtue (EMPL 153). This is a life which is supposed to satisfy us even if it requires “[t]oils, dangers, [and] death” (ibid.).

The third essay, “The Platonist,” seems to draw out the natural consequences of the Stoic’s claim that the “true sage and patriot” has the qualities that “elevate mortal man to a resemblance with the divinity” (EMPL 153). The Platonist, like the Stoic, holds that we can never “enjoy tranquility or satisfaction, while detained in the ignoble pursuits of sensual pleasure or popular applause” (EMPL 156). However, while the Stoic urged us to find happiness by seeking human perfection in a virtuous life, the Platonist holds that true happiness comes from contemplating God.

The most perfect happiness, surely, must arise from the contemplation of the most perfect object. But what more perfect than beauty and virtue? And where is beauty to be found equal to that of the universe? Or virtue, which can be compared to the benevolence and justice of the Deity (EMPL 158)?

According to the Platonist, the Stoic does not understand that true perfection can only be found in a divine source.

This leaves Hume’s final essay: “The Sceptic.” At the beginning of the essay the Sceptic seems to question the very possibility of deriving any universal standard of human happiness. The Sceptic argues that philosophers err by “confin[ing] too much their principles, and make no account of that vast variety, which nature has so much affected in all her operations” (EMPL 158). This error is even more evident, argues the Sceptic, in reasoning about human happiness.
Instead of taking account of the fact that there are a “vast variety of inclinations and pursuits among our species” which are satisfactory for different people, the philosopher holds that “[h]is own pursuits are always, in his account, the most engaging” (EMPL 160). Consequently, the Sceptic argues that philosophy cannot prescribe the ends for us that will make us happy. The most one can do is recommend the means of fulfilling one’s own particular desires (EMPL 161).

From these statements, it seems that the Sceptic’s contribution to the dialogue is wholly negative and that the only lesson we learn is that there is no single way to live a happy life. Yet, as the essay continues we see that this conclusion allows the Sceptic to provide the reader with positive advice for how to achieve happiness. The one thing we can learn from philosophy is that “nothing, in itself, [is] valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed” (EMPL 162). This leads the Sceptic to discuss how the enjoyment we take in a given object is relative to psychological dispositions of our species (ibid.), affected by “education, custom, prejudice, caprice, and humour” (EMPL 163), and that moral qualities are not mind independent (EMPL 164). What is most important for the present purpose, however, is the following positive claim that he derives from the view that no object has intrinsic worth.

The inference upon the whole is, that it is not from the value or worth of the object, which any person pursues, that we can determine his enjoyment, but merely from the passion with which he pursues it, and the success which he meets with in his pursuit. Objects have absolutely no worth or value in themselves. They derive their worth merely from the passion. If that be strong, and steady, and successful, the person is happy (EMPL 166).
Unlike the Epicurean, Stoic, and Platonist, the Sceptic does not think there is any particular object or way of life that will necessarily lead to happiness. Instead, what matters is the type of passion which drives us to pursue the objects that we find important.¹²

Furthermore, Hume’s Sceptic tells us what our passions must be like in order for us to be happy: “the passion must neither be too violent nor remiss,” “the passion must be benign and social; not rough or fierce,” and “the passion must be cheerful and gay, not gloomy and melancholy” (EMPL 167). This, of course, does limit to some extent the sorts of lives we could live and still be happy since “all dispositions of the mind are not alike favourable to happiness” (EMPL 168). One who intends to live a life of malice and betrayal, it seems, would have to be motivated by passions that are “rough and fierce.” Thus, the Sceptic points out that the “happiest disposition of mind is the virtuous” (EMPL 168, original emphasis). On this point, then, the Sceptic and Stoic agree although for different reasons.¹³ The Stoic, who Hume calls “the man of action and virtue” (EMPL 146n), recommends a virtuous life because such a life encapsulates human perfection. The Sceptic, on the other hand, recommends the virtuous life because it is the least likely to leave us disappointed. In large part, this is because the passions which make us “pursue external objects, contribute not so much to happiness, as those which rest in ourselves” (EMPL 168). Many of the enjoyments that come from living virtuously do not require the attainment of anything external. The Sceptic points out that a virtuous disposition of the mind “renders us sensible to the social passions, steels the heart against the assaults of fortune, reduces

¹² See Immerwahr, “Hume’s Essays on Happiness,” 314, on this point.
¹³ Virtue also plays a role in the happy life for the Epicurean (EMPL 142) and Platonist (EMPL 158), although the purpose of virtue for the Epicurean is somewhat unclear (see Walker, “Reconciling the Stoic and the Sceptic,” 88In1). For the Platonist, it seems that it is the contemplation of divine virtue that contributes to our happiness.
the affections to a just moderation, [and] makes our own thoughts an entertainment to us” (EMPL 168).14

One of the points that I think Hume wants to make in this essay (which will be further explored below), is that what allows the virtuous person’s “thoughts [to be] an entertainment” for them is that they are sensible of the social nature of their virtue. Even in “The Stoic,” instead of presenting a Stoic characterized by “cold-heartedness and self-absorption,” Hume portrays “a refined Stoic whose reasonings do not eliminate his compassion for others.”15 The sage, instead of “preserv[ing] himself in this philosophical indifference” is actually “bathed in tears” and “laments the miseries of human race, of his country, of his friends” (EMPL 151). Likewise, the sage also “rejoices in the generous disposition, and feels a satisfaction superior to that of the most indulged sense” (ibid.). This is because the “sentiments of humanity” are so “engaging” that “they brighten up the very face of sorrow” (EMPL 151).

However, after establishing the positive conclusion that true happiness depends on our passions or dispositions, the Sceptic then takes a more pessimistic turn. Although no “man would ever be unhappy, could he alter his feelings” and inculcate the sorts of dispositions that lead to happiness, unfortunately the “fabric and constitution of our mind no more depends on our choice, than of our body” (EMPL 168). The Sceptic does not believe it is within our power to adopt the sort of dispositions that will make us happy. Consequently, whether or not one possesses the sorts of dispositions that lead to happiness is largely a matter of good fortune. If someone were “born of so perverse a frame of mind, of so callous and insensible a disposition, as to have no

14 This is not to say that all the benefits of a virtuous disposition can be enjoyed within oneself. The Sceptic also notes that a virtuous disposition “leads to action and employment” and “inclines us rather to the pleasures of society and conversation, than to those of the senses” (EMPL 168).

15 Walker, “Reconciling the Stoic and Sceptic,” 893.
relish for virtue and humanity, no sympathy with his fellow-creatures,” then there is nothing a philosopher can do to cure this person (EMPL 169). Telling this person about the “inward satisfaction which results from laudable and humane actions” and “the delicate pleasure of disinterested love and friendship” would not accomplish anything if the “perverse” individual could not feel these types of pleasures (ibid.).

It is on this point that, as argued by Immerwahr, Hume parts ways with his Sceptic. While Hume does not think that we can radically change our nature, he does hold that we can take steps to inculcate the calm passions associated with benevolence. The important question for the present purpose however has to do with the relationship between happiness and virtue. In the conclusion to Book 3 of the *Treatise*, Hume hopes that the system of moral philosophy he has just outlined will demonstrate both the “happiness, as well as the dignity of virtue” (T 3.3.6.6; SBN 620-621). He states that the virtuous person can enjoy the “peace and inward satisfaction” of possessing a character capable of “bear[ing] its own survey” (ibid.). If Hume follows the conception of happiness outlined by the Sceptic, then it seems the reason for this would be that the virtuous person can recognize that their conduct is produced by the social passions of humanity and benevolence. The person who recognizes this can be “entertained” by their own thoughts. Of course, as we have seen, Hume does not always speak in his own voice in these essays on happiness. Thus, the case for attributing this view to him can be made stronger by finding corroboration from his other works. In the following section I argue that this idea is present in the conclusion to Book 3 of the *Treatise*.

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4. Hume’s Response to the Cause of Virtue Criticism

Recognizing that virtue is the product of our social affections requires reflection upon the origin of our moral sentiments. Hume’s most explicit treatment of this issue can be found in the final four paragraphs of the Treatise (T 3.3.6.3-6; SBN 619-621). These passages can only be understood adequately in light of the exchange between Hume and Francis Hutcheson that prompted their inclusion in the final version of the Treatise. While there are undeniable philosophical similarities between Hume and Hutcheson, there were also differences significant enough to make Hutcheson oppose Hume’s appointment to the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh with “the utmost of his power” (HL1 58). One of Hutcheson’s criticisms, which I will refer to as the Cause of Virtue (CV) criticism, was that Book 3 of Hume’s Treatise lacked “Warmth in the Cause of Virtue” (HL1 32). Hutcheson was concerned that Hume’s work in the Treatise would not strengthen, and may even weaken, the reader’s commitment to being a virtuous person.

A number of commentators have not viewed the modifications that Hume made to the Treatise in response to the CV criticism as philosophically substantive. Focusing on Hume’s aforementioned statement that “practical morality” should be pursued in a “work a-part” (T

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18 Norman Kemp Smith argues that Hume’s view that moral approval and disapproval is based upon “feeling” instead of “rational insight” was developed “under the direct influence of Francis Hutcheson” (The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines, (London: MacMillan, 1949), 13). Stephen Darwall states that after reading Hume’s arguments against moral rationalism “it is difficult to avoid the impression that Hume had Hutcheson’s Illustrations as well as Hutcheson’s Letters to Gilbert Burnet on his desk for easy reference” (“Hutcheson on Practical Reason,” Hume Studies 23.1 (1997): 73-89, 73).
3.3.6.6; SBN 620-621), it is commonly thought that Hume simply brushed aside Hutcheson’s criticism as a failure to appreciate the purpose of the Treatise.\(^{19}\) Those who do think that Hume deals with the CV criticism in a philosophically substantive way generally believe he waits until either the first and/or second Enquiries to do so.\(^{20}\) I hold, however, that Hume’s response to the CV criticism is more substantive than these commentators have suggested and sheds important light on why Hume believes that reflection upon our moral sentiments should be satisfying.

Hutcheson was not wholly critical of Hume’s work. When Hume sent Hutcheson drafts of Treatise Books 1 and 2 he was met with “very positive” feedback,\(^{21}\) and Hutcheson praised Hume for displaying “great acuteness of thought and reasoning.”\(^{22}\) It was Hume’s work on moral philosophy in book 3 of the Treatise that Hutcheson took issue with. In addition to leveling the CV criticism, Hutcheson also took issue with Hume’s understanding of what it means for something to be natural, his view that justice is an artificial virtue, and his classification of natural abilities as virtues.\(^{23}\) The original letter in which Hutcheson made these criticisms is now lost. However, we do have Hume’s response letter (which I will refer to as “the letter”), where he states that it was the CV criticism that “affected” him “most” (HL1 32). It is also in the letter that

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\(^{20}\) See Kate Abramson, “Sympathy and the Project of Hume’s Second Enquiry,” Archive für Geschichte der Philosophie 83.1 (2001): 45-80, and Adam Potkay, “A Response to My Critics,” Hume Studies 27.1 (2001): 173-180, for the argument that Hume sought to further the cause of virtue in the second Enquiry. See also Abramson, “Happy to Unite, or Not?” Philosophy Compass 1.3 (2006): 290-302, for suggestions on how Hume may have attempted to do so in the first Enquiry. Immerwahr, “Hume’s Essays on Happiness,” argues that the “work a-part” that Hume references at T 3.3.6.6 (SBN 620-621) came to fruition in his essays on happiness.


Hume first utilizes the painter-anatomist distinction I described in the previous chapter. He holds it is the role of the painter to strengthen our commitment to virtue and that it would be improper to combine these roles in the same work (HL1 32). He does reassure Hutcheson that he “intend[s] to make a new Tryal” which will make the “Moralist & Metaphysician agree a little better” (HL1 32). However, as noted before, Hume does not explicitly gesture at anything like this until the first Enquiry where he states that he will be “[h]appy” if his work can “unite the boundaries of the different species of philosophy” (EHU 1.17; SBN 12).  

I formerly argued that Hume’s work, if only implicitly in the Treatise, is guided by practical concern. It seems at least at this point Hume did not want to explicitly recognize the more substantive practical goal of inculcating virtue in his readers. In fact, in another letter Hume states that except for those “immediately concern’d in the Instruction of Youth,” one’s “Character’ should not [depend] upon his philosophical speculations” (HL1 34). This was not a view that set well with many of Hume’s contemporaries, Hutcheson in particular. Hutcheson’s commitment to the “cause of virtue” was clear in his teaching style which replaced traditional “dry, scholastic, Latin lectures” with “lively, extemporaneous discourses in English.” He hoped that, in line with the view that the University was responsible for “moral and religious training,” this style would more effectively promote virtue among his students. Hume’s  

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27 Ibid., 91.
perceived lack of support for the “cause of virtue” was one of the principal reasons he lost the appointment to the Edinburgh Chair to William Cleghorn.\textsuperscript{28} Even though Hutcheson actually shared more agreement on key points with Hume than with Cleghorn (most notably, Hume and Hutcheson agreed that morality was not a product of reason),\textsuperscript{29} Hutcheson thought that Hume had failed to fully succeed as a moral philosopher.\textsuperscript{30}

Hutcheson thought that Hume failed to support the cause of virtue by failing to portray our moral dispositions as a wholly natural component of human nature. In the preface to Hutcheson’s \textit{Essay on the Passions} and \textit{Illustrations on the Moral Sense} he decries the work of previous authors as a “great Detriment” to our “Natural Temper.”\textsuperscript{31} Hutcheson targeted those, such as Mandeville and Hobbes,\textsuperscript{32} who thought our generous sentiments were a sort of “Dissimulation” produced by the “intricate Relations” of “Self-Love” (EPI 5). His worry is that a reader who became convinced that there is no real generosity in human nature (EPI 4) would be “discourag’d” from ever trying to cultivate “kind generous Affections” (EPI 5). For Hutcheson,

\textsuperscript{28} Sher, “Professors of virtue,” 103, and Moore, “Hume and Hutcheson,” 379.

\textsuperscript{29} In fact, as Sher goes on to point out, those who were appointed to the chair after Cleghorn (particularly Ferguson and Stewart) also shared Hutcheson’s moralizing aspirations. However, as argued by P.B. Wood, this is not to say that all the major figures of the Scottish Enlightenment adopted this orientation. Wood points out that many of those at Aberdeen placed a greater emphasis on theoretical philosophy (“Science and the Pursuit of Virtue in the Aberdeen Enlightenment,” in \textit{Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment}, ed. M.A. Stewart, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

\textsuperscript{30} Abramson, “Sympathy and the Project of Hume’s Second Enquiry,” 58.


\textsuperscript{32} Aaron Garrett, in his editorial remarks, states that Hutcheson may also have had La Rochefoucault and others in mind here (EPI 5n2).
human nature is not fallen, inherently sinful, or incapable of genuine concern for others.\textsuperscript{33} and moral philosophy should not portray human beings as such. This is why Hutcheson takes such pains to argue that humans possess an innate moral sense implanted directly by God,\textsuperscript{34} that cannot be bribed (IBV 95-96) or influenced by self-interest (IBV 92-94) custom or habit (IBV 97-99), and which produces pleasure upon surveying benevolence (IBV 89-90).

While Hume did not base morality upon self-interest, there is a sense in which Hume thought that our moral sense\textsuperscript{35} was a type of construction. This is because Hume thought our moral sense originated from the interaction of various mechanisms of human psychology.\textsuperscript{36} The ability to make moral judgments requires the capacity to feel pleasure and pain, and (as mentioned previously) the imaginative capacity to adopt a general point of view where self-interest and circumstantial factors are not considered so that the character being evaluated “appears the same to every spectator” (T 3.3.1.30; SBN 590-591).\textsuperscript{37} Another capacity is needed

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} Francis Hutcheson, \textit{An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue}, ed. Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008), 99. Hereafter cited in text as “IBV” followed by the page number.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Hume generally uses either the term “sense of morals” (T 3.1.1.10, T 3.2.1.18, A 1; SBN 458, 483-484, 645-646), or “sense of virtue” (T 2.1.12.5, 3.1.2.3, 3.1.2.9, 3.2.1.19, 3.2.2.20, 3.2.2.5; SBN 326-327, 471, 474-475, 484, 496, 499), instead of the term “moral sense.” As pointed out by Jacqueline Taylor (“Justice and the Foundation of Social Morality in Hume’s \textit{Treatise}” \textit{Hume Studies} 24:1 (1998): 5-30, 27n7), Hume likely does this to distinguish his view from Hutcheson. Michael L. Frazer also notes that Hume, along with Adam Smith, tends not to use the term “moral sense” in order to distance themselves from Hutcheson (\textit{The Enlightenment of Sympathy: Justice and the Moral Sentiments in the Eighteenth Century and Today}, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 25). For the sake of simplicity, however, I will use the term “moral sense” here to refer to the faculty for moral approval in both Hume and Hutcheson.
\item \textsuperscript{37} See Antony Pitson, “The Nature of Humean Animals,” \textit{Hume Studies} 19.2 (1993): 301-316, 304, for discussion of the role the imagination plays in adopting the general point of view.
\end{itemize}
as well. Even though it may initially seem (as Hutcheson would have it) that the “distinction of virtue and vice [...] flow[s] from the immediate pleasure or uneasiness, which particular qualities cause” (T 3.3.1.29; SBN 590), Hume believes there must be some mechanism of communication which allows a spectator to feel the sentiments of the person being evaluated. This mechanism is “sympathy” (ibid.), which Hume defines as the ability to “receive by communication” the “inclinations and sentiments of others” (T 2.1.11.2; SBN 316-317). Hume may not think that our moral sense is a product of self-interest, but neither is it an irreducible existence in human nature.

Thus, the crux of Hutcheson’s objection to Hume’s moral “anatomy” is not simply that identifying the component parts of our moral sense makes it less aesthetically pleasing. The real problem is that the very idea that our moral sense could be analyzed in this way makes it seem artificial. If our moral sense is merely an artificial construct, and there are no truly virtuous dispositions in human nature, then (holds Hutcheson) the reader of Hume’s Treatise may not think it is worthwhile to attempt inculcating virtuous habits in themselves. If that is true, then Hume’s theory may be every bit as pernicious as that of Hobbes or Mandeville.

4.1 SYMPATHY AND REFLEXIVE APPROVAL OF OUR MORAL SENSE

In response, Hume added four paragraphs to the conclusion of Book 3 (T 3.3.6.3-6; SBN 619-621).38 One interpretation of these passages, offered along similar lines by both Annette Baier and Christine Korsgaard,39 takes Hume to offer an account of why our moral sense is normative. This is a controversial claim which I cannot fully address here.40 Given that these passages arose

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as a response to the CV criticism, it seems that Hume’s concern has more to do with the effect that examining the origin of our moral sense will have upon our moral motivation rather than if such examination will establish normativity.\textsuperscript{41} Nevertheless, I think that if we set aside the issue of normativity, then at least one version of the question that Korsgaard thinks Hume is addressing is certainly relevant here. Korsgaard explains that the major obstacle to explaining how morality derives its normativity is the view espoused by the moral skeptic. The moral skeptic is not someone who thinks that moral concepts do not have any influence on our lives.\textsuperscript{42} Instead, the moral skeptic believes that once the origin of moral concepts is explained we will no longer think we should treat them as authoritative: “once we see what is really behind morality, we won’t care about it anymore.”\textsuperscript{43} For Korsgaard, the paradigmatic instance of a normative failure would be if someone who found out the truth about the origin of the moral sense wished that they could “cure” themselves of it.\textsuperscript{44} The idea that discovering morality had a displeasing foundation would wholly eradicate one’s desire to be virtuous might be something of an exaggeration.\textsuperscript{45} Still, if an examination of the true nature of morality makes it seem trivial, then it seems plausible this would have some detrimental effect upon our moral motivation.

We can outline the version of Korsgaard’s question that Hume is concerned with here in the following way: “what effect will discovering the origin of our moral sense have on our desire

\textit{Studies} 25.1/2 (1999): 139-153, for criticism of the view that Hume is offering a theory of normativity in these passages.

\textsuperscript{41} As noted by Phillip Reed, it is also difficult to address the issue of normativity in Hume’s philosophy because “there are many different ways to construe what it is for a theory to be normative” (“What’s Wrong with Monkish Virtues,” 54n2).

\textsuperscript{42} Korsgaard, \textit{The Sources of Normativity}, 13.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Ibid.}, 14.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid.}, 88.

to cultivate the type of character approved of by that moral sense?” Unlike Hutcheson, Hume does not think that merely realizing our moral sense can be explained naturalistically will make us less committed to virtue. For Hume, whether or not philosophical anatomy leads to that unfortunate result depends upon how agreeable we find that which lies at the foundation of our moral sentiments. If Hume’s philosophical anatomy reveals that our moral sense is based upon disagreeable aspects of our nature, then Hume may agree that his investigations would not serve the “cause of virtue.” If, however, the anatomist finds that our moral sense is based upon an agreeable foundation, which represents what is most pleasant and engaging about human nature, then Hutcheson’s concern would be unfounded. In fact, Hume’s philosophical anatomy may even be able to strengthen our commitment to virtue.

I contend this is what Hume argues in the following passage, which I term the Generosity and Capacity (GC) passage. This stretch of text is found in the first of the four paragraphs Hume added to the conclusion of the Treatise in response to the CV criticism.

All lovers of virtue (and such we all are in speculation, however we may degenerate in practice) must certainly be pleas’d to see moral distinctions deriv’d from so noble a source, which gives us a just notion both of the generosity and capacity of our nature. It requires but very little knowledge of human affairs to perceive, that a sense of morals is a principle inherent in the soul, and one of the most powerful that enters into the composition. But this sense must certainly acquire new force, when reflecting on itself, it approves of those principles, from whence it is deriv’d, and finds nothing but what is great and good in its rise and origin (T 3.3.6.3; SBN 619).
Hume thinks that if we use our moral sense to evaluate the origin of our moral sense, we will find that sense arises from a “noble source” which evidences both human “generosity” and “capacity.” This discovery should cause our moral sense to acquire “new force.” In other words, because Hume’s “dissection” of our moral sense shows that it originates from agreeable aspects of our nature, reflecting upon that origin can actually increase our desire to be virtuous.

From the sentences following the GC passage, we see that the “noble source” from which our moral sense originates is “extensive sympathy with mankind” (T 3.3.6.3; SBN 619). According to Hume, sympathy is the capacity we have to “receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own” (T 2.1.11.2; SBN 316-317). Extensive sympathy, then, is the capacity we have to sympathize with any other human being, whether that person currently exists in society (T 3.3.1.11; SBN 579) or existed in the distant past (T 3.3.1.16; SBN 582). It is sympathy which allows a spectator to feel pleasurable or painful sentiments when surveying another’s actions, thus making moral evaluation possible. While Hume evidently thought we should be pleased to find that our moral sentiments arise in this way, Hutcheson did not have such a favorable evaluation of sympathy. In the Inquiry, he explicitly rejects the idea that our concern for others arises from sympathy (IBV 112-113) and states that we are not “conscious” of the “Sensations” of others (IBV 113).

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46 There is some controversy over what Hume means by “extensive” sympathy here. Jennifer Herdt has argued that Hume is using “extensive sympathy” here to signify our ability to feel not only another’s “isolated emotion” but to consider the other person as a whole, in the context of the situation being observed” (Jennifer Herdt, Religion and Faction in Hume’s Moral Philosophy, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 48). While I cannot discuss this issue here, I follow Andrew S. Cunningham who claims that argues that Hume simply means our ability to potentially sympathize with “any or all members of society” (Andrew Cunningham, “The Strength of Hume’s ‘Weak’ Sympathy,” Hume Studies 30.2 (2004): 237-256, 243).

47 See Glenn R. Morrow, “The Significance of the Doctrine of Sympathy in Hume and Adam Smith,” The Philosophical Review 32.1 (1923): 60-78, 64, on this point.
Hutcheson thinks explaining our concern for others as a product of sympathy is simply a
disguised way of basing morality upon self-interest. If we are capable of feeling the pleasurable
sensations of others, then our concern for others could be seen as merely the product of our
desire for our own personal pleasure, and there would be no such thing as “disinterested” love
(\textit{ibid.}), or love that cannot be reduced to self-interest.

What is it that makes Hume think, instead, that sympathy demonstrates the “generosity”
and “capacity” of human nature? I contend that each of these praiseworthy qualities can be
connected to a different aspect of sympathy. Hume uses the term “sympathy” to refer both to (i)
the \textit{psychological mechanism} by which we receive the sentiments of others and (ii) the \textit{actual
sentiment} which is communicated by that mechanism.\footnote{\textit{Vitz}, “Sympathy and Benevolence in Hume’s Moral Psychology,” \textit{Journal of the History of Philosophy} 42.3 (2004): 261-275, 264. Vitz also points out that Hume uses the term sympathy to refer to the process of conversion itself, but this is not as important for the present purpose.} The former demonstrates the “capacity”
human nature has for fellow-feeling. One of the “remarkable” (T 2.1.11.2; SBN 316-317) aspects
of sympathy is that it allows us to overcome our lack of direct access to other’s emotions (T
3.3.1.7; SBN 575-576). Through sympathy we convert the mere idea of another’s emotion,
which arises from observing the effects generally associated with some emotion such as a certain
tone of voice or facial gesture in another person (T 3.3.1.17; SBN 575-576), into an impression.
This impression “acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion
itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection” (T 2.1.11.3; SBN 317). We are
thus capable of feeling, to some extent, the emotions of our fellow human beings.

This realization about the “capacity” of human nature shows that we are capable of
relating to our fellow human beings on a much more intimate level. Human nature is not isolated
or self-contained. Through sympathy we are capable of “enter\[ing\] into the sentiments of others”
with “facility and pleasure” (T 2.1.11.5; SBN 318). As seen from the following well-known passage, Hume believes that sympathy provides a sort of social pleasure.

In general we may remark, that the minds of men are mirrors to one another, not only because they reflect each others emotions, but also because those rays of passions, sentiments and opinions may be often reverberated, and may decay away by insensible degrees. Thus the pleasure, which a rich man receives from his possessions, being thrown upon the beholder, causes a pleasure and esteem; which sentiments again, being perceiv’d and sympathiz’d with, encrease the pleasure of the possessor; and being once more reflected, become a new foundation for pleasure and esteem in the beholder (T 2.2.5.21; SBN 365).

Both our personal satisfaction, and the satisfaction of others, is increased through mutual sympathy. Thus, the ability we have to feel the sentiments of others through sympathy facilitates greater social connection. This is significant for Hume insofar as our desire to unite with others is among the strongest in human nature and “[a] perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can suffer” (T 2.2.5.15; SBN 363).

Hume also uses the term “sympathy” to refer to the sentiment produced by the above mechanism. When we see someone who is about to be “trod under foot by horses” our sympathy produces an emotion “so vivid” that the other person’s impending pain becomes “our own concern” (T 2.2.9.13; SBN 385-386). This is how even the “happiness of strangers” can have some affect upon us (T 3.3.6.2; SBN 618-619). The human mind does not simply have the “capacity” for fellow-feeling, but through sympathy also has the “generosity” to take an interest in another’s welfare. Given the role that the social affections play in Hume’s evaluation of the progress of society, it is not surprising that Hume thinks we should be proud of our capacity for
generosity. He states in one place that “generosity must be acknowledg’d to the honour of human nature” (T 3.2.2.6; SBN 487) and in another that generosity, along with the other social virtues, “bear[s] the greatest figure among the moral qualities” (T 3.3.1.11; SBN 578-579). If the capacity for generosity is one of the praiseworthy aspects of human nature, and generosity is made possible by sympathy, then it seems we should be pleased upon discovering the origin of our moral sense.

This is why Hume believes his sympathy-based explanation of our moral sense can succeed in the “cause of virtue” where Hobbes’ and Mandeville’s explanations would fail. If our approval of kind, generous actions was ultimately the product of self-interest, then that sense could not approve of its own origin. To put it another way, our moral sense would not garner reflexive approval. Consequently, we may (upon reflection) become disillusioned with morality. Why abide by the dictates of a moral sense which originates from those aspects of human nature that it finds disagreeable? If, on the other hand, Hume is right that our moral sense is based upon sympathy, which represents what is best and most agreeable about human nature, then reflection upon the origin of our moral sense should strengthen our commitment to virtue. It may be true that virtue and self-interest coincide in some way (we have already seen Hume argue in his essays that the virtuous life is the happiest one). The demands which morality makes upon us, however, do not themselves originate from the regard we have for ourselves.

4.2 Hume’s Criticism of Hutcheson

Hume is not content with merely defending himself from the CV criticism. In what directly follows the GC passage, which I refer to as the Original Instincts (OI) passage, Hume actually turns the CV criticism against Hutcheson.
Those who resolve the sense of morals into original instincts of the human mind, may defend the cause of virtue with sufficient authority; but want the advantage, which those possess, who account for that sense by an extensive sympathy with mankind. According to the latter system, not only virtue must be approv’d of, but also the sense of virtue: And not only that sense, but also the principles, from whence it is deriv’d. So that nothing is presented on any side, but what is laudable and good (T 3.3.6.3; SBN 619).

A number of commentators have noted that the “original instinct” theory Hume refers to here is Hutcheson’s. Recall that for Hutcheson our moral sense is “original” insofar as it is directly implanted by God and cannot be explained by any other aspects of human nature. In this passage Hume argues that his own theory is actually more likely than Hutcheson’s to engender reflexive approval, and therefore better serves the cause of virtue.

Unfortunately, Hume does not fully explain why he does not think that Hutcheson’s theory would enjoy the advantage of reflexive approval. Hume only uses the phrase “original instincts” in one other place in the Treatise (T 3.1.2.6; SBN 473). Michael Frazer has argued that Hume’s remarks there explain his criticism of Hutcheson in the OI passage. However, this seems problematic insofar as Hume’s concern there is with the explanatory adequacy of

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Hutcheson’s theory (or lack thereof), and not with the “cause of virtue.” A more promising method of determining why Hume thought his explanation of morality better furthered the “cause of virtue” is through examining Hutcheson’s own thoughts about the possibility of evaluating our moral sense. One of the rationalist arguments Hutcheson defends himself against in the *Illustrations* is that morality cannot be the product of a sense because we subject our senses themselves to moral evaluation. Therefore, morality must exist independent of our senses (EPI 149). In response, Hutcheson simply denies that it makes any sense to morally evaluate our moral sense (*ibid*.). We would no more call our moral sense “Good or Evil” than we would call our “Power of Tasting, sweet or bitter; or of Seeing, strait or crooked, white or black” (*ibid*.). To put the point more precisely, there is no non-trivial way to morally evaluate our moral sense. A benevolence-approving sense would approve of its own operations just as equally as a malice-approving sense (*ibid*.). But that is simply because “[e]very one judges the Affections of others by his own Sense” (*ibid*.). Thus, nothing substantial is gained by turning our moral sense upon itself.

However, this does not mean it is impossible to evaluate whether or not possessing a benevolence-approving or malice-approving moral sense is superior. A being with no moral sense, who observed someone with a benevolence-approving sense and someone with a malice-approving sense, could recognize that the former has a “*Tendency to the Happiness of the Person himself*” (EPI 149). This is because a benevolence-approving sense would impel one to perform actions that will be reciprocated with “*good Offices*” from others (EPI 150). A malice-approving sense, on the other hand, makes us more likely to perform actions that will make others desire our “*Destruction*” (*ibid*.). There are self-interested reasons to endorse our benevolence-approving moral sense, but no non-trivial moral reasons for doing so.
Did Hume think that Hutcheson’s theory would not engender reflexive approval because we cannot morally evaluate our moral sense? If this is what Hume had in mind, then his criticism would be too hasty. The process of reflexive evaluation involves assessing whether we would approve of the origin of our sense. While Hutcheson does not think that we can morally evaluate the moral sense itself, he does think that we can evaluate its origin. This can be seen from the response Hutcheson makes to another rationalist argument in the *Illustrations*. Some might argue that if morality is not based upon reason, then God had no reason to create us in our present constitution. Hutcheson admits that if God had nothing in its nature which resembled “our sweetest and most kind Affections,” then this criticism would be sound (EPI 151). If, however, there is a benevolent “Disposition in the Deity,” then “the manifest Tendency of the present Constitution to the Happiness of his Creatures was an exciting Reason for chusing it before the contrary” (*ibid.*). Upon reflection, we should see that what lies behind the particular constitution of our moral sense is God’s benevolence. Hutcheson also makes this point in the *Inquiry*: “if the Deity be really benevolent, or delights in the Happiness of others, he could not rationally act otherwise, or give us a moral Sense upon another Foundation, without counteracting his own benevolent Intentions” (IBV 197). This act of divine benevolence would garner the approval of a benevolence approving moral sense.

If Hume thinks that something prevents Hutcheson’s account of the moral sense from engendering reflexive approval, it must be because making reflexive approval depend upon the recognition of God’s benevolence is disadvantageous. There are two reasons Hume may have held this. First, Hume could point out that it is not always personally advantageous to have a
benevolence-approving sense.\textsuperscript{51} Someone with the opportunity to create a fraudulent charity for cancer research could, if she knew that she would not get caught, receive both money and a great deal of praise from others. However, her moral sense would disapprove of such an action. Hutcheson is clear to point out that our moral sense cannot be bribed by the promise of personal benefit (IBV 96-97). In this case, it does not seem that her interest is served by possessing a benevolence-approving moral sense. Hutcheson proposes a slightly different argument for why our moral sense demonstrates the benevolence of God in the \textit{Inquiry} (IBV 195-196). There he points out that if God equipped us with a malevolence-approving sense, we would still desire our own happiness. Upon seeing that our personal happiness is better served through benevolent actions, we would be mentally torn between benevolent actions (approved of by our desire for happiness) and malevolent actions (approved of by our “perverted” moral sense). Thus, by providing us with a benevolence-approving sense God prevents this mental schism.

Such cases may make us question whether God acted benevolently in creating us with a benevolence-approving moral sense, and consequently cause us to adopt a more skeptical attitude toward morality. There is an apt comparison here between our moral sense and our sense of taste. Recall that Hutcheson thinks our sense of taste, just like our moral sense, is not itself capable of self-evaluation (EPI 150). However, we can evaluate whether our sense of taste serves our advantage by making “\textit{healthful}” and “\textit{wholsom}” food “\textit{pleasant}” (\textit{ibid.}). While generally it seems Hutcheson is right that we could be grateful God gave us a sense of taste that distinguishes foods fit for human consumption, there are plenty of cases where our sense of taste is not

\textsuperscript{51}Hume does argue in the second \textit{Enquiry} that it is in our interest to act virtuously (EPM 9.22-25; SBN 282-285). However, the argument he gives there is that it is advantageous to be virtuous \textit{given} that we possess a moral sense that approves of virtuous actions and makes us feel uncomfortable when we act viciously. The present question is whether it is advantageous to have such a sense in the first place.
advantageous. This sense can drive us to consume sugary, processed foods when we know a plate of steamed broccoli would be a better choice. Consequently, we do not treat our sense of taste as wholly authoritative, and even try to fight against it when unhealthy temptation arises. If it is also true that the moral sense does not invariably serve our interest, then upon reflection we might adopt a similarly reserved attitude towards it.

Hutcheson could reply by admitting that even if it is not personally advantageous to have a benevolence-approving moral sense in every case, that it is best all things considered. The above false charity example only works properly if the fake philanthropist can be certain that her fraud will not be detected. Yet, given that we can never be certain that deception will serve our best interest, Hutcheson could argue that (given human cognitive constraints) God put us in the best position possible by creating us with a benevolence-approving sense. We can preserve the connection between our moral sense and God’s benevolence by seeing that it is the best available choice for God to make.

There is, however, a second argument available to Hume which deals with the grounds Hutcheson has for ascribing benevolence (or any other sentiment) to God. In the Essay on the Passions, Hutcheson argues we can form an idea of “Affections in the DIVINITY” through “Analogy to ourselves” (EPI 117). Hume challenges this idea in a 1740 letter to Hutcheson by pointing that only experience can tell us whether two beings have similar moral sentiments (HLI 40). If this is the case, then it would be impossible for us to know whether God was motivated by benevolence to create humans in their current constitution: “What Experience have we with regard to superior Beings? How can we ascribe to them any Sentiments at all” (ibid.)? Experience can inform us that human beings have similar sentiments, but experience cannot tell us anything about the supposed sentiments of God. This means that, even if it is advantageous to
have a benevolence-approving sense, we are unable to determine whether our possession of such a sense can be traced to the benevolent affections of God. Thus, we have no grounds for thinking that our moral sense arose from an agreeable origin.

While it is not immediately clear why Hume believes that Hutcheson’s theory does not serve the “cause of virtue” as well as his own, my hypothesis is that just as Hume criticizes Hutcheson’s conception of “natural” for relying upon “final Causes” and creating “endless” questions (HL1 40), he also challenges Hutcheson’s view that our moral sense is a product of divine benevolence. By using sympathy to replace divine providence as the foundation of our moral sense, Hume thinks he has provided a more intelligible explanation of why we should approve of how that sense originates. It seems that we must adopt Hume’s more naturalistic account if we want to be capable of seeing our moral sense as a product of our social sentiments. If, as suggested in “The Skeptic,” the virtuous person is to be “entertained” by the thought that his or her virtuous disposition arises from benevolence, then the connection between that disposition and benevolence must be intelligible. Hume believes that this connection is more clearly seen through reflection on the role that sympathy plays in common life than it is through uncertain speculations about the nature of God. Consequently, insofar as Hume explains our moral sense as a product of sympathy, and sympathy demonstrates the “generosity” and “capacity” of human nature, Hume describes our moral sense in a way that ensures it will meet reflexive approval and serve the “cause of virtue.”

5. CONCLUSION

The idea that we approve of our moral sentiments to the degree that they can be seen as issuing from our social affections provides support for my reading of “The Sceptic.” Genuine happiness

[52] Herdt, Religion and Faction in Hume’s Moral Philosophy, 64.
arises from a virtuous life because those who are virtuous can be “entertained” by the thought that our kind, gentle, benevolent and social affections lie at the basis of our conduct. Most commentators who have seen these passages as providing a method for confirming the importance of our moral sentiments. One who is tempted to stray from a virtuous life by (for instance) the pull of self-interest can renew their conviction in the importance of the moral sentiments by reflecting on their origin. Of course, if reflection on our moral sentiments revealed that they were fundamentally arbitrary or produced by the social conditioning of an oppressive political regime, then this would likely weaken our commitment to virtue. Since Hume believes that such reflection will reveal the social nature of our moral sentiments, he does not think that this is a realistic worry.

What I want to suggest here is that this process of reflexive evaluation can provide not only a method for justifying the importance of our moral sentiments, but a method for revising our moral sentiments as well. That is because, upon reflection, we should see that our approval of certain virtues does not originate wholly in our social affections. If recognizing that our moral sense is a product of human sociality is supposed to strengthen our desire to be virtuous, then recognizing certain qualities we include in our catalogue of virtues are not wholly the product of human sociality should give us a reason to revise the catalogue. Namely, it should give us a reason to revise our understanding of morality such that it more closely represents what we find best about human nature.

As we will see in the following chapter, in the second Enquiry Hume retains the idea that we should be pleased with what lies behind our moral sentiments, but with a slight modification.

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53 Rachel Cohon provides an example of “women in Saudi Arabia” who approve of the sort of bodily modesty that social mores require of them, but only because “they are trapped in false consciousness perpetuated by the oppressive patriarchy to keep them subordinate” (Hume’s Morality, 253). See also Cohon, Hume’s Morality, 263.
In this later work, we approve of the fact that our moral sentiments are founded upon the universal sentiment of humanity or our natural concern for others. This change is important for the present purpose because it provides more latitude for using reflexive approval as a method of moral revision. Consider Hume’s explanation in the Treatise of how we approve of the virtue of justice. Briefly, the conventions of justice themselves are established through mutual self-interest, but the reason we approve of those who abide by these conventions is that we sympathize with the generally positive effects that justice has upon the public interest (T 3.2.2.24; SBN 499-500). I will later argue (in chapter 5) that Hume is somewhat ambivalent about the virtue of justice precisely because he recognizes that it is a remedy for the effects of unbridled self-interest. While Hume fully recognizes that self-interest is a powerful motive in our nature, he also does not think it represents what is best about us. However, if we reflexively approve of our moral sentiments solely because they arise from the mechanism of sympathy, then this fact is irrelevant. Any quality which garners approval through the mechanism of sympathy will be a reflexive success, regardless of how disagreeable its origin may be.

Hume’s focus on sympathy, in effect, does not take into account other factors that seem relevant when evaluating the origin of our moral sentiments. Again, our appraisal of the military hero is perfect example. The fact that our approval of military heroism is conveyed by sympathy covers up the fact that the reason we approve of this character, and forget about the pernicious consequences that it has for the public, is that humans have the propensity to be awe-struck by those who elevate themselves above the common person. The critical edge of sympathy simply is not sharp enough. As Hume outlines it in the Treatise, it seems that the reflexivity standard “is met once approval of a trait is found to result from sympathy.”54 If, however, we are pleased by

54 Ibid., 265.
our moral sentiments to the extent that they arise from humanity and benevolence (which represent the social nature of human beings), then there is more room for critical evaluation. Hume can explain why we may come to question those traits that garner sympathetic approval, but (upon examination) are not founded upon our concern for others. In the next chapter I will turn to this shift from sympathy to humanity by outlining the role it played in Hume’s explanation of why we adopt a general point of view when evaluating others.
CHAPTER 3
SOCIALITY AND THE GENERAL POINT OF VIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter we saw that Hume believes our moral sentiments are capable of garnering reflexive approval based upon the fact that searching into their origins will reveal that “nothing is presented on any side, but what is laudable and good” (T 3.3.6.3, SBN 619). It is not just our sense of virtue itself, but the “principles” that sense is based upon, that should garner reflexive approval. In the conclusion to Book 3 of the Treatise, the agreeable foundation that Hume identifies is sympathy. If we turn to Hume’s later work in the second Enquiry, we see that Hume again provides a response to the CV criticism, but with some subtle (yet important) changes. He states there that while “the truth of any proposition by no means depends on its tendency to promote the interests of society,” only those who have “bad grace” would proclaim a truth that is “dangerous and pernicious” (EPM 9.14; SBN 278-279).

Why rake into those corners of nature which spread a nuisance all around? Why dig up the pestilence from the pit in which it is buried? The ingenuity of your researches may be admired, but your systems will be detested; and mankind will agree, if they cannot refute them, to sink them, at least, in eternal silence and oblivion (ibid.).

Fortunately, as he makes clear in the paragraph following this one, Hume does not think that true knowledge of the origin of our moral sense will have this effect. No “philosophical truths” can be of greater advantage than those “which represent virtue in all her genuine and most engaging charms, and make us approach her with ease, familiarity, and affection” (EPM 9.15; SBN 279-280).
The dismal dress falls off, with which many divines, and some philosophers, have covered her; and nothing appears but gentleness, humanity, beneficence, affability; nay, even at proper intervals, play, frolic, and gaiety [...] She declares that her sole purpose is to make her votaries and all mankind [...] cheerful and happy (ibid.).

Again, Hume believes that his reader will be pleased to discover the true origin of our moral sentiments.

Thus, Hume espouses the view that we will be pleased with what we find when searching into the origins of our moral sense in both the Treatise and the second Enquiry. What changes, however, is Hume’s view about what exactly we will find. While the fundamentals of Hume’s account of the mechanism of sympathy are still present in the second Enquiry, the role it plays in his moral theory is somewhat deemphasized. Instead, Hume argues that it is the “affection of humanity” which “can alone be the foundation of morals, or of any general system of blame or praise” (EPM 9.6; SBN 272-273). Hume understands humanity as a “cool preference” (EPM 9.4; SBN 270-271) for the well-being of others which exists in “all human creatures” (EPM 9.6; SBN 272-273). The “generous sentiments” of humanity may be too weak to determine our actions (in many cases they will be overpowered motivationally by self-interest), but they do at least provide us with a distinction between virtue and vice (EPM 9.4; SBN 270-271).

This change further supports my contention that Hume thought the reflexive success of our moral sentiments rested on the extent to which they can be seen as the product of our social sentiments. As pointed out by Ryan Hanley, it is easier to see how our moral sentiments can be “public and social” (EPM 5.42; SBN 228-229) if they are based on humanity than if they are
based upon sympathy. When first introducing the notion of sympathy, Hume notes that our ability to feel the sentiments of others is affected by the relations of “[r]esemblance and contiguity” (T 2.1.11.4; SBN 317-318). The “very remarkable resemblance among all human creatures” facilitates our ability to sympathize with other people (T 2.1.11.5; SBN 318). Furthermore, more particular resemblances, such as “similarity in our manners, or character, or country, or language,” facilitate our sympathy to an even greater extent. The same holds for contiguity insofar as we have a harder time sympathizing with those who are farther away. In order to counteract this effect, usually some “relation of blood” or “acquaintance” is necessary (T 2.1.11.6; SBN 318).

While sympathy is an important principle of human sociality, it is also easy to imagine how this aspect of sympathy could produce division and faction. This “darker side to sympathy,” as Jennifer Herdt calls it, was recognized by Shaftesbury.

In short, the very spirit of faction, for the greatest part, seems to be no other than the abuse or irregularity of that social love and common affection which is natural to mankind.

Hume was also aware of this discordant tendency of sympathy. “We sympathize more,” states Hume, “with persons contiguous to us, than with persons remote from us: With our acquaintance, than with strangers: With our countrymen, than with foreigners” (T 3.3.1.14; SBN 580-581). Here Hume uses the relation of contiguity to explain why we feel the sentiments of

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3 Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Sensus communis, an essay on the freedom of wit and humour in a letter to a friend, in Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, ed. Lawrence E. Klein, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 53.
some people easier than we do others. Specifically, we have the tendency to feel stronger sentiments of approbation for the character traits of those who reside closest to us. As I will discuss in more detail below, Hume deals with this problem by arguing that moral judgments only arise when we survey another’s character from a general point of view. Nevertheless, the fact that sympathy must be corrected in this way to circumvent its potentially divisive effects demonstrates that it is not always a principle of social connection.

Hume also discusses the discordant effects of sympathy in his essay “Of Parties in General.” While, in Hume’s view, “legislators and founders of states ought to be honoured and respected among men,” he thinks that “the founders of sects and factions [ought] to be detested and hated” (EMPL 55). We should praise the former because they “transmit a system of laws and institutions to secure the peace, happiness, and liberty of future generations” (EMPL 54). The latter, however, threaten to “subvert government, render laws impotent, and beget the fiercest animosities among men of the same nation” (EMPL 55). Hume thought that the presence of extreme faction posed a threat to public life. In some cases the difficulties posed by these factions are not severe. What Hume terms “factions from interest,” which arise when multiple groups “have a distinct authority in a government, not very accurately balanced or modeled,” can be prevented by a legislator with “great skill” (EMPL 59). Others, however, are much more difficult to resolve such as, what Hume terms, “parties from principle,” which are separated by some disagreement in “abstract speculative principle” (EMPL 60). Hume believes it is easier to account for such factions when the “different principles beget a contrariety of conduct” (ibid.). However, what at first should seem like “madness” are factions of principle where “one may follow his own way, without interfering with his neighbour” (ibid.). Factions of this sort, that are “attended with no contrariety of action,” are often based upon “religious controversies” (ibid.).
While Hume does not explicitly mention it by name, his explanation of how this type of faction arises appeals to the principle of sympathy.4

Two men travelling on the highway, the one east, the other west, can easily pass each other, if the way be broad enough: But two men, reasoning upon opposite principles of religion, cannot so easily pass, without shocking; though one should think, that the way were also, in that case, sufficiently broad, and that each might proceed, without interruption, in his own course. But such is the nature of the human mind, that it always lays hold on every mind that approaches it; and as it is wonderfully fortified by an unanimity of sentiments, so is it shocked and disturbed by any contrariety. Hence the eagerness, which most people discover in a dispute; and hence their impatience of opposition, even in the most speculative and indifferent opinions (EMPL 60-61).

This passage closely resembles a passage from the Treatise where Hume notes that “when a person opposes me in any sentiment, which I am strongly bent upon” the contrary sentiment “rouzes up my passion by contradiction” and that the source of this “commotion” is sympathy (T 3.3.2.3; SBN 593). Of course, sympathy can also produce uniformity of opinion. Hume thinks that sympathy best explains “the great uniformity we may observe in the humours and turn of thinking of those in the same nation” (T 2.1.11.2; SBN 316-317). We feel pressure to fit in with the prevailing opinion. However, once we have inculcated the common sentiments through sympathy, encountering opposing sentiments drives people into factions rather than toward common understanding.

If this is the case, then it seems to call into question Hume’s claim that recognizing sympathy is the source of our moral sentiments will engender reflexive approval. While sympathy can be a principle of social connection and concern, it can also be the impetus of faction and conflict. This may have been one reason that Hume elected to give humanity a greater role in the second *Enquiry*. In this chapter I will examine this shift from sympathy to humanity, and how this provides a more thoroughly social foundation for our moral sentiments, by outlining Hume’s account of moral judgment. Recall that Hume believes character traits are either virtuous or vicious to the extent that they make a spectator feel “a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind” when surveyed (T 3.1.2.3; SBN 471). This pleasure is felt when we observe a trait that is either useful or agreeable to the person being evaluated or others (T 3.3.1.30, EPM 9.1; SBN 591, 268). However, we can only feel the requisite sort of pleasure by surveying these traits from a perspective where the particular features of our own situation or the situation of whomever we are evaluating are set aside. As we will see in what follows, we must disregard how the character in question affects our self-interest (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471-472), our proximity in space and time to the character being evaluated (T 3.3.1.14; SBN 580-581), and the influence of fortune (T 3.3.1.19-23; SBN 584-587). In doing so we limit our evaluation of that person to how she acts within the “narrow circle” of people she commonly associates with (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602-603), and employ “general rules” so as to base our evaluation upon only the usual tendency of the character in question (T 3.3.1.20; SBN 584-585). The sentiments peculiar to morality, then, are a product of what has come to be known in the secondary literature as the *general point of view* (GPV).  

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5 Rachel Cohon prefers the terminology the “common point of view,” (Rachel Cohon, *Hume’s Morality*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 132). This is a phrase which Hume himself uses in two places (T 3.3.1.30, EPM 9.6; SBN 591, 272-3).
In a short summary of his account of moral judgment, Hume admits that it may seem surprising that in making judgments of virtue and vice we “forget” about our own interest (T 3.3.1.30; SBN 591). The reason for this, however, is that “‘tis impossible men cou’d ever agree in their sentiments and judgments, unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all of them” (ibid.). Our adoption of the GPV is, at least in part, motivated by our desire to have our moral judgments agree with the judgments of others. In this chapter, I discuss why Hume thinks agreement about our moral judgments is important enough to warrant adopting an impartial standpoint for evaluating another’s character.

I begin by outlining, in order to provide the necessary background, the properties Hume thinks are essential to moral judgment and what psychological mechanisms he thinks we use to make those judgments. I then identify three different motives that Hume thinks drive us to adopt the GPV: (i) the subjective conflict motive, (ii) the social conflict motive, and (iii) the social confirmation motive. While I will briefly discuss (i), I do not believe that this motive explains why we seek agreement with others regarding our character evaluations. Therefore, my main focus in this chapter will be on (ii) and (iii) – the social motives Hume identifies for taking up an impartial vantage point.

A number of commentators have noted that Hume thinks we seek agreement (through the GPV) because, as noted above, sympathy makes disagreement either uncomfortable or inconvenient. This is what I term the social conflict motive. While this is an important aspect of Hume’s explanation of moral evaluation, I believe that focusing on this alone presents a one-sided picture of our social motive to adopt the GPV. In this chapter I argue that, in the second Enquiry, Hume adds another layer to his account by arguing that we are motivated to adopt the
GPV because agreement with others is inherently desirable. This is what I term the social confirmation motive. We evaluate others impartially not only because doing so eliminates conflict, but because of our mutual desire to have others “second” our sentiments. That such a motive is present is important for three main reasons. First, in outlining the social confirmation motive Hume introduces the idea that we expect others will agree with the evaluations we make of another’s character. I argue that this can help to rectify certain problems that arise for Hume’s explanation of the social conflict motive. Second, Hume’s appeal to our inherent desire for agreement contributes to his endeavour to show that our moral sentiments (and human nature more generally) is fundamentally social. Third, the fact that even the process of moral judgment itself is based upon our social affections makes Hume’s claim that, upon reflection we will find “nothing but what is great and good” in our moral sense more plausible. Furthermore, the idea that humanity is what makes reflexive approval of the moral sense possible also provides the foundation for a standard of revision within Hume’s theory (or so I argue in the chapters which follow).

2. THE NATURE OF MORAL JUDGMENT

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, Hume takes it as an observable phenomenon that moral judgment is impartial or objective in all of the following three ways.

(i) Moral judgments are not influenced by the self-interest of the spectator.

(ii) Moral judgments are not influenced by the proximity (in both space and time) of the spectator to the person being evaluated.
(iii) Moral judgments are not influenced by fortuitous circumstances which may prevent a generally beneficial (or harmful) character from being so in some particular instance.

The fact that moral judgments exhibit these characteristics poses a special problem for Hume’s view that morality arises from sentiment (T 3.1.2; SBN 470-476). This is because our immediate sentiments often fail to exhibit (i)-(iii). The case of self-interest provides a perfect example. Hume notes that even though “[t]he good qualities of an enemy are hurtful to us,” these good qualities “still command our esteem and respect” (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471-472). We can approve of character traits which, given the situation, actually undermine our personal interest.

Nevertheless, Hume is fully aware that in common practice the sentiments “from interest and morals, are apt to be confounded,” and that “[i]t seldom happens, that we do not think an enemy vicious” (ibid.). The immediate sentiments we feel often lack this impartial character. Therefore, vindicating Hume’s moral sentimentalism requires explaining how we are capable of feeling disinterested and impartial sentiments, even if our partial, immediate feelings are significantly stronger (T 3.3.1.18, EPM 9.4; SBN 583-584, 270-271). Here Hume appeals to the GPV: “[t]is’ only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil” (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471-472). Once we consider a character from a general, disinterested vantage point we are capable of feeling moral sentiments.

What aspect of human psychology is it that allows us to abstract away from our personal point of view? In the case of self-interest it seems to be our capacity for sympathy. It is through sympathy that we feel pleasure when surveying a beneficial character and pain when surveying a harmful character (T 3.3.1.14; SBN 580-581), and because of sympathy that we can feel these
pleasures and pains in a disinterested manner. Through sympathy we are able to praise remote acts of justice which could have no conceivable effect on our interest (T 3.3.1.9; SBN 577-578), or praise the person who is agreeable to his or her peers even if we ourselves never gained any pleasure from that particular person’s agreeableness (T 3.3.1.29; SBN 590). Sympathy, then, ensures that the scope of our concern is not limited by the spectator’s self-interest. Because human “affections readily pass from one person to another” (T 3.3.1.7; SBN 575-576) we are not restricted to relating to others in merely a self-interested manner.  

However, sympathy itself cannot always ensure the impartiality of our moral judgments. Sympathy may give us the capability to relate to others in a disinterested manner, but we do not always avail ourselves of this opportunity. Recall Hume’s previous observation that it “seldom happens, that we do not think an enemy vicious” (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471-2). Furthermore, I mentioned briefly above that sympathy actually creates a problem for the impartiality of moral judgment regarding aspects (ii) and (iii) of moral judgment. As noted by Philip Mercer, “[a]lthough sympathy enlarges the scope of our emotional life, it does not free us of our self-centeredness or built-in bias for ourselves.” Here I will consider this problem in more detail. We can see the distorting effects of sympathy from the two objections Hume considers to his view that moral evaluations arise from sympathy beginning at T 3.3.1.14 (SBN 580-581). The first, which I term the “proximity in space/time” objection, is explained in the following passage.

But as this sympathy is very variable, it may be thought, that our sentiments of morals must admit of all the same variations. We sympathize more with persons

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contiguous to us, than with persons remote from us: With our acquaintance, than with strangers: With our countrymen, than with foreigners. But notwithstanding this variation of our sympathy, we give the same approbation to the same moral qualities in China as in England. They appear equally virtuous, and recommend themselves equally to the esteem of a judicious spectator. The sympathy varies without a variation in our esteem. Our esteem, therefore, proceeds not from sympathy (ibid., original emphasis).

As Hume makes clear when first introducing the notion of sympathy at T 2.1.11.5 (SBN 318), the strength of our sympathy is dependent upon the specific relationship we have to the person being sympathized with. From the present passage, we see that this phenomenon also affects our evaluation of other’s character traits. Our sympathy with a virtuous trait is greater when that trait is present in someone who exists in close spatial and also temporal proximity: “nor can I feel the same lively pleasure from the virtues of a person, who liv’d in Greece two thousand years ago, that I feel from the virtues of a familiar friend and acquaintance” (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581-582). The objection, then, is that sympathy does not account for the observable fact that our moral judgments do not fluctuate along these lines. We do not think that a courageous person living (for Hume) in England is any more virtuous than a courageous person living in China. If this is the case, then it would seem sympathy cannot be the source of our moral evaluations.

Hume also considers another potential problem which I will refer to as the “influence of fortune” objection. He notes that when someone possesses a character that generally tends to be beneficial we denominate it virtuous. This is the case even when some accidental circumstance is currently preventing that character from being actually beneficial. “Virtue in rags,” according to Hume, “is still virtue; and the love, which it procures, attends a man into a dungeon or desart,
where the virtue can no longer be exerted in action, and is lost to all the world” (T 3.3.1.19; SBN 584). Unfortunately, sympathy again seems ill-suited to account for this aspect of morality. This is because “[s]ympathy interests us in the good of mankind; and if sympathy were the source of our esteem for virtue, that sentiment of approbation could only take place, where the virtue actually attained its end, and was beneficial to mankind” (ibid.). Just like we do not sympathize as strongly with those who are either temporally or spatially farther away, neither is our sympathy as strong when a normally beneficial (or harmful) character trait is presently blocked from having that effect. This, again, seems to call into question whether our moral judgments arise from sympathy by identifying another instance where our sympathy varies in a manner that our moral judgments do not.

As one would expect, Hume’s response to each of these objections is that distinctively moral sentiments arise from the sympathy we feel with another’s character through the GPV. Unlike the case of eliminating considerations of self-interest, however, sympathy itself cannot be the psychological mechanism that allows us to adopt this impartial vantage point. This is because it was the variability of sympathy that caused these problems in the first place. Instead, we see Hume appeal here to the imagination. Consider first Hume’s response to the proximity in space/time objection.

Our servant, if diligent and faithful, may excite stronger sentiments of love and kindness than Marcus Brutus, as represented in history; but we say not upon that account, that the former character is more laudable than the latter. We know, that were we to approach equally near to that renown’d patriot, he wou’d command a much higher degree of affection and admiration (T 3.3.1.16; SBN 582).
Although we may have stronger personal feelings for our “diligent and faithful” servant than for the character of Brutus, we do not conclude that the former must be more virtuous. If we could actually inhabit the same time and place as Brutus we know that our feelings of approbation would exceed the feelings we have for our servant. Through this act of the imagination we realize that the strength of our immediate feelings is merely a product of our current spatio-temporal location. By imagining ourselves in the same spatio-temporal location as the person being evaluated, we can then eliminate the biasing elements of our own limited vantage point. The same phenomenon occurs when, according to Hume, we refrain from saying that some object is less beautiful merely because it is currently farther away (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581-582).

Hume makes a similar response to the influence of fortune objection. He provides a number of examples where we are able to separate the beneficial tendencies of some object from the current situation of that object. We are capable of praising a well-constructed house that nobody resides in, an area with “fertile soil, and a happy climate” that has no inhabitants, or a person “whose limbs and shape promise strength and activity” but is currently locked in a dungeon (T 3.3.1.20; SBN 584-585). Hume explains this by appealing explicitly to the imagination: “[w]here a character is, in every respect, fitted to be beneficial to society, the imagination passes easily from the cause to the effect, without considering that there are still some circumstances wanting to render the cause a compleat one” (ibid.). The imagination bypasses the unfortunate circumstance preventing the character in question from being beneficial, and associates that character with the benefits it would have in more favorable
circumstances. In this manner, we “separate, as much as possible, the fortune from the
disposition” when making moral evaluations (ibid.).

Whether it is the variability of sympathy, or the pull of self-interest, which causes our
immediate sentiments to be partial, rendering those sentiments impartial requires some sort of
mental effort. It takes a person of “temper and judgment […] who has command of himself” to
separate the sentiments of morality and self-interest (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 472). Making disinterested
judgments requires a measure of self-control. Likewise, overcoming the variability of sympathy
requires a very specific way of employing our imagination. The imagination “has the command
over all its ideas, and can join, and mix, and vary them in all the ways possible” (T 1.3.7.7; SBN
628-9), but it is only from the GPV that we are capable of feeling moral sentiments. Sympathy
and the imagination give us the capability to adopt the GPV, but given that taking up the GPV
requires using these capacities in a very specific way, we might wonder why it is that we do so.
Why do we bother expending the mental energy that impartiality requires in the first place?

We might be tempted to think that what impels us to adopt the GPV is some innate desire
to make moral judgments. As noted by Christine Korsgaard, however, this cannot be Hume’s
answer.

A creature who never viewed things from the general point of view would make
no moral judgments, and for such a creature, there would be no virtues and vices.

We cannot intelligibly say that such a creature would take up the general point of

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8 Sayre-McCord emphasizes this aspect of Hume’s moral theory (i.e. our ability to praise something for being well
suited for some purpose) in attributing to him what he calls a “Bauhuas Theory” of ethics (see “Hume and the

9 Lying in the background here is the issue of whether, as discussed by William Davie, adopting the GPV is a matter
My concern, however, is merely with what motive causes the human mind to expend the mental effort needed to
adopt the GPV. Whether or not Hume thinks we do so consciously or not is an important but separate issue.
view in order to bring morality, of which he has no prior conception, into existence.¹⁰

Morality only comes into existence after we have already adopted the GPV. Neither can our original motive to adopt the GPV be, as pointed out by Rachel Cohon, the desire to find “the true or correct moral judgment about a given, unchanged character.”¹¹ While the question of whether Hume thinks our moral judgments can be considered true is controversial,¹² Hume is clear that there is no original motive directly driving us to pursue truth for its own sake (T 2.3.10.2; SBN 448-9). Instead, theoretical inquiry is first motivated by the pleasure we derive from exercising our intellectual faculties (T 2.3.10.3; SBN 449), and only later do we acquire a concern for truth itself as repeated engagement in inquiry inculcates such a concern in us (T 2.3.10.7; SBN 451). This means that, regardless of whether Hume thought moral views are capable of being correct or incorrect, the desire to have a “correct” moral view cannot be what originally motivates us to adopt the GPV. Neither can a regard for impartiality as such be the motive we are searching for. As explained above, the natural variations of our sympathy show that strict impartiality is not a motive natural to human nature, and the idea that human beings are naturally partial is reinforced in a number of other contexts as well (T 3.2.1.5, 3.2.1.18, 3.2.2.8; SBN 478, 483-4, 488-9).

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¹² Hume is well known for his statement that moral sentiments cannot “be pronounced either true or false” (T 3.1.1.9; SBN 458). Yet at other points Hume criticizes those who have incorrect moral views. For instance, he believes that the so called “monkish virtues” (a constellation of activities all centered around extreme self-denial) actually ought to be considered vices (EPM 9.3; SBN 270). For a discussion of this issue see Julia Driver, “Pleasure as the Standard of Virtue in Hume’s Moral Philosophy,” Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 85:2 (2004): 173-194, and Cohon, Hume’s Morality.
In what follows I will classify and outline the various motives that Hume does think impel us to adopt the GPV. Doing so requires making two distinctions. First, the motives for adopting the GPV can be classified according to what the end goal of impartial evaluation is. Here I distinguish between subjective and social motives.

**Subjective Motive** → Some motive, $m$, to adopt the GPV is a *subjective motive* if and only if $m$ motivates adopting the GPV in order to coordinate one’s own mental state.

**Social Motive** → Some motive, $m$, to adopt the GPV is a *social motive* if and only if $m$ motivates adopting the GPV in order to coordinate one’s relationship to others.

Second, the motives for adopting the GPV can differ regarding the reason why we desire that end goal. Here I distinguish between confirmation and conflict motives.

**Conflict Motive** → Some motive, $m$, to adopt the GPV is a *conflict motive* if and only if $m$ impels us to achieve (by adopting the GPV) the relevant sort of coordination (whether subjective or social) because of our desire to avoid conflict.

**Confirmation Motive** → Some motive, $m$, to adopt the GPV is a *confirmation motive* if and only if $m$ impels us to achieve (by adopting the GPV) a certain sort of coordination (whether subjective or social) because of our desire for agreement.

The following table shows the possible combinations of these categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Motives</th>
<th>Confirmation Motives</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Motives</td>
<td>(1) Subjective Conflict Motive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Subjective Confirmation Motive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motives (1) and (3) each impel us to adopt the GPV in order to avoid a certain type of conflict. The explanation Hume provides based upon (1) holds that we adopt the GPV in order to stave off the conflict that would ensue among our various mental states over time when we evaluate others from a fluctuating vantage point. The explanation he provides which is based upon (3) holds that taking up the GPV is necessary to avoid the inter-personal conflict. Specifically, we make impartial evaluations in order to avoid the disagreement and inconvenience that would occur in our relationships with others if we evaluated others from our own personal point of view. With motives (2) and (4), however, it is not our desire to avoid conflict, but our inherent desire for agreement itself, which motivates us to take up the GPV. Looking first at motive (4), we adopt the GPV because of our desire for others to agree with the way in which we evaluate the usefulness and agreeableness of our peers’ character traits. Motive (2) is included in the table for the purpose of outlining all the possible combinations of the distinctions I made above. However, Hume never identifies our inherent desire to have our various mental states agree with one another as motive for impartial evaluation.

3. The Subjective Conflict Motive

I begin by outlining the subjective conflict motive. This motive drives us to view others from a general vantage point in order to quell the mental fluctuation that would occur otherwise. We can begin to see this by examining the following passage.

The case is here the same as it is in our judgments concerning external bodies. All objects seem to diminish by their distance: But tho’ the appearance of objects to our senses be the original standard, by which we judge of them, yet we do not say,
that they actually diminish by the distance; but correcting the appearances by reflection, arrive at a more constant and establish’d judgment concerning them. In like manner, tho’ sympathy be much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and a sympathy with persons remote from us much fainter than that with persons near and contiguous; yet we neglect all these differences in our calm judgments concerning the characters of men (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 603).

Hume notes here that we “correct” for the perceptual variation of external objects which occurs when we survey them from different distances. To use an example from the first Enquiry, we correct for the fact that a table we are walking away from appears to be shrinking (EHU 12.9; SBN 152).

Hume believes something similar motivates us to adopt the GPV. As a general principle of human psychology, sudden changes in our mental state are unpleasant (T 2.3.10.12; SBN 453-454). Yet, if we did not evaluate the character of others from a general vantage point, then our mental state would be racked by “uncertainty” arising “from the incessant changes of our situation” (T 3.3.1.18, SBN 583-584). This is because, without the GPV, every time our perspective changed so would our evaluation of another’s character: “[o]ur situation, with regard both to persons and things, is in continual fluctuation; and a man, that lies at a distance from us, may, in a little time, become a familiar acquaintance” (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581-582). As noted by Kathleen Wallace, the GPV is needed to reduce the influence of “variations in my mental activity itself that can be due to many factors, such as fortune, one’s own mental disposition at any time, the vivacity of a particular impression of one’s situation, one’s shifting interests, and the like.”

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Therefore, we adopt an impartial perspective in order to avoid the discomfort associated with a conflicting mental state.\textsuperscript{14}

The subjective conflict motive, then, seems to function in the following way. Imagine that my neighbor, who previously I had judged to be highly virtuous, moves to another country. I would now (because of the variability that sympathy exhibits through changes in proximity) not approve of her character as strongly. This variation is uncomfortable and, thus, motivates us to adopt a perspective which prevents these changes. There is something problematic, however, about our aversion to mental variation acting as a motive for adopting the GPV. Namely, it seems to over-determine the cases in which we would use the GPV to correct our evaluations. There are certain types of variation that we do not think have to be corrected. People who we once evaluated as vicious may become more virtuous as they mature, or once morally praiseworthy individuals may become more vicious as the circumstances of their life deteriorate. Intuitively, we would say that in these cases our judgments should vary because there has been an actual change in the worth of that person’s moral character. But this idea is not available to Hume because, as discussed previously, the desire to get our moral judgments correct is not what motivates the GPV. If our reason for adopting the GPV is to alleviate the pain of mental fluctuation, then it should not matter what the reason for that fluctuation is.

More importantly for the purpose of this paper, however, is the fact that the subjective conflict motive does not address the question I posed at the outset: why do we adopt the GPV in order to secure agreement with others? It may be the case that the point of view which allows us to eradicate mental variation is also the point of view which leads to agreement with others, but this is an accidental effect. Another method of eliminating mental variation, which did not lead

to agreement with others, would satisfy the subjective conflict motive just as well. Thus, in the sections which follow, I will turn to the social motives Hume identifies for adopting the GPV which directly address the issue of why we seek agreement with others.

4. THE SOCIAL CONFLICT MOTIVE

The following passage is representative of Hume’s explanation of the social conflict motive.

[E]very particular man has a peculiar position with regard to others; and tis’ impossible we cou’d ever converse together on any reasonable terms, were each of us to consider characters and persons, only as they appear from his peculiar point of view. In order, therefore, to prevent those continual contradictions, and arrive at a more stable judgment of things, we fix on some steady and general points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581-582, original emphasis).

Here Hume identifies our need to converse with others as an impetus for adopting the GPV. Because everyone inhabits a particular point of view, our immediate and unaltered sentiments are bound to disagree with one another. Thus, Hume believes that we adopt the GPV in order to reconcile the resultant “contradictions.”

To use a previously mentioned example, we may feel stronger “sentiments of love” toward our “diligent and faithful” servant than we do toward “Marcus Brutus, as represented in history” (T 3.3.1.16; SBN 582). However, we do not say that our servant has a “more laudable” moral character upon that basis (ibid.). We are aware that if we could exist in close proximity to Marcus Brutus, then his character would “command a much higher degree of affection and admiration” than the character of our servant (ibid.). The reason that we make judgments from

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15 Hume makes this point in a number of other Treatise passages as well. See T 3.3.1.16 (SBN 582), T 3.3.1.18 (SBN 583-584), and T 3.3.3.2 (SBN 603-4).
this general vantage point is that it would be “impossible we cou’d ever make use of language, or communicate our sentiments to one another” if we didn’t “overlook our present situation” (ibid.). Hume does admit that our judgments of others, when modified by adopting the GPV, do not always influence our actual “love and hatred” of others (T 3.3.1.18; SBN 583-584). While I may reach the conclusion that Marcus Brutus’ character is more worthy of love, my actual feelings will be much stronger for my servant whom I interact with on a daily basis: “the heart does not always take part with those general notions” (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602-603). Still, the judgments we form of others through the GPV are “sufficient for discourse, and serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools” (ibid.).

As noted by Sayre-McCord, the “contradictions” that Hume has in mind here cannot be propositional. There is, strictly speaking, no contradiction when you approve of someone’s character and I disapprove of it. This does, however, present a conflict of attitude. Yet, it is not immediately clear why conflicts in attitude would pose a problem for our ability to converse with one another. Sayre-McCord points out that there are many cases where we are able to tolerate differences in attitude, and that these differences can even be useful: “as when your preference for white meat complements my preference for dark.” Furthermore, even if these conflicts in attitude did pose a problem for conversation, it is not clear why it demands that we adopt an impartial vantage point. For instance, “there is clearly an intelligible language of self-interest – a

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16 See Korsgaard, “The General Point of View: Love and Moral Approval in Hume’s Ethics,” 10, on the connection between virtue and being worthy of love.

17 In fact, if Elizabeth S. Radcliffe is correct, then for Hume our actual sentiments may never actually reach the impartiality of the GPV, but may only approximate it (“Hume on Motivating Sentiments, the General Point of View, and the Inculcation of ‘Morality,’” Hume Studies 20.1 (1994): 37-58.


language we can and do use to describe the tendency of people’s character’s to our own benefit.”

If all we are concerned with is finding a way to speak with one another, then the vantage point of self-interest works just as well as an impartial vantage point of the GPV.

To avoid these problems, Sayre-McCord attributes to Hume the view that the GPV is needed to prevent the conflicts in action that would ensue from impartial evaluation. He notes that “our sentiments of approval and disapproval” play an important role in shaping “the lives we try, and try to get others, to live.” When we approve of another’s character, we not only classify that person’s character as agreeable or praiseworthy, but are also driven to model our own character after it and encourage others to do the same. However, if “these sentiments prove unstable, unpredictable, and idiosyncratic, and to the extent that they conflict, [then] so too will the plans and projects we and others undertake at their prodding.” The reason we need the GPV is not simply because attitudinal conflicts exist, but because these attitudinal conflicts engender subsequent conflicts of action.

However, it is not clear whether there is sufficient evidence for interpreting Hume in this way. Hume never directly mentions conflict ensuing from incompatible courses of action, and states explicitly at one point that where we are unable to change our immediate sentiments that the GPV does nothing more than make us “[correct] our language” (T 3.3.1.16, SBN 582). Here, again, it seems the relevant conflict arises from our need to converse with others, and not our need for complementary life plans. Furthermore, it would be problematic if Hume did hold this view. How much inconvenience is there when not everyone is motivated to cultivate the same sort of character? There may be a great deal of inconvenience if, for instance, the conflict was so

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22 Ibid., 217.
great that I was motivated to be courageous and you were motivated to be cowardly. Perhaps this could be the case where it is self-interest that is influencing our evaluation. Recalling Hume’s aforementioned example of an enemy whose “good qualities,” such as courage, make him or her “hurtful to us” (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 471-472), each of us may only be motivated to be courageous, or encourage others to be courageous, where doing so would be to our benefit.

However, Hume does not think that we take up the GPV only to eliminate the effects of self-interest. Consider, again, Hume’s example where we are comparing the character of Marcus Brutus to that of our servant. In this case, our particular spatio-temporal position makes us feel stronger sentiments of approval for our “diligent and faithful” servant (T 3.3.1.16; SBN 582). Our close proximity to our servant distorts the fact that it is Marcus Brutus who possesses a more praiseworthy character. Even if this is the case, however, there is no suggestion here that we are completely unable to make a positive evaluation of Brutus’ character. The content of our judgment remains the same (i.e. Marcus Brutus has many useful and agreeable traits) even if the evaluations we make of those in closer proximity have more phenomenal strength.23 Consequently, insofar as Hume believes virtue is one of the principle causes of love (T 3.1.2.5; SBN 473), surveying our servant would incite stronger feelings of love than our imaginative survey of Brutus. Yet, even if Brutus’ character does not invoke the amount of love it seems to warrant, this would not prevent anyone from recognizing that Marcus Brutus’ character traits are useful and/or agreeable. One may be less motivated to inculcate the specific traits of Marcus Brutus, and instead inculcate the traits of one of their close relations. Consequently, we will not all work to cultivate the same set of virtues to the same degree. Yet, this will remain true whether or not people evaluate others from a general perspective. Given the fact that time is limited, and

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23 I am grateful to a reviewer from *Hume Studies* for helping me to clarify this point.
people have certain talents and dispositions, nobody will be able to fully inculcate every virtue. Hume’s description of Cleanthes in the second Enquiry as “a model of perfect virtue,” who possess all of the useful and agreeable qualities we consider virtuous, is a worthy but likely unrealistic ideal (EPM 9.2; SBN 269-270). Analogously, it is true that if we did not evaluate from an impartial vantage point, then differently situated people would emphasize the virtues of those people that exist in close proximity. Nevertheless, since it is still possible to recognize the virtue of those who are distant, it does not seem that putting more emphasis on certain virtues could provide a significant enough inconvenience to motivate adopting the GPV.

If the fact that people are not motivated to pursue each virtue to the same degree cannot fully explain why we adopt the GPV, then we are still left with Hume’s assertion that we take up an impartial standpoint in order to facilitate conversation. Consequently, we are still left with the same question of why our need to discuss others character traits requires us to evaluate impartially. If moral properties do not come into existence until the GPV has already been taken up, then “what exactly is it that we need to talk about?” Why do we not simply accept that other people evaluate others differently? Korsgaard believes that Hume never fully addresses this problem, but she does provide an answer she believes he could have given. Recall from earlier that Hume believes it is uncomfortable to sympathize with those who have sentiments or opinions that are contrary to our own: “no sooner any person approaches me, than he diffuses on me all his opinions” (T 3.3.2.2; SBN 592). Hume observes that although this process does not always “change my sentiments” it does disturb the “easy course of my thought” (ibid.). Korsgaard argues that Hume could appeal to this in order to explain “the peculiar irritability that is produced in us when people express sentiments contrary to our own on matters about which

we feel strongly. Instead of our need to converse with others, it is our need to tolerate being in the presence of those who disagree with us that motivates the GPV.

As Korsgaard goes on to argue, however, that there is an important problem with this explanation of our motivation to evaluate impartially.

If Hume is right [that the contradictory sentiments of others provide pressure to take up the GPV], there is pressure on those who must endure one other’s company to agree about everything. When you really like something – a movie, a popular book, a food – even things thought to be “matters of taste” – you urge your friends to try it. If they don’t like it, this sets up a tension […] Any difference of sentiment, however trivial, sets up a conflict or a tiny movement of estrangement that human beings find it difficult to endure. So on Hume’s account, the problem is not really to see why the lovable is not just a matter of taste like the flavors of ice cream. The problem is to see how we can possibly treat even the flavors of ice cream as a mere matter of taste.

The problem here is similar to the problem I identified in section 3 with the subjective conflict motive in that appealing to sympathy as the impetus for adopting the GPV again over determines the matter. There are some instances where the fact that someone else has a different sentiment than we do does not drive us to adopt an impartial vantage point. The case pointed to here deals with “matters of taste.” If any conflict in sentiment is sufficient to cause mental disturbance, then even conflicts about what foods we prefer will provide impetus to adopt the GPV.


26 Ibid., 25.
It seems that adopting the GPV will not be capable of quelling our mental instability in such cases. As I will further discuss below, if our difference of opinion about how delicious some ice cream flavor is arises from a real difference in the functioning of our taste buds or psychological makeup (as opposed to some temporary disturbance of our physiological or mental state caused by, say, illness), there is no perspective which will make us agree on this matter. The only alternative would be to simply ignore each other, thereby removing the cause of our mutual mental instability. This route of defense, if Hume was to take it, would be quite problematic. First, ceasing to communicate our sentiments about matters of taste to one another would be a very difficult task. This is especially true since, for Hume, actions serve as signs of internal principles or motives (T 3.2.1.2; SBN 477). This means that even seeing someone enjoy a flavor of ice cream that we do not like could engender discomfort. Second, this explanation does not at all matchup with our common experience about how we react to others having different tastes. As briefly mentioned before, we have no problem tolerating others with different taste in all sorts of things and attributing the difference to pure subjective preference. Thus, if Hume did appeal to the pressure produced by our sympathy with the contrary sentiments as the impetus to adopt the GPV, he would have to explain why this does not also cause us to seek agreement in matters of taste.

5. THE SOCIAL CONFIRMATION MOTIVE

While the social conflict motive does provide an explanation of why it is that we use the GPV to secure agreement with others, it also encounters certain problems. The following remark by Korsgaard points to the basis of these problems.
[Until we adopt the GPV], we simply love and hate, and make judgments about whether or not we like people. And it is not, so far, obvious why we should expect to concur in our loves and hates, or regard it as a contradiction if we do not.\textsuperscript{27}

The problem Hume faces is that prior to taking up the GPV we have no \textit{expectation} that our evaluations of other people will necessarily agree with how others evaluate. Because there is no expectation of agreement there is no reason to prefer adopting an impartial standpoint over the standpoint of self-interest. The latter allows us to speak with one another just as well as the former. Unless there is an expectation that we will agree about character evaluations, then there won’t be any pressure to adopt an impartial perspective when we disagree. Additionally, the above outlined matters of taste problem will also persist if there is no expectation of agreement. Without the prior expectation that our character evaluations will agree, Hume cannot explain why we treat character evaluations any differently from our evaluation of ice cream flavors (which we do not necessarily expect to agree about).

In this section I argue that, \textit{contra} the characterization given by Korsgaard, the expectation for agreement does play a role in Hume’s explanation of why we adopt the GPV. We can see this by examining Hume’s discussion of the GPV in the conclusion to the second \textit{Enquiry}.

When a man denominates another his \textit{enemy}, his \textit{rival}, his \textit{antagonist}, his \textit{adversary}, he is understood to speak the language of self-love, and to express sentiments, peculiar to himself, and arising from his particular circumstances and situation. But when he bestows on any man the epithets of \textit{vicious} or \textit{odious} or \textit{depraved}, he then speaks another language, and expresses sentiments, in which he

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 16-17.
expects all his audience to concur with him. (EPM 9.6; SBN 272-273, original emphasis).

Here Hume argues that whether we expect others to agree with our evaluations depends upon what aspect of human nature produced that evaluation. When our self-interest makes us identify another person as our enemy, we do not expect that others will view that person similarly. This is because we know that it is only in virtue of some particular feature about ourselves (such as the fact that we are opposing that person on a battlefield) that we view him or her as an enemy.

The case is different, however, when we identify someone as “vicious” or “odious.” These identifications do not arise from our self-concern. Instead, they arise from what Hume terms the “principle of humanity” (EPM 9.6; SBN 272-273), or the human disposition to care about the well-being of others. This disposition yields the sentiment of humanity which “produce[s] a cool preference of what is useful and serviceable to mankind, above what is pernicious and dangerous” (EPM 9.4, SBN 270-271). It is this sentiment which gives rise to “moral distinction[s]” and our “blame and approbation” of certain character traits (ibid.).

Importantly, Hume thinks that the principle of humanity is equally present in all human beings: “every man, in some degree, concurs” in their concern for the welfare of others and no “human heart” can “be wholly indifferent to public good nor entirely unaffected with the tendency of characters and manners” (EPM 9.6; SBN 272-273). Even if the “generous sentiments” produced by the principle of humanity are too weak “to move even a hand or finger of our body,” they are

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still capable of influencing how we evaluate others (EPM 9.4; SBN 270-271). The “tendency of characters” which Hume believes the principle of humanity makes us concerned about is their usefulness and agreeableness. Therefore, because the principle of humanity is universal, we expect that others will agree with us when we evaluate the usefulness and agreeableness of another’s character. By contrast, since our concern for our own interest does not exist equally others, we do not form the expectation for agreement regarding those types of judgments.

Thus, at least in the second Enquiry, it seems Hume does believe we have a prior expectation that others will agree with our character evaluations. This also shows how Hume can account for “matters of taste.” In his essay “Of the Standard of Taste” Hume notes that at a certain level of generality all will agree about aesthetic judgments (EMPL 233). As the matter under examination is rendered more particular, however, agreement becomes less likely: “[c]omedy, tragedy, satire, odes, have each its partisans, who prefer that particular species of writing to all others” (EMPL 244). This is because “it is almost impossible not to feel a predilection for that which suits our particular turn and disposition” (EMPL 244). Our tastes (just like the judgments we make as a result of self-interest) arise from psychological principles which are particular to us as individuals, and are not necessarily shared throughout the human species. This is why we are not startled or disturbed by realizing, for instance, that other people prefer different flavors of ice cream. The evaluations we make of the usefulness and agreeableness of another’s character, unlike our preferences for certain foods, arise from a universal principle of human psychology. Thus, we form an expectation for agreement which we seek to satisfy in the former case but not the latter. 29 Of course, limiting our expectation for agreement in this way

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29 As noted by Frazer, Hume thinks that “we can coexist indefinitely amidst irresolvable aesthetic disagreement” but that “we must have a common viewpoint for purposes of ethical judgment in order to live together at all” (Frazer, The Enlightenment of Sympathy, 52).
may require some experience. We might initially be driven to try and secure agreement about all of our sentiments, and it may only be through a process of trial and error that we learn this is impossible in certain cases. Nevertheless, upon gaining this knowledge we should be able to distinguish those sentiments for which agreement is possible, and those for which it is not.

Even for those sentiments which arise from a universal principle of human nature, there is still no guarantee of agreement. Differences in perspective will still distort how we evaluate others. As we would expect, Hume appeals to the GPV at this point.

He must here, therefore, depart from his private and particular situation, and must choose a point of view, common to him with others; he must move some universal principle of the human frame, and touch a string to which all mankind have an accord and symphony (EPM 9.6, SBN 272-273).

In order to bring about the agreement that the principle of humanity makes possible, we have to abstract away from our present situation and evaluate others impartially. What is interesting about this passage is that Hume seems to suggest it is the expectation for agreement itself which motivates adopting the GPV. Or, more precisely, it is our desire to fulfill that expectation which does the motivating work. Because the judgments we make about the usefulness or agreeableness of another’s character arise from the universal principle of humanity, we expect that others will agree with us about those evaluations. When we find that making evaluations from our own particular vantage point upsets this expectation, we then adopt the GPV so that expectation can be fulfilled.

Of course, the mere fact that an outcome is expected does not necessarily mean will be actively motivated to bring it about. In many cases we are either apathetic about an expected occurrence or would rather avoid it. I expect that I will have to do laundry every week, but I
would not object at all if my expectation was upset because someone (unexpectedly) did it for me. Similarly, one might argue here that what is motivating us to adopt the GPV is not our expectation that (because the principle of humanity is universal) our evaluations of others will agree. Instead, our real motivation is our desire to avoid conflict (i.e. the social conflict motive), and securing agreement with others is just one way of achieving that goal. One could also avoid conflict by adopting a hermetic lifestyle and avoiding anyone who holds a contrary sentiment. Undoubtedly this is a more difficult task, and so in the vast majority of cases eliminating conflict will require that we find a way to coexist with others, but for present purposes that is a tangential issue. The point is simply that, upon this explanation, we do not have any inherent desire to satisfy our agreement expectation. Securing agreement with others is valued instrumentally as one manner of achieving social stability; just as doing my own laundry is but one method of getting my clothes cleaned.

However, this does not seem to be what Hume has in mind these passages. Nowhere does he mention the instability that is created through conflict. Instead, he asserts that we “expect” to others to agree with our evaluations stemming from the principle of humanity, and that consequently we adopt the GPV in order to bring about this result. In other words, he seems to hold that we take active steps to satisfy our expectation for agreement. I contend that this adds another layer to the social motive that Hume identifies for adopting the GPV: the social confirmation motive. Like the social conflict motive, the social confirmation motive seeks to coordinate our relationships with other people. However, unlike the social conflict motive which drives us to develop non-conflicting relationships with others, the social confirmation motive drives us to develop relationships of agreement with others. In the former case agreement is

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30 See Loeb, Stability and Justification in Hume’s Treatise, 91-97 for a discussion of this issue.
instrumentally useful, while in the latter agreement is sought for its agreeability. Evidence that Hume thinks we find concurrence with others about our character evaluations immediately agreeable can be found a just a few paragraphs later. There Hume notes that moral sentiments are not only “universal” but “social” in nature (EPM 9.9; SBN 275). Moral sentiments bind us together as the “party of humankind against vice and disorder, its common enemy” (ibid.). Because moral sentiments are universal in the human species, not only do they “[occur] more frequently in discourse,” but are “cherished by society” (ibid.). If we “cherish” the fact that our moral sentiments provide a common identity for the human species (or the “party of humankind”), then we should be motivated to eliminate the idiosyncrasies of our particular vantage point regardless of whether doing so is necessary to alleviate conflict.

Hume appeals to a similar type of motivation in other places as well. Consider the much discussed conclusion to the first Book of the Treatise (T 1.4.7; SBN 263-74), which I discussed in chapter 1, where Hume provides an account of the troubling effects of the skeptical arguments he introduced in previous sections. Hume notes that he is “unable to mingle and unite in society” and “has been expell’d [from] all human commerce, and left utterly abandon’d and disconsolate” (T 1.4.7.2; SBN 264-5). Hume is motivated to leave behind his current state of skeptical despair, in part, because it impedes social interaction. Why does being unable to participate in social activity have such motivational force? On the one hand, Hume does appeal here to the disagreeableness that arises from conflict: “[w]hen I look abroad, I forsee on every side, dispute, contradiction, anger, calumny and detraction” (ibid.). He also, however, mentions our desire to have our opinions confirmed by others: “I feel all my opinions loosen and fall of themselves,

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when unsupported by the approbation of others” (*ibid*.). Even if being a skeptic did not engender constant “dispute, contradiction, anger, calumny and detraction” from others, or even if the skeptic could retreat to somewhere so remote that she was not cognizant of any opposition, the fact that nobody else would hold similar sentiments provides motivation for leaving skepticism behind.

This idea recurs in Book 2 of the *Treatise* where Hume notes that “a perfect solitude is [...] the greatest punishment we can suffer,” and that “[e]very pleasure languishes when enjoy’d a-part from company” (T 2.2.5.15, SBN 362-363). In a similar fashion, adopting a general vantage point preserves the “cherished” social nature of our moral sentiments which bind the “party of humankind” together. In Michael Frazer’s words, for Hume, “[t]he social need for appeal to a common point of view [...] goes much deeper psychologically then the mere need for common terms of discourse. Our need for a general point of view stems from our insatiable desire for the company of our fellows.”

If my reading of the conclusion of the second *Enquiry* is correct, then we can add that we adopt the GPV, not just to enable cooperation in society, but to preserve our common human identity as the species capable of feeling generous sentiments of moral concern.

### 6. SOCIAL CONFIRMATION AND THE SOCIAL NATURE OF MORALITY

I turn now to considering what advantages Hume’s theory gains by identifying not just our desire to avoid social conflict, but also our desire for social confirmation, as a motive to adopt the GPV. First, the manner in which Hume outlines the social confirmation motive (specifically the fact that it is based upon our expectation for agreement) helps to resolve some of the problems that plague his social conflict-based explanation. Because we expect our character evaluations to

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agree, when those evaluations conflict we cannot resolve the issue by adopting the perspective of self-interest. The self-interested perspective may allow us to adopt an intelligible language for discussing our evaluations with others, but it will not allow us to approve of others in quite the same way or to the same degree. When supplemented by recognition of our expectation for agreement, then, Hume can explain why social conflict leads us specifically to adopt an impartial vantage point.

I believe that Hume’s appeal to social confirmation also makes an important contribution to debates about the nature of human sociality which concerned Hume and his contemporaries. Consider, for instance, the various explanations given regarding why it is that we unite together in society. Some, specifically Hobbes and Mandeville, held that social union was instrumentally valued insofar as it allowed to us to satisfy other more primary desires. Hobbes, in De Cive, characteristically states that “[w]e do not therefore seek by nature society for its own sake, but that we may receive some honour or profit from it; these we desire primarily, that secondarily.”

Society occurs not because we inherently desire the company of others, but because of its ancillary benefits, and society would become superfluous if we could attain these benefits in some other way. In The Moralists, Shaftesbury presented a starkly different explanation: it could “never without absurdity be allowed” that the “natural state” of human beings is to live “separately.” Someone without any desire for society could, conceivably, have the “outward shape” of a human being, but “his passions, appetites, and organs must be wholly different.”

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the *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, Shaftesbury argues that were there any human beings who lost their “social Affection,” we would view them as “monsters” who had a “misshapen or distorted” internal constitution. In an important sense, then, Shaftesbury thinks the natural desire for social contact with our fellows is a defining characteristic of what it means to be a human being. While Hobbes thinks the fact that we unite in civil society is only an expression of our self-concern, Shaftesbury believes it expresses our genuinely social nature.

Given Hume’s previously mentioned assertion that “perfect solitude is [...] the greatest punishment we can suffer,” and that “[e]very pleasure languishes when enjoy’d a-part from company” (*T* 2.2.5.15, SBN 362-363), it seems he sides more with Shaftesbury on the nature of human sociality. Our initial impulse to unite with others stems from our desire for social connection. “The first and original principle of human society,” argues Hume, is the “natural appetite betwixt the sexes” (*T* 3.2.2.4; SBN 486). As Anette Baier puts it, we are “natural cooperators” with our “lovers and children” and it is this sort of natural cooperation which later provides our model for the conventions of justice. Of course, because Hume does think that our initial motivation for establishing these conventions of justice is a sort of mutual self-interest (*T* 3.2.2.13; SBN 492), Shaftesbury would likely not think that Hume’s view makes our participation in society fully expressive of our social nature.

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For the moment, however, my main concern is with Hume’s account of moral evaluation. What we have seen is that Hume’s explanation of why we adopt the general point of view makes an important contribution to his endeavour to show that human morality is fundamentally social. As argued by Marie A. Martin, while “Hume’s principle of sympathy is an important part of his theory, it is by no means the only, or even the major social element.” Martin states that, for Hume, the thoroughly social nature of morality is demonstrated by the role that the GPV plays in establishing the standards of moral approbation. Given that securing agreement with others about our moral evaluations requires adopting “intersubjective standards,” moral evaluation itself can only take place given the presence of others and our need to unite with them. I contend that Hume’s appeal to the social confirmation motive strengthens the extent to which the GPV renders moral evaluation a social enterprise. In explaining the connection between the GPV and the social nature of morality, Martin points to what I have termed the conflict motives (social and subjective) for evaluating impartially. Yet, if the reason we seek agreement with others through the GPV is to avoid conflict, then our intersubjective standards of moral evaluation do not seem to be thoroughly social. In fact, Hume’s explanation of our practice of impartial evaluation begins to seem quite similar to Hobbes’ explanation of why we enter civil society. For this reason, Sayre-McCord has argued that “Hume’s worry is basically a civilized version of Hobbes’s more nightmarish version of unregulated self-interest leading to destructive


41 Ibid., 118.
interaction.” In light of these sorts of considerations, J.L. Mackie has argued that Hume is unable to maintain his distinction between natural and artificial virtues. As I discuss further in chapter 5, Hume thinks that some traits (the natural virtues) garner immediate approval while other traits (the artificial virtues) are only approved given the presence of some convention. Yet, according to Mackie’s criticism, because the GPV itself is a conflict resolving convention, all virtues (including the putatively natural) depend upon the presence of conventions.

Some have argued that Hume is still able to make the distinction between natural and artificial virtues. However, even if this is the case, it does not address the issue about the social nature of morality I am concerned with here. If our motive for impartial evaluation resembles the instrumentally social motive that Hobbes identifies for why we enter civil society more than it does Shaftesbury’s emphasis upon an inherently social motive, then moral evaluation is only social in a thin sense. Insofar as Hume thought it was important to show that our moral sentiments were a product of our “social affections,” and that (like Shaftesbury) Hume thinks that our moral sentiments of generous concern for others are a defining characteristic of the “party of humankind,” his conflict-based explanation does not seem fully adequate. However, because Hume appeals to our desire for agreement in addition to our aversion to conflict, in principle we have reason to adopt the GPV before establishing any convention.

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43 Mackie, Hume’s Moral Theory, 123.
of evaluation, lying behind our moral sentiments is the desire we have to unite with others. While conflict avoidance also plays an important role, at least one of the motives we have for impartial evaluation more fully represents the inherently social nature of human beings.

7. CONCLUSION

If my arguments here are sound, then there is more to find in the origin of our moral sentiments than the often variable mechanism of sympathy by which we share our sentiments with one another. At the foundation of morality is the sentiment of humanity which makes us concerned for the interest of our fellows and is common throughout the human species. This sentiment forms the “party of humankind” and, because we seek to preserve our common human identity, motivates us to adopt a general point of view when evaluating others. As I suggested at the close of the previous chapter, I believe that reflexivity (as a standard of revision) has a sharper critical edge when based upon humanity than when based upon sympathy. When evaluating (and potentially revising) our catalogue of virtues, the most important question is not whether our moral approval arises from sympathy. Instead, the pressing question is whether our approval is representative of the social affections that form our common human identity. I believe Hume recognized this in the second Enquiry. Recall that what we find when the “dismal dress” falls away from our moral sentiments is “gentleness, humanity, beneficence, [and] affability.” When our catalogue of virtues fails to fully characterize the social nature of human beings, then we have at least some reason to revise it. In the chapters which follow I will explore how this standard could be applied in Hume’s theory.
CHAPTER 4
REFORMING SENTIMENTS OF IMMEDIATE AGREEABILITY

1. INTRODUCTION

If the standard guiding Hume’s attempt to revise our catalogue of virtues is based upon our social and benevolent affections, then we should expect that Hume will attempt to modify our understanding of virtue and vice when we approve of characteristics that do not issue from these aspects of our nature. Given this, there are two types of virtues that seem most likely to be in need of revision. First, some traits are approved because they are immediately agreeable. As I will discuss in further detail below, Hume believes that certain qualities garner approval because of “something mysterious and inexplicable, which conveys an immediate satisfaction to the spectator” (EPM 8.14; SBN 267). There are certain qualities, military heroism being a prime example, which garner our approval simply because they are immediately agreeable to those who survey them. In fact, these qualities often garner this approval despite have deleterious consequences for the rest of society. Second, there are the traits which Hume refers to as artificial virtues. This class of virtues, which most notably includes justice, is based upon conventions which redirect our self-interest toward publically beneficial ends. While the artificial virtues are praised for their tendency to be publically useful, their basis in mutual self-interest poses some problems regarding how we ought to treat those who are less powerful.

In this chapter (and the next) I turn to examining how Hume does, or could, apply the standard of revision I have outlined in such instances. In doing so, I take on two main tasks. First, I will examine Hume’s views on the progress of modern society. If Hume does have a standard of revision like the one I have attributed to him, then we should expect that he would employ it when making judgments regarding moral progress. I demonstrate here that this is just
what we find in those instances where Hume compares the nature of modern and ancient society. Second, I outline how Hume takes on the role of the painter and attempts to modify our current moral sentiments by examining our approval of military heroism. I argue that Hume sought to paint a picture of military heroism which demonstrates to the reader that our approval that trait (based upon immediate agreeability) conflicts with our approval of benevolence. Insofar as Hume thought social sentiments such as benevolence were more agreeable and engaging, he thought that portraying military courage in this way would temper our unthinking approval of it.

2. LUXURY, GALLANTRY, AND THE PROGRESS OF CIVILIZATION

One debate Hume was involved in regarding the nature of modern society dealt with the status commerce and the enjoyment of luxury that was associated with it. As noted by John Shovlin, “[a]t the simplest level, the disagreement was about whether spectacular consumption by the rich, and the middling and poorer sort’s growing taste for fashionable clothing, colonial commodities, and other consumer goods, had positive or negative consequences.”¹ Those involved in this debate saw the rise of commercial society as a distinctive element of modern society that distinguished it from ancient ways of life. There was mixed opinion, however, on how we ought to appraise this modern development. While some held that luxury had a positive effect on the economy by stimulating industry, others thought it drew attention away from other more valuable pursuits.² Specifically, it was the “classicals [the ancient Greeks and Romans] and the early Church Fathers after them [who] regarded luxurious consumption as having negative moral, political and military consequences.”³ Hume’s own contribution to the luxury debate

² Ibid., 204.
occurred primarily in two of the essays published in the 1752 *Political Discourses*: “Of Commerce” and “Of Luxury.” The latter of these was renamed “Of Refinement in the Arts” in the editions after 1960 likely because of the various negative connotations that the term “luxury” had inherited.⁴

While many people have the tendency to “declaim against present times, and magnify the virtue of remote ancestors” (EMPL 278), Hume instead tended to praise the role of commerce and luxury in modern society. “[T]he ages of refinement,” argued Hume, “are both the happiest and most virtuous” (EMPL 269). There were a number of reasons for this. One way in which Hume believes moral progress can occur, as argued by Alix Cohen, is through refinement of our conception of what is useful.⁵ Thus, progress occurs when we adopt more socially useful institutions and customs. We see that, especially in “Of Commerce,” this was one reason for Hume’s optimism regarding modern commerce. In that essay, Hume addressed one of the arguments brought forth by those who thought that the development of commercial society was a step backwards for society. Hume thought it was a “general maxim” that “the public becomes powerful in proportion to the opulence and extensive commerce of private men” (EMPL 255). However, he admitted that this is not always the case.

There may be some circumstances, where the commerce and riches and luxury of individuals, instead of adding strength to the public, will serve only to thin its armies, and diminish its authority among the neighbouring nations (ibid.).

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Hume reveals that he is fully aware of the common worry that a society concerned with more refined and luxurious desires would become less powerful. In pre-commercial societies the goods which are wrought from the land, “instead of maintaining tradesmen and manufacturers, may support fleets and armies to a much greater extent, than where a great many arts are required to minister to the luxury of particular persons” (EMPL 257). The taste for luxury diverts a nation’s focus away from increasing its power and influence.

Admitting further that this argument is not “merely chimerical,” Hume notes that it is also founded upon “history and experience” (EMPL 257). For example, the “republic of Sparta was certainly more powerful than any state now in the world […] and this was owing entirely to the want of commerce and luxury” (ibid.). Even given this concession, however, Hume does not recommend that modern governments attempt to replicate these ancient societies. He points out that the “ancient policy,” which subdued commerce and made the citizens labor to support the ambition of military conquest, was “contrary to the more natural and usual course of things” (EMPL 259).

It is well known with what peculiar laws Sparta was governed, and what a prodigy that republic is justly esteemed to by every one, who has considered human nature as it has displayed itself in other nations, and other ages. Were the testimony of history less positive and circumstantial, such a government would appear a mere philosophical whim or fiction, and impossible ever to be reduced to practice (ibid.).

The Spartan society is much more the exception than it is the rule. Consequently, the fact that it was the “want of commerce and luxury” (EMPL 258) which was responsible for the power of
these nations should not be seen as evidence that limiting commerce and luxury would have similar effects now.

For Hume, the fundamental problem with the ancient method of governance is that it is ill suited for human nature. “Sovereigns,” Hume argues, “must take mankind as they find them, and cannot pretend to introduce any violent change in their principles and ways of thinking” (EMPL 260). Instead, it is best that government “comply with the common bent of mankind, and give it all the improvements of which it is susceptible” (ibid.). As noted by Cohen, “[t]he decline of Rome seems to strengthen his [Hume’s] claim that the ancient republics had to distort human nature in order to achieve that public spirit which distinguished them, gloriously but briefly.”

In Hume’s view, the “most natural course of things” is to allow “industry and arts and trade [to] increase the power of the sovereign as well as the happiness of the subjects” (ibid.). Based upon this line of reasoning, Cohen conceives of moral progress in the following way.

[T]he difference between different moral systems, and different models of civilization in general, is that, relative to the constitution of human nature, some fit it more that [sic] others and permit a better realization of its capacities, that is to say without perverting its tendencies.

The ancient policy which “aggrandizes the public by the poverty of individuals” does not fit as well with human nature as the modern way of life which encourages commerce and luxury (EMPL 260). It is simply not sustainable, given the constraints of human nature, to make citizens “undergo the greatest hardships for the sake of the public” (EMPL 262).

Thus, the progress of society can occur as we gain greater knowledge about human nature and how it is best governed toward productive ends. However, I hold that this was not the main

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6 Ibid., 122.
7 Ibid., 122.
reason why Hume thought modern society had progressed beyond the ancients in this regard. In fact, Hume’s main concern in the luxury debate was not with whether it made society more powerful and productive, but rather with the “political, cultural, and moral status of commercial modernity.” Shovlin points out that those who opposed modern commercial society had the following types of concerns.

They argued that luxury enervated and feminized men, sapping their capacity for military virtue; they claimed that luxury was a tool of potential despots who used it to weaken the commitment of their subjects to liberty and the public welfare; and they claimed that it made both rulers and their subjects corrupt and self-serving.

The luxury debate concerned not only its effects upon the power or economic prosperity of society, but the effects it had upon the moral character of the populace. Some worried that commerce and luxury were the root of many societal ills and would encourage vice.

Hume’s own views on luxury evolved before finally reaching maturity in “Of Refinement in the Arts.” In the Treatise Hume condemns luxury as a vice which “draw[s] ruin on us, and incapacitate[s] us for business and action” (T 3.3.4.7; SBN 610-611). Here Hume adopts the line that pursuit of luxury leads to personal ruin. However, as argued by Ryu Susato, it seems that “at this stage, Hume had not yet paid much attention to the full implications” that commercial society had upon “the historical shift in morality.” In the second Enquiry, Hume’s assessment becomes somewhat more positive and closer to the position he will eventually adopt in “Of

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8 Shovlin, “Hume’s Political Discourses and the French luxury debate,” 205. See also Susato, “Hume’s Nuanced Defense of Luxury.”
9 Ibid., 205.
10 See Cunningham, “David Hume’s Account of Luxury,” on this point.
Refinement.” He uses luxury as an example of a trait that we change our sentiments about once we have a better understanding of its actual tendencies.

Luxury, or a refinement on the pleasures and conveniences of life, had not long been supposed the source of every corruption in government, and the immediate cause of faction, sedition, civil wars, and the total loss of liberty. It was, therefore, universally regarded as a vice, and was an object of declamation to all satyrists, and severe moralists. Those, who prove, or attempt to prove, that such refinements rather tend to the increase of industry, civility, and arts, regulate anew our moral as well as political sentiments, and represent, as laudable or innocent, what had formerly been regarded as pernicious and blameable (EPM 2.21; SBN 181, original emphasis).

Hume does point out, in his discussion of the sensible knave, that those who sacrifice the pleasure of virtue for the pleasure of luxury are the “greatest dupes” (EPM 9.25; SBN 283-284). But this is not a criticism of luxury itself, only a criticism of excessive luxury (a theme that carries over into Hume’s mature and considered view of luxury).

At the outset of the essay “Of Refinement,” Hume defines luxury as “great refinement in the gratification of the senses” (EMPL 268). Being defined this way, Hume thinks it is absurd to think that “the gratifying of any sense, or the indulging of any delicacy in meat, drink, or apparel, is of itself a vice, can never enter into a head, that is not disordered by the frenzies of enthusiasm” (EMPL 268). For example, in a comment which resembles his condemnation of the monkish virtues in the second Enquiry (EPM 9.3; SBN 270), Hume tells us of a monk who forced himself to never look out his chamber window in order to prevent himself from receiving “so sensual a gratification” (EMPL 268). Echoing his earlier comments on the sensible knave,
Hume reaffirms here that luxury is only troublesome when it conflicts with our pursuit of virtue (EMPL 269). Hume intends to stake out a middle position that rejects both those of “libertine principles [who] bestow praises even on vicious luxury,” and those “of severe morals [who] blame even the most innocent luxury” (ibid.). As Hume makes clear later in the essay (EMPL 280n10), his main target among the extreme apologists for luxury is Bernard Mandeville. Hume does not cite anyone specifically who belongs to the camp of the “severe moralists,” but J. Martin Stafford has argued that it was “very probably” John Dennis. Dennis authored *Vice and Luxury Publick Mischiefs* which provided a scathing attack of Mandeville’s praise of excessive luxury.  

Hume did not just reject the “severe” position because he thought there was nothing wrong with innocent enjoyment. He also thought that commercial luxury had broad positive effects for society. As Cunningham puts it, Hume thought that commerce and luxury played an important role in satisfying the human need for “psychological stimulation.” In commercial ages people are kept in “perpetual occupation” and enjoy “the occupation itself, as well as those pleasures which are the fruit of their labor” (EMPL 270). The consequent cultivation of the “mechanical arts” which this leads to is also associated with “refinements in the liberal” arts (ibid.). “The same age,” Hume observes, “which produces great philosophers and politicians, renowned generals and poets, usually abounds with skilful weavers, and ship-carpenters” (ibid.). This is because “[t]he spirit of the age affects all the arts” and once people have been “roused

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13 Cunningham, “David Hume’s Account of Luxury,” 237. Cunningham believes this is a general principle in Hume’s philosophy which we can also see in his dramatic discussion of skepticism in T 1.4.7 (Ibid., 237n19).
from their lethargy” they will “carry improvements into every art and science” consequently eradicating “[p]rofound ignorance” (EMPL 271).

Yet, as suggested earlier, of more importance for Hume was the effect that luxury had upon the moral character of society. Hume noted that “[t]he more these refined arts advance, the more sociable men become” and it becomes almost impossible that “possessed of a fund of conversation, they should be contented to remain in solitude, or live with their fellows in a distant manner, which is peculiar to ignorant and barbarous nations” (EMPL 271). One important effect of commerce was the rise of urban life where people lived together in close proximity. Against those who held that that urban life had a corrupting influence, Hume held that the urban way of life was both more social and more humane.14

They flock into cities; love to receive and communicate knowledge; to show their wit or their breeding; their taste in conversation or living, in clothes or furniture. Curiosity allures the wise; vanity the foolish; and pleasure both. Particular clubs and societies are everywhere formed: Both sexes meet in an easy and sociable manner; and the tempers of men, as well as their behaviour, refine apace. So that, beside the improvements which they receive from knowledge and the liberal arts, it is impossible but they must feel an encrease of humanity, from the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other’s pleasure and entertainment (ibid.).

The primary benefit of commerce is not economic or political, but human and social. As described by Richard Boyd, “commerce itself provides a public setting for modern individuals of different ranks and social stations to meet and interact on terms more sociable than complete

anonymity but less intimate than personal benevolence.” Hume believes that this “habit of conversing” is responsible for greater degree of humanity and concern for others that exists in modern times. While Hume admits there are some disadvantages associated with commerce and luxury, such as increased “infidelity to the marriage-bed” (EMPL 272), he does not think that such disadvantages “bear any proportion” to the advantages of increased humanity (EMPL 271). Hume thinks that this is especially clear when we consider that “[t]reachery and cruelty, the most pernicious and most odious of all vices, seem peculiar to uncivilized ages” (EMPL 278).

Thus, Hume argues that “industry, knowledge, and humanity, are linked together by an indissoluble chain” (EMPL 271). It may be more common to denominate modern eras “luxurious ages,” but Hume reminds his reader that we should see them as “the more polished ages” (ibid.). This is in direct opposition to John Dennis who, in his response to Bernard Mandeville, held that modern society had corrupted the natural virtue of uncivilized human beings.

Since we live in so degenerate an Age, that some of the People of it are impos’d upon even by such wretched Stuff, I must be obliged to answer it. I observe then, That the Manners of Men have, for the most part, had most Sincerity and Integrity, in those Barbarous Countries, where there never were either Lawgivers or Philosophers [...]. And the Prince of Ancient Politicians, in his Treatise of Germany, where he speaks of the Innocence and Integrity of the Ancient

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Germans, gives the same Reason for that Integrity, that the Poet does for that of the Scythians.\textsuperscript{17}

In a passage from the second Enquiry that I will discuss in more detail below, Hume portrays the ancient Scythians in a much different light by emphasizing their violent manner (EPM 7.14; SBN 255). Hume thought that, on the whole, those who prized the virtue and humanity of ancient civilizations tended to leave out some of the less appealing details.

In fact, Hume thought the development of commerce in modern times helped to bring out what is best in human nature. The following passage demonstrates why the connection that Hume draws between commerce and increased humanity is so important.

When the tempers of men are softened as well as their knowledge improved, this humanity appears still more conspicuous, and is the chief characteristic which distinguishes a civilized age from times of barbarity and ignorance. Factions are then less inveterate, revolutions less tragical, authority less severe, and seditions less frequent (EMPL 274).

Increased humanity is the “chief characteristic” which Hume thought distinguished the modern period from ancient barbarism.\textsuperscript{18} Hume even thought that commerce had an effect upon how a society wages war.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} John Dennis, Vice and Luxury Public Mischiefs, in Private Vices, Public Benefits? – the Contemporary Reception of Bernard Mandeville, ed. J. Martin Stafford, (Solihull, 1997), 176-177. See also Stafford, “Hume on Luxury: A Response to John Dennis?” 648, on this point.

\textsuperscript{18} As pointed out by Boyd, many in the eighteenth century used the term “barbarism” to denote less morally developed societies (“Manners and Morals,” 65).

Even foreign wars abate of their cruelty; and after the field of battle, where honour and interest steel men against compassion as well as fear, the combatants divest themselves of the brute, and resume the man (EMPL 274).

Thus, to the extent that commercial society renders society more humane, it should be seen as a sign of genuine progress.

Hume’s discussion of gallantry, found in his essay “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” appeals to this idea as well. Hume used the term gallantry to signify the system of politeness and manners supposed to produce “genteel behavior between the sexes.” Hume believes that this, like commerce and luxury, is an improvement that is particular to modern society. In ancient times “there was not much delicacy of breeding, or that polite deference and respect, which civility obliges us either to express or counterfeit towards the persons with whom we converse” (EMPL 128), in contrast to the “superiority in politeness” of “modern times” (EMPL 131). While Hume’s discussion of gallantry certainly involves a conception of women that relies upon stereotypes of female traits, what is most important for the present purpose is the reason Hume puts forth for why the presence of gallantry should be seen as an improvement.

Hume’s main opponents on this point are the “zealous partisans of the ancients” who “have asserted it [gallantry] to be foppish and ridiculous, and a reproach, rather than a credit, to the present age” (EMPL 131). One view about gallantry was that it made people act in a phony or non-genuine manner toward one another. This caused some to prefer the more direct and straightforward customs of the ancients. As we see in a footnote to the above passage, Hume

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21 Livia Giuriglaia points out that “Hume’s habitual references to women as the ‘fair sex,’ whose traits include softness, delicacy, frailty, and many other cliches from which stereotypes are drawn” (“The Gallant and the Philosopher,” *Hume Studies* 30.1 (2004): 127-148, 129).
specifically had Shaftesbury in mind here (EMPL 131n32). In his “The Moralists” Shaftesbury states that the ancients “understood truth and nature too well, to admit so ridiculous an invention” as gallantry.\textsuperscript{22} Shaftesbury held that gallantry causes men to treat women in a way that is not justified by their natural status.

But in a country where no she-saints were worshiped by any authority from religion, it was as impertinent and senseless, as it was profane, to deify the Sex, raise them to a capacity above what nature had allowed, and treat them with a respect, which in the natural way of love they themselves were the aptest to complain of.\textsuperscript{23}

Hume also held that there was a natural difference of capacities between the sexes: “nature has given man the superiority above woman, by endowing him with greater strength both of mind and body” (EMPL 133). However, he did not think there was anything unnatural about gallantry. He argues that it is an outgrowth of the “natural affection between the sexes, which […] is not merely confined to the satisfaction of the bodily appetite, but begets a friendship and mutual sympathy, which runs through the whole tenor of their lives” (EMPL 131). As we see from the Treatise, it is this same passion of attachment between the sexes, and the subsequent attachment they have toward their offspring, that makes the formation of society possible (T 3.2.24; SBN 486).

Given Hume’s previous statement that the primary difference between modern civilization and “barbarous” ages is the prevalence of humanity and kind affections, it seems that

\textsuperscript{22} Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Earl of Shaftesbury, The moralists, a philosophical rhapsody, being a recital of certain conversations on natural and moral subjects, in Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times, ed. Lawrence Klein, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 236.

\textsuperscript{23} Shaftesbury, The moralists, 237.
the second reason Hume gives for his approval of gallantry is even more significant. He notes that not only is gallantry natural, but it is also generous (EMPL 132). Gallantry, like other systems of polite manners, has been designed to “render conversation, and the intercourse of minds more easy and agreeable” (ibid.). Schemes of politeness accomplish this by hiding “any passion disagreeable to others,” and displaying the “appearance of sentiments different from those to which they naturally incline” (ibid.). Humans are naturally inclined to have a preference for themselves and their own interest. The “polite man,” however, counteracts this tendency by showing “deference towards his companions” by “yield[ing] the superiority to them in all common incidents of society” (ibid.). The elderly, who have certain “infirmities, and naturally dread contempt from the youth” are respected by those who are younger (ibid.). Additionally, “foreigners [who] are without protection […] receive the highest civilities, and are entitled to the first place in every company,” or at least they receive such treatment in “all polite countries” (ibid.). Finally, the head of a family always places himself below any guests and is “attentive to the wants of everyone” (ibid.).

In each of these cases, those who are in some way vulnerable receive “generous attention” (EMPL 133). Hume believes that the same is the case with gallantry. Because Hume holds that men have a natural superiority over women, “it is his part to alleviate that superiority, as much as possible, by the generosity of his behaviour, and by a studied deference and complaisance for all her inclinations and opinions” (ibid.). Hume gives the following description of the ancient relationship between men and women in order to demonstrate the superiority of the modern practice.

Barbarous nations display this superiority [of men over women], by reducing their females to the most abject slavery; by confining them, by beating them, by selling
them, by killing them […] The ancient Muscovites wedded their wives with a
whip, instead of a ring (ibid.).

Hume, then, approves of gallantry insofar as it produces more hospitable and humane conduct which allows for easier social commerce among the sexes. Gallantry, like politeness more generally, induces “civility,” “respect,” and “complaisance” (ibid.). As noted by Ryu Susato, “[f]or Hume […] social intercourse between men and women is a means to ‘softening’ people’s manners through the formalities of politeness involved in social interaction between the two sexes.”

It is quite reasonable to question Hume’s optimism about commercial society and practices of gallantry as well as his view that “industrial development and the advancement of commerce were the springboards to progress and happiness.” As argued by Jeanne A. Schuler and Patrick Murray, “[w]ith hindsight it is not difficult to fault Hume’s cheery portrait of commerce. Tell those for whom ‘industriousness’ means being worked into an early grave about the happiness that it brings, or talk to the detail labourer on an assembly line about how work energises the mind.”

Turning to the issue of gallantry, some commentators have seen Hume’s work as amenable a distinctively feminine philosophical outlook. Livia Guimares has argued,

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for instance, that “[e]ven if it [gallantry] begins condescendingly (as all too often it does), that’s not at all where it will lead, and not at all where it will necessarily end.” In fact, Hume ultimately concludes that women have a special role to play in the moral education of society.

What better school for manners, than the company of virtuous women; where the mutual endeavour to please must insensibly polish the mind, where the example of female softness and modesty must communicate itself to their admirers, and where the delicacy of that sex puts every one on his guard, lest he give offence by any breach of decency (EMPL 134)?

In commenting on this passage Donald T. Siebert points out that “[d]espite his [Hume’s] thoroughly patriarchal reasoning, Hume has nonetheless made women – virtuous women […] the very cornerstone of modern civilization” and that gallantry is a “catalyst of polite behavior, and polite behavior for him is almost inevitably moral.”

Others have been more critical. Christine Battersby contends, partly based upon Hume’s comments about gallantry, that “Hume merely sees women’s political and social oppression as appropriate, and even as necessary.” In fact, many female writers during Hume’s own time criticized the view of gallantry put forth by Hume and others by questioning (i) the extent to which women should be viewed as the so-called “fair sex” and (ii) the extent to which modern

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30 Jan Stanek argues that, while others before Hume had emphasized “the importance of female company,” Hume’s stance is distinctive insofar as it recommends the company of women from the perspective of virtue (“Hume and the Question of Good Manners,” Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics 46.1 (2009): 29-48, 34).
gallantry had actually caused men to forgo violence against women. Of course, Hume need not claim that these practices are ideal to see them as at least improvements over their ancient predecessors. However, what is most important for the present purpose is not whether Hume was correct to praise these practices, but the reason he had for praising them. The common thread in each of these cases is that Hume saw some practice as an improvement in large measure because it rendered social relations more humane and harmonious. This theme comes through quite clearly in a passage from “That Politics may be reduced to a Science.”

Nothing does more honour to human nature, than to see it susceptible of so noble a passion [of public spirit]; as nothing can be a greater indication of meanness of heart in any man, than to see him destitute of it. A man who loves only himself, without regard to friendship and desert, merits the severest blame; and a man, who is only susceptible of friendship, without public spirit, or a regard to the community, is deficient in the most material part of virtue (EMPL 26-27).

The person who lacks public spirit, who has no genuine humane concern for his or her fellows in society, is most deficient in virtue.

3. Reforming Immediate Agreeability

Having seen how the role that humanity and benevolence play in Hume’s evaluation of societal progress, I now turn to considering a specific example of how Hume utilized these considerations to modify our current moral sentiments. Hume provides a number of examples of situations where the approval (or disapproval) we feel for a certain trait changes. This can be seen most clearly with the traits that are approved on the basis of their usefulness. At various

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times, people have held false beliefs about the social utility (or disutility) of almsgiving, tyrannicide, liberality in princes, and (as I just discussed above) luxury (EPM 2.18-21; SBN 180-181). To take the first example, although we initially praise “[g]iving alms to beggars” as an instance of benevolence, Hume argues that we retract our praise once we see that this practice only encourages “idleness and debauchery” (EPM 2.18; SBN 180). Our moral evaluations will change as our factual beliefs about a trait’s utility are refined through “sounder reasoning and larger experience” (D 336). 32

Yet, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, we might think that the approval we feel on the basis of immediate agreeability is where the need for revision will be greatest. A standard of revision seems most needed in those situations where we are unthinkingly drawn into approving of some trait without considering its wider effects. Unfortunately, the relatively straightforward method Hume identifies for reforming our utility-based approvals is not applicable to those traits that we find immediately agreeable. The entire point of introducing agreeability is to show that some traits garner our approval without any consideration of that trait’s utility (EPM 7.2, SBN 250-251). For this reason, Rachel Cohon argues that we will need to make a slight emendation to Hume’s theory if we want to criticize agreeability-based approvals. Recall the example of homosexuality that I mentioned briefly in chapter 1. In “A Dialogue” Hume states that the “Greek loves” where “blameable” (D 334) and much less “natural and agreeable” than French marital infidelity (D 335). 33 If Hume and his contemporaries disapproved of homosexuality because they found it disagreeable, then their disapproval would not be influenced by correcting any false beliefs they may have about its social effects. For this

reason Cohon suggests that, if we want to have a way of criticizing agreeability-based approvals, we will have to amend Hume’s theory by considering the social effects the result from the act of blame itself. We should recognize, Cohon argues, that “[h]ad homosexuality been tolerated, so much human suffering would have been avoided,” and thus stop considering homosexuality a vice. Here I argue that Hume does provide a method of reforming the moral sentiments we feel from immediate agreeability. I will show this by considering a trait that Hume believes is immediately agreeable despite being socially harmful: military heroism. I argue that Hume’s theory can support a way to revise our sentiments of approval for this trait by pointing out how such approval conflicts with our concern for benevolence.

**3.1 IS MILITARY HEROISM A VIRTUE?**

Hume’s first discussion of military heroism occurs in the *Treatise*. He notes there this trait “is much admir’d by the generality of mankind” who ascribe it “the most sublime kind of merit” (T 3.3.2.15; SBN 600-601). However, Hume also points out that “[m]en of cool reflection are not so sanguine in their praises of it” (*ibid.*). Those capable of looking past the “dazzling [sic]” character of the military hero realize that this trait has caused “infinite confusions and disorder […] the subversion of empires, the devastation of provinces, the sack of cities” (*ibid.*). A similar discussion also occurs in the second *Enquiry*. The Athenians valued both their understanding of agriculture and laws and their successes in battle. Although there is “no comparison in point of utility, between these peaceful and military honours,” and the latter are “condemned by calm reason and reflection,” the praise they gave to them is “natural in the mind of man” (EPM 7.25; SBN 259).

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34 *Ibid.*, 266.
Given that, as explained in the previous section, Hume believes society progresses as humanity and benevolence becomes more prevalent, we might expect him to outright condemn those who are mesmerized into praising the violent hero of war. However, the picture we get in these passages is more complicated than that. From the perspective of social utility the military hero appears vicious, but from the perspective of immediate agreeability the hero appears virtuous. What perspective, if any, does Hume privilege? Richard Dees takes the “if any” option holding that “Hume was content to let our mixed judgments about it [military heroism] stand.”35 Annette Baier, on the other hand, argued that Hume thinks “[c]ourage has to be transferred from the battlefield to more peaceful fields (or to merely domestic battlefields), before it gets approved as a virtue.”36 This view implies that it is the “Men of cool reflection,” and not the “generality of mankind,” who are correct in their appraisal of military heroism. However, this cannot be the case if, as I argued in chapter 2 following Phillip Reed, Hume’s standard of virtue is determined by general consensus. If the consensus standard is correct, then Hume must concede (despite whatever personal reservations he might have) that military heroism is a virtue insofar as the majority approves it.

In fact, this seems to be just the sort of instance where it would misinterpret Hume’s intentions if we did not adhere to the consensus standard. We cannot attribute to Hume the view

that the socially deleterious consequences of military heroism render it a vice without also attributing to him the view that agreeability is outweighed by usefulness. This, however, would distort the import of Hume’s moral philosophy by making him a straightforward utilitarian (or at least some sort of consequentialist). However, Hume is clear that for the majority of people, to the exclusion of those disposed to “cool reflection,” the displeasure we would feel from the social disutility of military heroism is “over-power’d by a stronger and more immediate sympathy” with that character’s agreeableness (T 3.3.2.15; SBN 600-601). This implies that even Hume would not be able to resist the hero’s charms when he does not have the social harms in the front of his mind.  

Thus, it seems we must accept that military heroism is a genuine Humean virtue, despite the social harm it produces, simply because it is agreeable to the “generality of mankind.”

3.2 Painting the Military Hero

Given the assumption that military heroism is a genuine virtue, we must now turn to the question of whether Hume had any desire to reform our sentiments about it. Hume does state that when we engage in “cool reflection” we will not be disposed to approve of the military hero. Yet, perhaps Hume was content to consider our praise of the military hero as an instance where we must submit to “the blind, but sure testimony of taste and sentiment” which so often “baffle[s]” those philosophers who attempt to rationally explain our agreeability-based approvals (EPM 8.14; SBN 267).

However, in this case I think there is good reason to trust the suspicion that Hume was uneasy about the military hero’s courage. Not only is it suggested indirectly by Hume’s commitment to the connection between progress and humanity that came through in his essays.

on commerce and gallantry, but also much more directly in an early unpublished essay entitled “An Historical Essay on Chivalry and modern Honour.” In this essay, now believed to be dated somewhere from 1731-1734, Hume discusses the place of courage in ancient societies. He notes that “in all rude Ages, & in the Infancy of every State” that the “most admir’d Virtue” is “Courage or Warlike Bravery” (ECM 7). Hume was troubled by the fact that in ancient societies courage was so predominant that it “swallowed up all the [other]” virtues and became the “distinguishing Mark of Merit” (ECM 8). This sort of courage continues to have influence in modern societies as well, albeit in a disguised form. “From an affectation of Civility,” the moderns attempt to give warlike courage “the most courteous & humane Air imaginable” and a face of “sublime Generosity” (ECM 12). This is seen in the modern practice of dueling where instead of fighting one another full of “Passion & Resentment,” the attempt is made to mix “Civility” with undaunted Courage” (ECM 16). Your combatant will “[salute] you before he cuts your Throat” (ibid.). While Hume suggests that “the plain roughness” of the ancients is preferable to the “chimerical & affected Politeness” of the moderns, he does note that the modern practice is at least an “Endeavor” at improvement over the ancients (ECM 12).

41 While it is accepted that Hume was concerned about the predominance of courage in ancient cultures, there is some disagreement in the literature about his appraisal of chivalry and honor (the modern offspring of ancient courage). E.C. Mossner argues that the thesis of the “Essay on Chivalry” is “the degeneration of true classical virtue and the rise of false Gothic chivalry” (*The Life of David Hume*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 47). William Dowling, “Burke and the Age of Chivalry,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 12 (1982): 109-124, Ryan Patrick
it is natural that courage would prevail in ancient societies beset by “absolute necessity in Wars,” but is far from thinking this situation is ideal (ECM 7).

The idea that the prevalence of courage is the mark of a less developed society can be seen in Hume’s more mature works as well. In the essay “Of the Origin of Government,” Hume again observes that courage is considered a superior virtue during in primitive cultures that exist “during a state of war […] where the pernicious effects of disorder are most sensibly felt” (EMPL 39-40). In “A Dialogue” Hume states that dueling is an “absurd and barbarous” practice which is praised only by “oddly” directing our esteem for the qualities of courage, honor, fidelity, and friendship (D 335). Below we will examine passages in the second Enquiry which also display Hume’s uneasiness with military courage. Thus, while courage may not need to be excised from the battlefield in order to qualify as virtuous (insofar as the majority of people find the military hero agreeable), it does need to be put toward less violent ends for Hume to feel comfortable with our praise of it.42

As mentioned earlier, because our approval of military heroism is based upon its agreeability, correcting false beliefs will not reform our sentiments about it. If Hume is uneasy about our admiration of military heroes, then he will have to portray it as disagreeable and not merely demonstrate its harmful effects to modify our sentiments. In other words, as discussed in chapter 1, it requires adopting the role of the painter who is supposed to make us “feel the


difference between vice and virtue” by “excit[ing] and regulat[ing] our sentiments” (EHU 1.1; SBN 5-6). This is a difficult task because, as noted previously, Hume thinks that what causes us to approve of agreeable qualities is to some extent “something mysterious and inexplicable” (EPM 8.14, SBN 267). Still, whatever difficulties this goal might present, we have seen that there is a strong commitment to practical matters in Hume’s work. Furthermore, Kate Abramson has argued that in the second Enquiry Hume consciously adopted the painter’s practical goal of inspiring the reader to be virtuous. One way, according to Abramson, that Hume does this is by providing a picture of the ideal moral character that the reader will more readily sympathize with. This more sympathetically engaging picture of virtue is supposed to lead to moral improvement by increasing the reader’s desire to develop a virtuous character (and consequently addressing the CV criticism leveled by Hutcheson).

However, there is more than one way to make a reader “feel the difference between vice and virtue.” In addition to encouraging the reader to act virtuously, I hold that (at least in the case of military heroism) Hume sought to reform the reader’s sense of what is genuinely agreeable. Hume does not wish to modify our sentiments about all types of courage. In fact, he allows without reservation that courage can in certain cases be both useful and agreeable (EPM 7.15; SBN 254). Yet, Hume paints a decidedly disagreeable of ancient warlike cultures. Confirming his earlier comments in the “Essay on Chivalry,” Hume states that the “martial temper of the Romans, inflamed by continual wars” gave courage a “distinction from all other moral

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43 Hume also discusses this at T 3.3.4.11; SBN 612. See Sharon R. Krause, “Hume and the (false) Luster of Justice,” Political Theory 32.5 (2004): 628-655, 636, on this point.


45 Ibid., 68. Specifically, Abramson compares Hume’s description of the ideal moral character at T 3.3.3.9 (SBN 606) to the description he provides at EPM 9.2 (269-270).
qualities” (EPM 7.13; SBN 254-255). In order to portray for the reader the effect this has upon the moral sentiments, Hume appeals to the testimony of the Roman historian Tacitus about the practices of the warlike Germanic tribe the Suevi.

*The Suevi, in the opinion of Tacitus, dressed their hair with a laudable intent: Not for the purpose of loving or being loved: They dorned themselves only for their enemies, and in order to appear more terrible.* A sentiment of the historian, which would sound a little oddly in other nations and other ages (*ibid.*, original emphasis).

Hume thinks the idea that dress designed, not to facilitate love and fellow feeling, but to intimidate could arise from a praiseworthy intention should “sound a little oddly” to the modern reader. In the next paragraph Hume utilizes a much more graphic description of cultures that prize courage as the highest virtue.

*The Scythians, according to Herodotus, after scalping their enemies, dressed the skin like leather, and used it as a towel; and whoever had the most of those towels was most esteemed among them* (EPM 7.14; SBN 255).

Whereas in the *Treatise* Hume kept his description of the negative aspects of military heroism at a relatively general level, noting the “subversion of empires, the devastation of provinces, [and] the sack of cities” (T 3.3.2.15; SBN 599-600), here he provides a much more vivid image of the downside to courage and conquest. Hume actually engages in the endeavour of “paint[ing] out the evils” of military heroism which he only gestured at in the *Treatise* (*ibid.*). Insofar as this depiction is more vivid, it should also be more effective in arousing the sympathetic engagement of the reader.

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46 As noted by Andrew Sabl, Hume attempts to dissuade his reader’s from immediately praising military heroism in his *History* as well (“Noble Infirmity: Love of Fame in Hume,” 551-554).
In “uncultivated nations” which lack “full experience” of the advantages imparted by the “social virtues” the courage of the military hero is “most celebrated by poets, recommended by parents and instructors, and admired by the public in general” (EPM 7.15; SBN 255). While modern society is no longer one in which “courage is the predominant excellence” (ibid.), it is still one in which admiration of military heroes is encouraged by public opinion. We can read Hume’s comments here as an attempt to counter this propensity. Hume likely thought that the modern reader would be shocked and horrified at the prospect of praising someone whose military conquests provided them with a bevy of human flesh towels. These sorts of accounts, by portraying the less romantic and appealing aspect of military heroism, may even make one in the midst of hero worship pause and reconsider their approval. In other words, Hume attempts to paint a competing picture of military heroism depicting the trait’s disagreeability.

3.3 Conflict with Benevolence

Hume’s attempt to influence our sentiments toward the military hero by portraying it in a less agreeable fashion may leave us somewhat uncomfortable. What makes Hume so confident that we would be better off tempering our praise of the military hero? Is it merely his personal taste? In the essay “Of the Original Contract,” Hume makes clear that we should be cautious when analyzing our moral approvals and disapprovals.

47 Jacqueline Taylor points out that, for Hume, this is one reason why rhetoric and eloquence were so prevalent in ancient times (“Hume on the Importance of Humanity,” Revue Internationale de philosophie 67 (2013): 81-97, 90-91).

48 Hume’s eagerness to paint a disagreeable picture of ancient military courage may be further evidenced by Timothy Costelloe’s suggestion that Hume’s account of the Scythians was actually distorted to make them sound more terrible (“Hume on History,” in Continuum Companion to Hume, ed. Bailey and O’Brien, (New York: Continuum, 2012), 366-367).
And there is no virtue or moral duty, but what may, with facility, be refined away, if we indulge a false philosophy, in sifting and scrutinizing it, by every captious rule of logic, in every light or position, in which it may be placed (EMPL 482). Anything that meets our approval can be found to have some negative or disagreeable aspect if we search hard enough. Does Hume himself fall prey to this sort of overly ambitious “false philosophy” in his attempt to reform his reader’s sentiments about military heroism?

Vindicating Hume from the charge that he has violated his own convictions requires showing that he can give some sort of principled reason for preferring a less enthusiastic approval of the military hero. Directly following his discussion of the Scythians, Hume asserts that: “[s]o much had martial bravery, in that nation, as well as in many others, destroyed the sentiments of humanity; a virtue surely much more useful and engaging” (EPM 7.14; SBN 255). The consequence of placing courage, particularly in its military guise, atop the catalogue of virtues is the erosion of humanity. Importantly, this passage does not merely say that the virtues of humanity and benevolence are more useful. Hume also makes sure to point out here that these kinder virtues are more engaging. The suggestion here is that, while there is an undeniable agreeability associated with contemplation of the military hero, contemplation of the benevolent character is even more satisfactory. It seems that Hume’s unease about our attraction


50 In the second Enquiry Hume sometimes uses the term “humanity” to either a principle of human nature that allows us to make moral judgment, or to the sentiment produced by that principle. In other places he uses it simply to refer to the virtue of humanity. It is this latter sense humanity and benevolence are equivalent and it is this latter sense which concerns me here (see Remy Debes, “Humanity, sympathy and the puzzle of Hume’s second enquiry,” British Journal for the History of Philosophy 15.1 (2007): 27-57, 32).

51 This point is fully consistent with Hume’s earlier examined remark in “The Stoic” that “[s]o engaging are the sentiments of humanity” (EMPL 151).
to military glory is that it renders us blind to how our unthinking admiration of that character conflicts with the “softness and tenderness” of benevolence. It is contemplation of the latter which Hume believes provides “us the purest and most satisfactory enjoyment” (EPM 7.19; SBN 257). His gruesome depictions of warlike valor, then, can be seen as a reminder to the reader that the “benevolent or softer affections [...] express the highest merit” (EPM 2.1; SBN 176).

Without guidance from benevolence, “undaunated courage [...] may only expose a hero or politician to the envy and ill-will of the public” (ibid.).

This can be further confirmed by examining a passage where Hume discusses the agreeability of benevolence that in important respects mirrors his discussion of the agreeability of military heroism.

As a certain proof, that the whole merit of benevolence is not derived from its usefulness, we may observe, that, in a kind way of blame, we say, a person is too good; when he exceeds his part in society, and carries his attention for others beyond the proper bounds. In like manner, we say, a man is too high-spirited, too intrepid, too indifferent about fortune: Reproaches, which really, at bottom, imply more esteem than many panegyrics (EPM 7.22; SBN 258, original emphasis).

While most of the time benevolence is a boon for the public interest, it can also be harmful when concern for others exceeds its “proper bounds.” For this reason, “we cannot forbear applying the epithet of blame” when excessive benevolence becomes “hurtful” (ibid.). Yet, even when we recognize that a benevolent act is harmful, Hume points out that the criticism we make actually implies more praise than it does blame: “its noble elevation, or its engaging tenderness so seizes the heart, as rather to increase our friendship and concern for the person” (ibid.).

52 See T 3.3.3.3 (SBN 603-604) for a similar passage.
Hume’s discussion of excessive benevolence here parallels his discussion of military
heroism in that each trait is immediately agreeable despite being socially harmful. Yet, despite
this parallel, Hume description of how we approve of each trait differs in an important respect.
Recall the disjointed nature of our approval for the military hero. Those of “cool reflection”
disapprove of that character because of its social disutility, while the “generality of mankind”
approves of it because it is immediately agreeable. Neither of these appraisals, however, has an
effect on the other. It is only when “we fix our view on the person himself,” and ignore the
“mischief” he causes, that we are struck by admiration (T 3.3.2.15; SBN 600-601). Conversely, it
is only when the “evils” of military heroism are “present to us” that we can “hate” this character
(ibid.). Yet, this sort of mutual exclusivity is not present in Hume’s discussion of excessive
benevolence. Hume thinks that when we blame someone by calling them “too good” that, more
fundamentally, this is a species of praise. Even those of “cool reflection” are not immune to
admiring excessive benevolence. Furthermore, nowhere does Hume try to paint a less attractive
picture of benevolence that would counter our propensity to admire its “noble elevation.”

If we take Hume’s comments at EPM 7.22 (SBN 258) seriously, then Hume’s earlier
comments on almsgiving do not tell the entire story about excessive, or misguided, benevolence.
According to Hume, the almsgiver “exceeds his part in society” and thus performs an action that
is socially harmful. Yet, it is too quick to say “we regard that species of charity rather as a
weakness than a virtue” (EPM 2.18; SBN 180). Certainly, those who realize that almsgiving is
pernicious will want to redirect this misguided philanthropist’s benevolence toward more useful
ends. Yet, the fact that this benevolent act is socially harmful, does not detract from our praise of
the agreeable character trait which Hume believes the object of our moral evaluations (T 3.2.1.2;
SBN 477-478).
The fact that Hume is willing to allow our approval of excessive benevolence’s immediate agreeability to stand, but hopes to reform our admiration of military heroism, supports the view that Hume’s unease with military courage stems its conflict with our praise of benevolence. Consider Hume’s discussion of how our appraisal of the agreeability of courage can conflict with our appraisal of the utility that trait has for its possessor. Hume explains that we initially disapprove “pride or self-esteem” underlying heroic virtue when it becomes “extravagant” and threatens the well-being of the courageous individual (T 3.3.2.14; SBN 600). Yet, once we consider the “agreeable” and “sublime sensation” of this character, “the sympathy with that satisfaction diminishes considerably the blame” (ibid.). Like Hume’s discussion of excessive benevolence, here our utility-based and agreeability-based approvals interact with one another. The immediate agreeability we feel “diminishes” our blame for the hero’s self-ruinous action. The same holds when benevolence is disadvantageous to its possessor. One who grieves too much for a lost friend is still admired. This is because benevolence is “peculiar” in that it is praised in “all its shapes and appearances” (T 3.3.3.6; SBN 605). It is only when our praise of military heroism conflicts with our disapproval of social harm, or our benevolent disposition, that Hume thinks agreeability and utility are mutually exclusive. It is only in this case that those engaging in “cool reflection” are untouched by the grandeur of the character being evaluated.

One might object to this interpretation by pointing out that there are other instances where we approve of something that conflicts with benevolence that do not make Hume uneasy. For instance, he states that “[w]e are not, however, to imagine, that all the angry passions are vicious” (T 3.3.3.7; SBN 605). The blame we bestow on those who fail to be angry toward those who wrong them seems to conflict with benevolence (one who was only concerned for the interests of others would not advertise their moral wrongs), but Hume does not seem to express
any reservations about this. It is important to note, however, that Hume believes we blame those who lack proper anger despite the fact that anger is “disagreeable” (ibid.). This means that our blame must arise from the disutility of failing to be angry. Hume does not discuss it in great detail, but he suggests that this failure is harmful to the possessor insofar as it demonstrates “weakness and imbecility” (ibid.). The present account is meant only to explain why Hume seeks to reform sentiments of approval for agreeable traits that conflict with benevolence.

By reforming our sentiments in this way, Hume can further ensure that when the examination of our moral sense will reveal “gentleness, humanity, beneficence, [and] affability” (EPM 9.15; SBN 279-280). If Hume is successful, then we will be less captivated by traits that would garner disapproval from our benevolent sentiments. Still, Hume may not be so “sanguine” in his praise of military heroism, but that does not imply that it never warrants praise. In the right circumstances courage can be a useful character trait. Hume’s concern lies more with our propensity to praise courage in war solely in virtue of its agreeability and independent of its consequences. Hume’s account of our agreeability-based approval of the military hero seems to depict one who has lost control of themselves and “cannot refuse” admiring that person’s courage (T 3.3.2.15; SBN 600-601). This resembles his description of enthusiasm in which one “delivers himself over, blindly, and without reserve” (EMPL 74). The consequence is that “reason, and even morality are rejected as fallacious guides” (ibid.). Our admiration of heroes may not lead to the rejection of morality as a whole, but it does to a certain extent make us sacrifice the more valuable pleasures of benevolence and calls into question the idea that our

53 See Abramson, “Two Portraits of the Humean Moral Agent,” 314-318 for an argument along these lines.
54 Ultimately, we see that even this sort of righteous anger must be constrained by our benevolent passions: “[w]here these angry passions rise up to cruelty, they form the most detested of all vices” (T 3.3.3.8; SBN 605-606). See Annette Baier, “Moralism and Cruelty: Reflections on Hume and Kant,” Ethics 103.3 (1993): 436-457, 438-439, on this point.
moral sentiments are based upon social concern. While the ancients needed “better Example” to realize this (ECM 12), Hume hopes that the modern reader can simply be reminded of it.\(^{55}\)

4. \textbf{Conclusion}

The interpretation I have provided here attributes to Hume a principled basis for revising our current moral sentiments while remaining faithful to his moral sentimentalism. While Hume himself may have (for instance) disapproved of homosexuality, the sentimentalist theory he adheres to does not necessarily commit him to this view. In fact, we can paint out the agreeable “friendship, sympathy, mutual attachment, and fidelity” of these relationships (D 334). Furthermore, picking up on Cohon’s suggestion that we consider the effects of appraisal itself, we can also paint out the disagreeable social division which results from considering homosexuality a vice. In any case, Hume is not forced to hold that our agreeability-based appraisals are immune to criticism and revision.

\(^{55}\) Although the fact that benevolence is a more agreeable trait than benevolence is one reason Hume would have for wanting to reform our sentiments, there may be others as well. Some have noted that Hume seems to contradict himself by praising “philosophical tranquility” (EPM 7.16; SBN 256) and decrying the “monkish virtues” (EPM 9.3; SBN 270) and that this may have stemmed Hume’s own prejudice against religion (see Elizabeth Dimm, “Hume and the Monkish Virtues,” \textit{Philosophical Investigation} 10.3 (1987): 212-225 and William Davie, “Hume on Monkish Virtues,” \textit{Hume Studies} 25.1/2 (1999): 139-153). We might explain this apparent inconsistency, however, by taking seriously Hume’s claim in the \textit{Treatise} that “the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous” (T I.4.7.13, SBN 271-272). If Hume believes that the religious disposition which makes one praise the monkish virtues is dangerous, then considerations of social utility might motivate him to encourage our disagreeable sentiments toward them.
CHAPTER 5
RESENTMENT AND THE EXTENSION OF JUSTICE

1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I argued that the Hume’s humanity-based standard of provides a method of revising our approval (and disapproval) of traits that are based upon immediate agreeability (at least where that approval would conflict with our benevolent and social sentiments). I stated there that these sorts of approvals were one of two types that we would expect to be in most need of reform. The other was our approval of what Hume terms the artificial virtues which are primarily represented by justice. In the case of immediate agreeability, it is because our approval of such traits often forces us to turn a blind eye toward other considerations (such as the wider societal harm caused by that trait). In the case of the artificial virtues it is because they are based upon mutual self-interest. As I discuss in more detail below, Hume thought that justice was composed of a set of conventions (largely concerned with the stabilization of property) that are put into place for the purpose of preserving society. In time, Hume believes that societal influence (in particular the influence of parents) equips us for abiding by these conventions by “rubbing off those rough corners and untoward affections” (T 3.2.2.4; SBN 486). Furthermore, we eventually are capable of approving of those who act justly (i.e. who follow the conventions) even when doing so has no effect upon our interest (T 3.2.2.24; SBN 498-499).

However, what first motivates us to establish conventions of justice, what Hume terms our “natural obligation” to justice (T 3.2.2.23; SBN 498), is mutual self-interest. One potentially problematic aspect of basing justice upon mutual self-interest in this way has to do with how far the rights of justice are extended. If only those who can pose a threat to the stability of society need to be included within the conventions of justice, then it seems that we will have no reason
to include those who are weakest and most vulnerable. This exact point arises in a well-known passage from Hume’s second *Enquiry*, which I refer to as the powerless creatures (PC) passage.

Were there a species of creatures intermingled with men, which, though rational, were possessed of such inferior strength, both of body and mind, that they were incapable of all resistance, and could never, upon the highest provocation, make us feel the effects of their resentment; the necessary consequence, I think, is that we should be bound by the laws of humanity to give gentle usage to these creatures, but should not, properly speaking, lie under any restraint of justice with regard to them, nor could they possess any right or property, exclusive of such arbitrary lords. Our intercourse with them could not be called society, which supposes a degree of equality; but absolute command on the one side, and servile obedience on the other. Whatever we covet, they must instantly resign: Our permission is the only tenure, by which they hold their possessions: Our compassion and kindness the only check by which they curb our lawless will: And as no inconvenience ever results from the exercise of power, so firmly established in nature, the restraints of justice and property, being totally *useless*, would never have place in so unequal a confederacy (EPM 3.18; SBN 190-191, original emphasis).

Here we see one consequence of making justice rely upon mutual self-interest. Despite the fact that the species Hume imagines here is rational, their utter powerlessness means they do not
warrant inclusion in the scope of justice. In fact, Thomas Reid criticized this passage stating that “Mr Hobbes could have said no more.”

Many contemporary commentators have found the PC passage to be highly problematic as well. Among these is Michael Ridge who suggests that “this passage does not represent David Hume’s finest moment.” Ridge distinguishes between two separate problems that the PC passage brings to light: the problem of exclusion and the problem of paternalism. The problem of exclusion is the worry that Hume’s theory excludes from the scope of justice certain individuals who ought to be included. As examples, Ridge points to “young children, highly vulnerable tribes, the handicapped, the elderly, and distant future generations.” As I discuss in more detail below, Hume does think that those who lack what we might call coercive power (i.e. the power to directly pose a threat to society) can still be included in the scope of justice by expressing resentment. However, the PC passage makes quite clear that some (such as Hume’s imagined species) will be left out of the scope of justice.

Still, it would be too quick to conclude from this fact alone that there is something wrong with Hume’s view of justice. Unless we think that being included in the scope of justice is inherently valuable (which given the view that justice is an artificial virtue it seems that Hume would not), then exclusion is only problematic if the sort of treatment this implies for those who are excluded is inappropriate. Given this, there might be a reason to think that the PC passage is not problematic at all. Those who are left outside the scope of justice are not left without any moral consideration. Recall that those who are excluded from the scope of justice are still owed

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“compassion and kindness” in accordance with the “laws of humanity.” In fact, this is the very reason that Hume criticizes the practice of slavery in Europe and the Americas.⁵ He argues that the “little humanity” shown by slave holders toward their slaves is “sufficient alone to disgust us with that unbounded dominion” (EMPL 383-384). Thus, it may seem that Hume’s inclusion of the “duties of humanity” makes the PC passage much less objectionable than it would first appear.

For Ridge, however, this does completely resolve the issue because humanity provides the imagined species with the wrong type of moral protection.⁶ It is at this point that he poses the problem of paternalism. Since paternalistic influences are intended to make one better off, we cannot say that paternalism is unkind or inhumane. However, if rational beings ought to be allowed to make their own choices, then it would be wrong to override the autonomy of this imagined rational species of creatures. The problem here is not just that the imagined species of creatures is denied their autonomy, but that they are denied it for the wrong reason. It is not because they lack the mental capacity to decide for themselves, but simply because they do not have the power to resist, that they are subject to paternalism.⁷ The problem of exclusion, then, deals with who is excluded while the problem of paternalism deals with how those who are excluded are treated.

In this chapter I examine whether the standard of revision I have identified could allow Hume to rectify the problematic aspects of his theory that are brought to light by the PC passage. In doing so, I will first consider the problem of paternalism. I argue that, given what some being

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⁷ Ibid., 158-159.
would have to be like in order (on Hume’s own terms) to be excluded from the scope of justice, that the PC passage should not be seen as morally problematic. The reason the imagined species is excluded is that they are incapable of feeling what I term “the pain of dependence,” or unease arising from complete dependence upon those who are more powerful. Those capable of the pain of dependence will resent exclusion from the scope of justice (and the accompanying susceptibility to paternalism). However, I contend that Hume did not think that the imagined species was capable of feeling the pain of dependence. This means that the imagined species would not consider themselves wronged when subject to paternalistic treatment and, consequently, there is good reason to think the sort of paternalism that Hume’s theory allows is not morally objectionable.

With this understanding in place I then turn to the problem of exclusion and consider a potential problem for Hume’s view that expressions of resentment can act as a catalyst for including in the scope of justice those capable of feeling the pain of dependence, but lacking in coercive power. This problem arises for Hume if we take him to understand resentment as displeasure expressed toward some moral wrong doing. This is because, for Hume, the conventions of justice only have a connection to morality after the conventions of justice have been put into place. Once the conventions are established on the basis of mutual self-interest our sympathy with the public interest served by the whole system causes us to praise those who act justly (and blame those who are unjust). Yet, there is no moral complaint that can be made against the how the conventions of justice themselves have been structured (assuming that they are indeed mutually advantageous). Consequently, it is not clear that the displeasure those who lack coercive power would feel could be seen as genuine resentment and, therefore, gain them inclusion into the scope of justice.
While Hume himself does not recognize this problem, I argue that the standard of revision I have identified here allows Hume a response. If we instead understand resentment in a non-moralized sense, as essentially a synonym for anger, then upon reflection we should see that the manner in which the conventions of justice are structured is the cause of unsociable passions which make social union unpleasant. The problem here is not just that relations between the powerful and powerless become less agreeable, but that the source of this social discord can be found in origin of justice (one of the qualities which occupies and important place in our catalogue of virtues). This poses a difficulty for our conception that the human species is characterized by moral sentiments that are based in benevolence, kindness, and concern for others. The resentment of the powerless forces us to confront the unsociable aspects of justice and shows us that not everything associated with justice is “laudable and good” (T 3.3.6.3; SBN 619). As such, our desire to preserve our identity as the “party of humankind” should provide us a reason to revise the structures of justice so that they are more extensive and inclusive and not the impetus of antagonistic passions and societal relations.

2. UNPACKING THE POWERLESS CREATURES PASSAGE

In this section I begin by providing further analysis of the PC passage. The imagined species possesses the following three characteristics: (i) rationality, (ii) insufficient mental and/or physical power to resist human beings, and (iii) the inability to make humans feel the effects of their resentment. In this situation Hume holds it would be “useless” for the powerful humans to act justly toward the imagined species although they still deserve our “compassion and kindness.” In the paragraph directly following the PC passage, which I term the animals, Natives, and women (ANW) passage, Hume further explains this idea by providing three examples.

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This is plainly the situation of men, with regard to animals; and how far these may be said to possess reason, I leave it to others to determine. The great superiority of civilized Europeans above barbarous Indians, tempted us to imagine ourselves on the same footing with regard to them, and made us throw off all restraints of justice, and even of humanity, in our treatment of them. In many nations, the female sex are reduced to like slavery, and are rendered incapable of all property, in opposition to their lordly masters. But though the males, when united, have in all countries bodily force sufficient to maintain this severe tyranny, yet such are the insinuation, address, and charms of their fair companions, that women are commonly able to break the confederacy, and share with the other sex in all the rights and privileges of society (EPM 3.19; SBN 191).

Hume notes that the relationship between humans and non-human animals\textsuperscript{9} mirrors the relationship that humans would have with the imagined species. We are obligated to treat animals with kindness but not with justice.\textsuperscript{10}

The matter is more complicated regarding the relationship between Europeans and Native Americans and the relationship between men and women. Presumably because of technological superiority, Hume states that the Europeans were “tempted” to think that the relationship between them and the Native-Americans was the same as the relationship between humans and animals. The implication here is that the Europeans mistakenly thought that the Native Americans did not warrant inclusion in the scope of justice.\textsuperscript{11} Something similar occurs in

\textsuperscript{9} From this point forward I will use the term “animals” in place of “non-human animals.”


Hume’s discussion of the relationship between men and women. As Hume perceives it, the superior bodily force of men has often caused women to be placed in a subordinate condition.

But again women, unlike animals, are capable of “break[ing] the confederacy” and sharing with men “in all the rights and privileges of society.” Certainly, Hume’s assertion that women share in all the rights of society was more than a little naive, and as Annette Baier points out the appeal to women’s “insinuation, address and charms” will not “endear Hume to contemporary feminists.”

Still, these examples show Hume believes Native Americans and women, despite his perception that they lack the coercive power to resist, warrant inclusion in the scope of justice.

For the purpose of this discussion, in which I will focus upon the problem of paternalism, I will accept Hume’s supposition that the imagined species and animals do not warrant inclusion in the scope of justice and that Native Americans and women do warrant inclusion. Since Hume asserts that the cases of the imagined species and the animals are analogous, the crucial question is the following: what reason does Hume have for excluding animals from the scope of justice which also explains why the imagined species is excluded? By answering this question we can then determine whether it is morally objectionable to act paternalistically toward those beings that Hume thinks do not warrant the rights of justice.

3. WHY ARE ANIMALS EXCLUDED?

We might think that Hume excludes animals from the scope of justice because he sees justice as dealing largely with property. In the Treatise he explains that our need for justice originates from the fact that our acquired goods are scarce and vulnerable to being taken by others (T 3.2.2.7; SBN 487-488). Consequently, the conventions of justice are responsible for establishing both the

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rules ascribing who is entitled to what goods (T 3.2.3; SBN 501-513) and how those goods can be transferred (T 3.2.4; SBN 514-516). Hume makes clear elsewhere that animals are “incapable” of having a sense of “right and property” (T 2.1.12.5; SBN 326-327), and we might naturally think this is because they are incapable of understanding the rules associated with property.

As I discuss further below, Arthur Kuflik takes this line of reasoning.\(^{13}\) However, whether or not animals are capable of following rules of property is beside the point. As Ridge argues, in response to Kuflik, Hume is clear in the PC passage that the imagined species of creatures is rational.\(^{14}\) If that is the case, then it seems they would be capable of following basic rules of property. Thus, whether or not the inability to understand rules of property is a good reason for excluding animals from the scope of justice, it is not the reason that Hume has in mind for why the imagined species is excluded. Hume’s analogy between the imagined species and animals only holds if there is something else which makes animals incapable of “right and property.”

Hume’s view that justice is an artificial virtue further confirms the idea that possession of reason itself is not sufficient to warrant inclusion in the scope of justice. Unlike the natural virtues (which are exemplified by humanity and benevolence), there is no original motive in human nature which can impel us to act in accordance with an artificial virtue such as justice without the presence of some convention. A parent can be motivated by “natural affection” to care for a child (T 3.2.1.5; SBN 478). However, there is no natural motive, or a motive present in

\(^{13}\) Kuflik, “Hume on Justice to Animals, Indians and Women,” 59-62.

the “rude and more natural condition” of human beings, that could move us to respect another’s property or restore a loan (T 3.2.1.9; SBN 479-480). Such a motive can only come about after conventions of justice have been put in place for the purpose of preserving the benefits of living together in society. These benefits include: (i) an increase in our “force, ability, and security” (T 3.2.2.3; SBN 485, original emphasis) and (ii) the social benefits we derive from acquiring “a new affection to company and conversation” (T 3.2.2.9; SBN 489).

The purpose of justice, then, is to resolve the conflicts that threaten to undermine the benefits we receive from our social arrangements. This is made clear by Hume’s discussion of the so-called “circumstances of justice.”

He argues that in situations where no conflict exists, either because resources are not scarce (EPM 3.2-3; SBN 183-184) or because human beings always acted benevolently and unselfishly (EPM 3.6; SBN 184-185), the conventions of justice would have no purpose. Additionally, in situations where conflict exists but cannot be resolved by establishing rules, either because resources are so scarce that all are forced to act from self-interest alone (EPM 3.8; SBN 186-187) or because humans were so malevolent that they simply refuse to regulate their conduct (EPM 3.9; SBN 187), justice would be equally useless. The PC passage also occurs in Hume’s circumstances of justice discussion. Because the imagined species cannot create any “inconvenience” for society, there is no conflict to resolve.

Consequently, the sorts of property-regulating conventions that would exist between humans and the imagined species would be very different from the sorts of conventions humans share amongst themselves.

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15 The term the “circumstances of justice” was first coined by John Rawls who claims to follow Hume in holding that the rules of justice only hold within certain conditions (A Theory of Justice, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 126n).

16 See Hope, “The Circumstances of Justice,” 137, on this point.
There would be no need for conventions which prohibit humans from taking the imagined species property for benevolent reasons if doing so would not create any conflict.

Thus, it is not the possession of reason that determines who ought to be included in the scope of justice (and consequently exempted from paternalistic treatment). Rather, it is only those capable, to use Baier’s term, of “making trouble” for society when they are excluded who warrant inclusion in the scope of justice.\textsuperscript{17} What is it that gives one the ability to “make trouble?” We can glean from the PC passage that it is the qualities which the imagined species lacks: (i) the ability to resist through coercive power and/or (ii) the ability to make one’s resentments felt. Beings with sufficient coercive power can take others’ external goods and consequently pose a threat to the integrity of society. Beings with the ability to make their resentment felt may be empowered to “break confederacies” and overcome their disadvantageous position of power.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, because Hume thinks that Native Americans and women can be included within the scope of justice despite a supposed lack of coercive power, he must think it is through resentment that they are able to make enough trouble to pose an “inconvenience to society.”

Since animals do not have recourse to resistance through coercive power, they also will only be able to break the human confederacy by expressing resentment.\textsuperscript{19} We might think that Hume is too quick to conclude that animals are incapable of making their resentments felt. As stated by Jenkins and Shaver, “our dog makes his resentment felt by his sad, guilt-producing

\textsuperscript{17} Baier, \textit{The Cautious Jealous Virtue}, 151.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 151.

\textsuperscript{19} Although some have called into question whether Hume should be so quick to suppose that animals lack coercive power given that many animals can pose a physical threat to humans (Kuflik, “Hume on Justice to Animals, Indians and Women,” 56, 62-63, Jenkins and Shaver, “Mr. Hobbes Could Have Said No More,” 138, and Peter S. Fosl, “Animality and Common Life in Hume,” \textit{1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era 4} (1999): 93-120, 114-15). While this is true in certain individual cases, when considered from the point of view of a “confederacy” of human beings it seems clear that humans have ample technological superiority to subdue animals.
expression as we leave him at the kennel." If animals are capable of arousing human sympathy through expressions of resentment in this way, then why does Hume hold that animals (unlike Native Americans and women) are incapable of making their resentments felt? It may seem that Hume is on especially shaky ground here given that, unlike some of his predecessors, he takes human nature to be continuous with the nature of other animals. In both the Treatise and the first Enquiry Hume stresses that animals have the ability to reason. Animals are capable of “learn[ing] many things from experience, and infer[ring], that the same events will always follow from the same causes” (EHU 9.2; SBN 105). Hume does state in the Treatise that humans have superior reasoning ability, but emphasizes that the difference is one of degree and not of kind (T 3.3.4.5; SBN 610). Hume also makes clear that animals possess both the capacity for pleasure and pain (T 1.3.16.2, EHU 9.3; SBN 176, 105), the capacity for sympathy (T 2.2.5.15, T 2.2.12.6; SBN 363, 398), and the capacity to feel love and hatred (T 2.2.12.1; SBN 397). If this is true, and a lack of coercive power is not sufficient to exclude some being from the scope of justice, then Hume should provide further explanation of why animals cannot make their resentments felt.

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Here I will consider three possible explanations.

(1) Animals cannot make their resentments felt because they are not capable of feeling resentment.

(2) The resentment animals express cannot be seen as resentment specifically about injustice because animals fail to understand the basis of justice.

(3) The resentment animals express cannot be seen as resentment specifically about injustice because animals do not feel the particular kind of pain that accompanies being excluded from the scope of justice (what I term the “pain of dependence”).

### 3.1 Explanation (1): Animals Cannot Feel Resentment

There is some reason to think Hume is committed to the view that animals are incapable of feeling resentment. A number of people commenting on this passage have pointed out that expressions of resentment are not simply expressions of anger.\(^{23}\) Resentment implies the expression of anger toward some moral wrongdoing. Presumably, this would mean that resentment requires the ability to understand morality. Because, in Hume’s view, animals have “little or no sense of virtue or vice” (T 2.1.12.5; SBN 326-7) it seems he is also committed to the view that animals are incapable of resentment.\(^{24}\) Initially, it may seem strange that Hume thinks animals cannot have a sense of morality. Recall that moral sentiments are a special species of pleasurable or painful feeling (T 3.1.2.3; SBN 471) that is communicated through sympathy when we survey the qualities or character traits of another person (T 3.3.1.10; SBN 577-78). Yet, as pointed out above, Hume believes that animals have both the ability to feel pleasure and pain, and the capacity for sympathy. Furthermore, animals are even capable of feeling the passions of

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\(^{24}\) See also T 3.1.1; SBN 467-468.
pride and humility (T 2.1.12; SBN 324-328) which are associated with human virtue and vice (T 2.1.7; SBN 294-298).

One way we might explain why Hume thinks animals cannot feel specifically moral sentiments is that animals are incapable of adopting the general point of view that I discussed in chapter 3.\textsuperscript{25} This inability stems from their limited imagination. In “Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature” Hume asserts that human thought is “not limited by any narrow bounds, either of place or time” and a human can carry “his researches into the most distant regions of this globe” (EMPL 82). Animals, on the other hand, are “limited in [their] observations and reasonings to a few sensible objects which surround it; without curiosity, without foresight” (\textit{ibid.}). Animals cannot consider new possibilities, counter-factuals, or how certain objects would cause different pains and pleasures in different situations or when surveyed from different perspectives. Since Hume believes that moral sentiments only arise from a general point of view, it seems this lack of imaginative capacity would prohibit animals from having a recognizable sense of morality.

However, if animals are incapable of adopting this vantage point then they would be incapable of feeling distinctively moral sentiments despite the fact that they possess (limited) reason, the capacity for pleasure/pain, and the capacity for sympathy.\textsuperscript{26} It takes a more robust imaginative capacity (of the sort that humans possess) to consider whether the cause of one’s current displeasure would also be disapproved of from a non-biased vantage point. The most animals are capable of is expressing displeasure at the pain they feel (whether their own pain or the pain of others they are sympathizing with) from their own \textit{particular} perspective. Yet, Hume is clear that feelings of resentment cause us to desire the punishment of the person who wronged


us “independent[ly] of all considerations of pleasure or advantage to [ourselves]” (T 2.3.3.9; SBN 417-418).

I think there are three main disadvantages of this explanation. First, adopting this view makes Hume’s claims here depend upon whether he can consistently maintain that animals lack an understanding of morality. This is a controversial question within Hume scholarship which I will not settle here. Second, even if the inability to express resentment provides one reason why animals should be excluded, this reason cannot also explain why the imagined species is excluded. As Ridge argues, the “most natural” way to read the PC passage is that the creatures Hume imagines there are capable of feeling resentment, but (for whatever reason) cannot make their resentment felt. It would be “highly misleading at best” if by the inability to make one’s resentments felt, Hume actually meant the inability to have resentment at all.

Third, it might be possible (in some sense) for humans to feel the resentment of animals, even if animals are themselves incapable of feeling it. Upon observation, we might conclude that the excluded animals would be justified in expressing resentment. The circumstances are in place such that, if animals had the correct emotional equipment, they would feel resentment. In the Treatise Hume points out that we are capable of sympathizing with non-existent passions. When someone who “obtains any honourable office, or inherits a great fortune” shows indifference about that benefit we are actually “the more rejoic’d for his prosperity” (T 2.2.7.5; SBN 370-371). Similarly, when someone suffers a “great misfortune” with patience, and without becoming


dejected, we still conceive a “lively idea of his sorrow” (*ibid.*). This would provide animals with an indirect method of expressing their resentment. Given that the issue for Hume is the ability to make one’s resentments “felt,” the perspective of those who are observing, and consequently sympathizing with, the resentment may be more important than that of the resentful being.29

Finally, below (see sections 7 and 8) I will consider the possibility that Hume may be using the term resentment in a non-moralized sense to a sort of instinctive anger. It seems that animals would be capable of feeling resentment in this sense (recall the earlier example of the sadness expressed by a dog left at the kennel).

### 3.2 Explanation (2): Animals Cannot Understand the Basis of Justice

Instead of denying that animals are capable of feeling resentment, we might instead argue that Hume excludes them from the scope of justice because the resentment animals express cannot be seen as directed specifically at injustice. Kuflik takes this approach by arguing that in order to feel resentment toward injustice one must be able to “*understand* – and appreciate – the usefulness of rules of justice.”30 Animals, because their reason is limited, lack the ability to understand how justice arises from utility. This leads Kuflik to interpret Hume as arguing that “nothing they [animals] do in reaction to human encroachments could be a reflection on their being angry *at or about* human failure to observe rules of justice.”31 I previously (in section two)

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29 Thanks to David Agler for helping me clarify this point. It is also worth noting here that an explanation of this sort would give Hume a way to justify how future generations could be included in the scope of justice despite their inability to express resentment. Imagine, for instance, that we are engaging in actions which will ruin the environment for those in the distant future. Even if no presently alive person feels resentful about this action, we should be able to imagine the resentment that those in the future would *feel* from having to live in a depleted environment. This provides some explanation for how Hume could include what Ridge believes is the “most difficult” group in the scope of justice (“David Hume, Paternalist,” 158).

30 Kuflik, “Hume on Justice to Animals, Indians and Women,” 63, original emphasis.

31 *Ibid.*, 64, original emphasis.
identified two main problems with this explanation: (i) this explanation cannot also explain why
the imagined species is excluded and (ii) it is not clear that (given justice is an artificial virtue
charged with the task of resolving conflict) possession of reason itself should matter.
Furthermore, if (as argued above) actually feeling resentment is not a requirement for resentment
to be felt by others, then it seems the same could hold for the ability to express resentment
specifically about injustice. Others may be able to realize that one has suffered an infraction
specifically arising from the rules of justice, even if the victim of that infraction cannot.

Additionally, if Hume were to hold the view that Kuflik attributes to him here, then this
would render his theory vulnerable to a criticism leveled against him by Adam Smith. Smith
argued that utility cannot be the basis of justice because “[a]ll men even the most stupid and
unthinking,” approve of the execution of justice, “[b]ut few men have reflected upon” the
relationship between justice and utility. 32 Seeing how injustice diminishes the welfare of society
requires reflection, but even those who have never reflected about the harmful tendencies of
injustice still disapprove of it. Thus, according to this argument, considerations of utility cannot
be the primary reason for our disapproval of injustice.33

I think that Hume is capable of responding to this criticism. While Hume does think the
original basis of justice is the utility and mutual advantage it has for society, he allows that in a
“civilz’d state” when we have been “train’d up according to a certain discipline and education”
that we can have a “regard for justice” itself (T 3.2.1.9; SBN 479-80). This “regard for justice” is

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1982), II.i3.9. Hereafter cited in text as TMS followed by the Part, Section, Chapter, and Paragraph Number.
33 In this way Smith, somewhat ironically, criticizes Hume (the paradigmatic anti-rationalist philosopher) for making
his explanation of why injustice is a vice too dependent upon reason. See Spencer J. Pack and Eric Schliesser,
“Smith's Humean Criticism of Hume's Account of the Origin of Justice,” Journal of the History of Philosophy 44:1
a new psychological propensity formed through a “progress of sentiments” which is “forwarded by the artifice of politicians” (T 3.2.2.25; SBN 500). Hume’s theory of justice is distinctive in that he sees justice as a dynamic system which not only redirects but transforms native human psychological tendencies. Our ability to disapprove of injustice without any consideration regarding the basis of justice in utility is simply one of those transformations. But if Hume holds the view that Kuflik attributes to him here, then he becomes vulnerable to Smith’s criticism. If Hume believes one can only express resentment toward injustice if one understands the basis of justice, and Smith is right that most have not engaged in the reflection necessary to arrive at this understanding, then Hume will be committed to the view that most people do not warrant inclusion in the scope of justice.

3.3 EXPLANATION (3): ANIMALS CANNOT FEEL THE PAIN OF DEPENDENCE

Despite the problematic aspects of Kuflik’s explanation, there is an important insight in the idea that animals are incapable of expressing resentment specifically toward injustice. I think, however, that Hume is capable of offering a more promising answer for why that is than the one Kuflik attributes to him. The reason why the resentment of animals cannot be seen as directed

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toward injustice is not primarily because of their inability to understand justice properly. Rather, it is because animals are incapable of feeling the particular sort of pain that comes from being excluded from the scope of justice.

Hume does not state this explicitly in the PC passage, but I believe it can be inferred from his discussion in the *Treatise* Book 2 section entitled “Of Property and Riches.” Here Hume gives an account of the psychological effects that occur when someone is in a state of complete dependence. He begins by referring back to a previous discussion regarding the distinction commonly made between having some power and exercising it (T 1.3.14.34; SBN 171). He argued there, and now reemphasizes, that this distinction is “entirely frivolous” (T 2.1.10.4; SBN 311-312). We are only justified in saying that one had the power to do some action if he or she actually performed it. Otherwise, the cause which would have produced that action must have been lacking and the power to perform the action was never actually present. Although Hume thinks that the distinction between having a power and exercising that power rests on a philosophical error, he admits that this distinction often affects our passions. According to Hume, “[w]e are pleas’d when we acquire an ability of procuring pleasure” and “displeas’d when another procures a power of giving pain” (*ibid.*).

To illustrate this point Hume imagines himself in a situation where he is unarmed and encounters his enemy “with a sword by his side” (T 2.1.10.5; SBN 312). If some external constraint such as the force of law is in place, then Hume says he would have no reason to feel uneasy. However, if there were no external constraints such that the enemy “may punish or reward me as he pleases,” then Hume concludes “I then attribute a full power to him, and consider myself as his subject or vassal” (*ibid.*). Without the force of law to balance out the disparity in power, the unarmed person is left in a state of complete dependence. Hume thinks
that being in such a state has a very particular psychological effect. Whenever it is “uncertain whether he will injure me or not, I must be uneasy in such a situation, and cannot consider the possibility or probability of that injury without a sensible concern” (T 2.1.10.7; SBN 313-314, original emphasis). One who is placed in a situation of dependence, according to Hume, will feel “uneasy” about how they are going to be treated and experience a “sensible concern” about the potential for harm or injury. I term this the “pain of dependence.” Especially important here is Hume’s description of how this pain comes about. While Hume’s initial example describes the armed, powerful person as our “enemy,” we see here that antagonism is not necessary for the pain of dependence to occur. Even if the person who we suppose has the power to harm us never actually makes us “feel any harm” (T 2.1.10.7, SBN 313-314), we still feel the uncertainty described here. This is because we know that “[n]othing is more fluctuating and inconstant […] than the will of man” and there is nothing “but strong motives which can give us an absolute certainty in pronouncing concerning any of his future actions” (T 2.1.10.6; SBN 312-313).

This means that the pain of dependence may require some general knowledge about how humans tend to act, but is not based upon specific knowledge of how that person has treated us in the past. This is confirmed in the next paragraph where Hume examines how the same principle operates in the opposite circumstance where there is no strong motive preventing us from taking advantage of a benefit: “when any good approaches in such a manner that it is in one’s own power to take or leave it,” then the “imagination easily anticipates the satisfaction, and conveys the same joy, as if they were persuaded of its real and actual existence” (T 2.1.10.8; SBN 314). It is the imagination which causes us to receive pleasure from seeing that no obstacle stands in the way of us enjoying some benefit. Conversely, it is also the imagination which causes us to be displeased and uncertain when we recognize that no strong motive stands in the way of another.
person harming us. This explains why we feel the pain of dependence even when the person we
are dependent upon has never harmed us in the past. The imagination forces us to consider not
just what someone is likely to do based on past experience, but what that person could do based
upon the impediments that stand in their way. In this way, an “illusion of the fancy” (T 2.1.10.9;
SBN 314-315, original emphasis) makes the philosophically untenable distinction between
power and the exercise of power have a very real effect in human psychology.

We see from the following passage that Hume does not believe this distinction has the
same effect on animal psychology.

As animals are but little susceptible either of the pleasures or pains of the
imagination, they can judge of objects only by the sensible good or evil, which
they produce, and from that must regulate their affections towards them.
Accordingly we find, that by benefits or injuries we produce their love or hatred;
and that by feeding and cherishing any animal, we quickly acquire his affections;
as by beating and abusing him we never fail to draw on us his enmity and ill-will
(T 2.2.12.3; SBN 397, original emphasis).

Here Hume uses the notion of pleasures and pains of the imagination to refer to the feelings that
result from considering, not just the present and past effects that an object has had upon us, but
the effects that object could have upon us.\(^{35}\) Animals lack this capacity and, therefore, can only
feel pleasures and pains that arise from what has happened in their experience. A dog will feel
uneasy around an abusive owner, but would not have any uneasiness merely in virtue of the fact
that its human owner is more powerful. This is because animals do not possess the imaginative
capacity to consider, given the presence or lack of constraints that impede another person’s

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\(^{35}\) Hume uses the term “pleasure of the imagination” one other time in his writings in a quote from Joseph Addison
(T 2.1.4.5, SBN 284). However, his use of the term there does not seem to have any bearing on the present issue.
actions, how that person could possibly treat them. Yet, this is exactly what is required to feel the pain of dependence. Thus, their relative satisfaction or unease in the presence of someone else would have to be based solely upon their past experience.

If being excluded from the scope of justice (and consequently being placed in a position of subordination to the more powerful humans) does not cause animals to feel the pain of dependence, then it does not seem they would have any reason to resent their exclusion. Again, they may feel anger toward any mistreatment, but will not have any pain or uneasiness about exclusion itself. Importantly, there is nothing in Hume’s description of the imagined species that prevents us from thinking they are also incapable of feeling the pain of dependence. In fact, Hume’s nonchalant attitude in the ANW passage toward the question of whether animals possess reason (a question he says he will leave “others to determine”) provides some positive evidence for this reading. The reason for his dismissive attitude here is not, as we have seen, that he has no view about animal reason. If my arguments here are correct, his attitude is better explained by the fact that possession of reason is not a sufficient condition for resenting exclusion from the scope of justice. This fits very nicely with the general anti-rationalist tenor of Hume’s philosophy. Just as not “every rational being” is necessarily capable of comprehending morality (T 3.1.1.4; SBN 456-457), neither does “every rational being” warrant inclusion in the scope of justice. Thus, whatever resentment a member of the imagined species may express about their treatment is not a call for further justice, but for further humanity, kindness, and benevolence. Because this species does not feel any particular uneasiness arising from the presence of highly disparate power relations (as humans do), the duties of humanity are sufficient, and the duties of justice superfluous, for their needs.
4. JUSTICE AND THE PAIN OF DEPENDENCE

The ability to resent the pain of dependence may not be necessary to be included within the scope of justice (we can imagine another hypothetical species which is equal to humans in coercive power but lacks imaginative capacity), but it is sufficient. Underlying this interpretation is the claim that, for those who do possess the requisite imaginative capacity, the duties of humanity are not sufficient to quell the pain of dependence. In the PC passage Hume certainly makes it sound as though those who are left outside the scope of justice are in the sort of dependent position that would cause the pain of dependence. Without “equality” there is only “absolute command on the one side, and servile obedience on the other.” Yet, in the example Hume provided with the unarmed person, it is the “fear of the civil magistrate” which prevents an unarmed person from feeling the pain of dependence. This means that it is not just the rule of law, but the force of law which subdues the pain of dependence.

The question, then, of whether justice is necessary to placate the pain of dependence turns on what sorts of moral duties Hume believes should be enforced. Based on the fact that Hume thought the purpose of government was to provide a more immediate motive, through punishment, for following the rules of justice, it is clear he thinks the duties of justice should be enforced (T 3.2.7; SBN 534-539). Yet, this does not necessarily imply that the duties of humanity should not be enforced. Robert Shaver has argued that Hume, unlike Adam Smith, takes our duties of humanity to be just as strict as our duties of justice.36 Smith held that, while humanity is necessary for society to flourish, only justice is required for society to subsist, and consequently only justice merits enforcement.37 Hume, however, holds that the very subsistence

37 Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, II.i.3.3.
of society requires humanity just as much as it requires justice (EPM 5.5; SBN 215). It is only through the ties of humanity that we can protect and assist those who are very young, and only through such parental affection that we are conditioned for following the cooperative scheme of justice. Shaver concludes that, because Hume believes it is only through parental instruction that we develop a sense of “honour and duty” (T 3.2.6.11; SBN 533-534), he also thinks “justice presupposes humanity in that humanity is causally necessary for producing people capable of justice.”

If humanity is just as necessary for society as justice, then it may seem that Hume should hold that the duties of humanity and justice warrant enforcement. In Shaver’s view “Hume leaves open the possibility of enforced humanity.” Yet, if the duties of humanity warrant enforcement just as much as the duties of justice, then inclusion within the scope of humanity should relieve the pain of dependence just as effectively as being included within the scope of justice. This would imply that resentment arising from the pain of dependence need not be seen as resentment about exclusion from justice. There are two responses here. First, it is notable that nowhere in Hume’s Treatise, apropos his discussion of the origin of government, does he mention the need for enforcing the duties of humanity. He explicitly states that “the principal object of government is to constrain men to observe the laws of nature,” (T 3.2.8.5; SBN 543-544) by which he means the three main laws of justice (T 3.2.8.3; SBN 541-42). This is put even more forcefully in “Of the Origin of Government,” where he asserts that the “vast apparatus of our government” has “no other object or purpose but the distribution of justice” (EMPL 37, emphasis added).

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39 Ibid., 553.
40 Ibid., 554.
Still, perhaps Hume is not fully appreciating the implications of his own theory. If benevolent concern for children on the part of parents is necessary to produce people who are capable of following the rules of justice, then the government’s purpose of ensuring that the rules of justice are followed may require enforcement of benevolence. Yet, and this brings us to the second response, the sort of humanity that Hume takes to be necessary for society to survive does not seem to be the sort of humanity discussed in the PC passage. The humane disposition that Shaver identifies as necessary for justice is the parental concern for equipping the next generation with the temperament necessary for cooperating in society. The humane disposition necessary for justice is the selfless concern for the future well-being of society.

In the PC passage, however, the future stability and continuation of society is not at issue. The issue is how to treat those who, because they cannot make their resentments felt, have no claim to be included within the conventions of justice at all. But whether or not we follow Hume’s exhortation to treat such beings with kindness, parental concern can still provide children with the tools needed to regulate their conduct according to rules of justice and preserve the integrity of society. Hume’s theory may provide a good reason to enforce humanity understood as parental concern, but not a reason to enforce humanity understood as kindness to those who are unequal even if there is a non-optional moral duty to be humane in this way for other reasons.  

5. RECONSIDERING THE PROBLEM OF PATERNALISM

We can now reconsider the problem of paternalism in light of this interpretation. Ridge illustrates the morally objectionable paternalism that Hume’s theory supposedly allows for by having us imagine we have encountered an alien species which possesses all the characteristics

of Hume’s imagined species. This species is rational, but because they have failed to apply their intellects to technological advancement, are completely unable to resist our superior force.

Ridge then asks us to imagine we know a very serious ecological disaster will soon make life miserable for all residents of that planet. We explain to the alien species why they must leave their home planet, and offer to provide them the necessary transportation, but they refuse because of their emotional attachment. Because we have excellent reason to believe that it is in their long term interest to relocate, and they are unable to resist us, we forcibly relocate them for their own benefit.

In order to keep the focus squarely on the issue of paternalism itself, let us also assume that we are correct in our judgment of what is best for this alien species and, perhaps, that later on they would be capable of recognizing this. If this is the case, then what could be wrong about this forced relocation? Ridge notes that we cannot claim this act is wrong because it is inhumane. This is because the relocation will benefit them in the long run and is done for that purpose. Instead, “[t]he most powerful objection to what we have done to this alien species is […] it was unjust. We treated these beings just like children, incapable of deciding what was best for themselves.”

I concede that Hume thinks it is justifiable to treat those who fall outside the scope of justice paternalistically. In the Treatise Hume explicitly states that benevolence, if unconstrained by justice, would require us to prevent a “prolificate debauchee” from possessing property if he or she would “rather receive harm than benefit from large possessions” (T 3.2.1.13; SBN 482). I

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42 See Ridge, “David Hume, Paternalist,” 163, for his explanation of this example which I paraphrase in the remainder of this paragraph.
43 Ibid., 163-164.
44 Ibid., 164.
argue, however, that given what a being would have to be like to be incapable of resenting exclusion from the scope of justice, there is reason to think that such paternalism would not be morally objectionable. According to my interpretation, Hume only thinks that we should treat as dependents (and act paternalistically toward) those who do not have any inherent interest in independence. In this respect, Hume’s account resembles in certain ways the argument given by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*. There Mill argued that freedom from paternalistic influence is valuable because such freedom is necessary for the development of individuality and further that “the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being” (OL 261). It is only through freedom, Mill thinks, that one can become a “well-developed human [being]” (OL 267).

However, his anti-paternalism was limited in an important way. We only need to refrain from paternalistic interference toward “human beings in the maturity of their faculties” (OL 224). He cites both children and “backward states of society” as examples (*ibid*.). While this latter example seems to rely upon an unfortunate intolerance, the general underlying principle is that we only need to refrain from paternalism toward those who can be “improved by free and equal discussion” (*ibid*.). In other words, Mill does not think it is wrong to act paternalistically toward those who will not benefit from having autonomy. While, as I discuss in more detail below, Hume does not draw as close a connection between autonomy and well-being as Mill, Hume does employ a similar idea. Those who can feel the pain of dependence will have some

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interest in avoiding the psychological uneasiness that would arise from being excluded from the scope of justice. Not only will they feel unsettled when considering their own situation but, quite likely, from the “cruel comparison” (EMPL 383) that would be made with others who do enjoy independence. However, this would not be the case for those who cannot feel the pain of dependence. Consequently, those who are excluded from the scope of justice would not have any reason to object to paternalistic treatment. 

If we reconsider Ridge’s example with this in mind, the force of the problem of paternalism begins to disappear. If Hume’s theory dictates that the powerless alien species from Ridge’s example falls outside the scope of justice, then this species must lack the imaginative capacity to feel the pain of dependence. This means that, for them, independence itself would not contribute to their well-being. We can think about this in terms of the so-called “endorsement constraint” that Ronald Dworkin places upon paternalistic interference. While the details of Dworkin’s argument are more complicated, the general idea is that one’s well-being cannot be changed for the better unless that person endorses the change that is made. It is instructive for the present purpose to consider what would cause this alien species to either endorse, or refuse to endorse, forced relocation. Certainly, they would refuse to endorse relocation if we were moving them to a planet which would make their lives worse. In doing so we would have acted

47 As pointed out to me by an anonymous reviewer from The Southern Journal of Philosophy there may be other types of psychological pain besides the pain of dependence that are relevant here as well. While Hume himself never explicitly identifies this, a broadly Humean psychology could include a feeling of uneasiness that occurs, not merely when there is someone who holds a great deal of power over us, but when that powerful person uses their position to override our considered judgments about what is best for us (i.e. the pain of being treated like a child). Because the ability to feel resentment arising from the pain of dependence is a sufficient, but not necessary, condition for inclusion in the scope of justice, nothing in my interpretation would prevent this sort of psychological pain from playing a role. If the aliens from Ridge’s example were incapable of feeling the pain of dependence, but capable of resenting being treated like children, then it may be the case that they warrant inclusion in the scope of justice.

malevolently, and they could justifiably resent our actions. Yet it does not seem that beings of this particular constitution would find any reason to withhold their endorsement if the relocation benefited them. The fact that it was not their decision to depart their home planet would not hold any special significance. They may feel initial uneasiness from being uncertain about whether leaving home will increase their welfare (an uneasiness that would quickly dissipate upon learning of the condition of their now former planet), but could not feel uneasiness from the position of dependence itself. Thus, even upon the supposition that paternalism can only be justified through endorsement, the type of paternalism that Hume’s theory allows, or perhaps requires, would be morally justifiable.

This means that only those who would not see exclusion itself as detrimental to their well-being are left outside the scope of justice. One might object, however, that this interpretation draws too close (and direct) a connection between justice and individual well-being. As Hume notes in a passage from the second Enquiry, one aspect of his claim that justice is an artificial virtue is that it is not always beneficial.

They [the virtues of justice and fidelity] are highly useful, or indeed absolutely necessary to the well-being of mankind: But the benefit, resulting from them, is not the consequence of every individual single act; but arises from the whole scheme or system, concurred in by the whole, or the greater part of the society (EPM App 3.3; SBN 304).

Hume believes that justice is vital for the well-being of individuals, but not in the sense that our welfare is served by each act of justice. Rather, it is the cooperative scheme as a whole which serves our interest indirectly by preserving “peace and order” in society (ibid.). The benefit of

49 I thank an anonymous reviewer from The Southern Journal of Philosophy for bringing this objection to my attention.
the system of justice is indirect because there are a number of instances where an individual act of justice produces “pernicious circumstances” (ibid.). One example of this has already been mentioned. Justice demands that we allow the “prolifigate debauchee” to keep his possessions even if he will only harm himself with them (T 3.2.1.13; SBN 482). This is not the case with natural virtues such as humanity or benevolence. When a parent’s “natural sympathy” causes him to “[fly] to the relief of his child” the benefit of this action is “compleat and entire” (EPM App 3.2; SBN 303-304). We praise this sort of action without any reflection, or “enlarged views,” on the public benefit of parental affection (ibid.). Hume makes this point quite clearly in the Treatise: “the good, which results from the former [the natural virtues], arises from every single act […] Whereas a single act of justice, consider’d in itself, may often be contrary to the public good” (T 3.3.1.12, SBN 579-580).

However, if being included in the scope of justice contributes to one’s well-being by preventing the pain of dependence, then it could be objected that (contra Hume’s stated position) justice would produce some good in every instance. This objection is important, but I believe there is a plausible response. Another situation where Hume thinks justice does not serve the well-being of the person being treated justly deals with our conduct towards misers. The miser is someone who has “heaped up immense stores of superfluous riches” without ever actually using them (EPM App 3.6, SBN 305-306). In his discussion of why private benevolence cannot serve as our original motive to justice, Hume points out that justice requires us to refrain from taking the miser’s possessions even though the miser “can make no use of [them]” (T 3.2.1.13; SBN 482) and thus would not be harmed by being deprived of them. Perhaps the miser would even be benefited by being forced to find another more fulfilling source of happiness besides the mere “gratification of his avarice” (EPM 9.20; SBN 281). Yet, it might seem strange that Hume holds
the miser would not be harmed by having his possessions taken. This is because earlier in the *Treatise*, in the same section where Hume discusses the pain of dependence, he notes that a “miser receives delight from his money” (T 2.1.10.9; SBN 314-315). The miser is pleased to hoard wealth simply because it provides the “power [...] of procuring all the pleasures and conveniences of life” even though “he has enjoy’d his riches for forty years without ever employing them” (ibid.). The same “illusion of the fancy” that makes those who lack coercive power feel the pain of dependence also makes a miser feel the pleasure of owning items that have never been (and likely never will be) used (ibid.).

Yet, Hume does not conclude from this that acting justly toward misers (by allowing them to retain their possessions) best serves their well-being. Hume is clear that private benevolence, “or a regard to the interests of the party concern’d,” gives us a reason to take the miser’s possessions (T 3.2.1.13; SBN 482). The fact that the miser receives some psychological benefit from hoarding possessions does not mean that justice improves the miser’s from an overall point of view. The same, then, should hold for those who warrant inclusion in the scope of justice because they resent their position of dependence. It is true that being included in the scope of justice benefits their well-being to a certain extent, and that they will feel resentful if they are denied this benefit. Yet, this does not mean that inclusion in the scope of justice necessarily provides an overall increase to their welfare in every case. In situations, like Hume’s “profligate debauchee,” where these individuals were greatly harming themselves by holding property, then respecting their property rights would be an instance where an individual act of justice results in harm. Thus, my interpretation does not imply that each act of justice produces a favorable outcome.
More importantly, what this interpretation does imply is that those who Hume thinks should be excluded from the scope of justice are not harmed by exclusion itself. While I do not argue that this view is wholly uncontroversial, it does appeal to important moral intuitions about the relationship between how we treat of others and how that other would conceive of our treatment. In deciding whether or not it is acceptable to treat a being paternalistically we must consider whether doing so would cause the being in question to feel resentment. Answering this question requires determining whether or not this being would consider paternalism itself as detrimental to his or her welfare. This at least is a clear advance for Hume over the view that the imagined species is treated paternalistically simply because they lack the coercive power to resist humans. Furthermore, this interpretation preserves Kuflik’s insight that the “more general wisdom” of Hume’s theory is that how we should treat other kinds of beings “depend[s] on the nature and capacities of the being in question.” For a species of creatures which would not see being placed in a position of dependence as detrimental, it would seem sufficient that we treat them humanely (and possibly paternalistically).

6. Resentment and Exclusion

If the reading I have offered is correct, then Hume has a plausible reason for excluding the groups he intends to exclude from the scope of justice. Still, this interpretation might make us wonder why Hume bothers mentioning resentment at all in the PC passage. If what really matters is the ability to feel the pain of dependence, then why frame the discussion in terms of the ability to make resentment felt? Why not simply say that exclusion from the scope of justice (itself)

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50 For instance, one who adopted the Kantian view that it is wrong to treat rational beings paternalistically would still be left unsatisfied.

51 Kuflik, “Hume on Justice to Animals, Indians and Women,” 64.
does not cause these creatures any pain? However, there is an important difference between resentment and pain. Pain can provide a reason for resentment, but pain itself does not necessarily produce the same sort of response in those who observe it. A prisoner serving a justified prison sentence may very well feel the pain of dependence. However, this fact alone would not necessarily motivate us to lessen this prisoner’s sentence. As Adam Smith puts it, we might feel “compassion for his [an inhuman murderer’s] misery” but would not have “fellow-feeling with his resentment” (TMS II.i.3.3). And, in Hume’s words, when a criminal makes himself “obnoxious to the public” the “ordinary rules of justice are, with regard to him, suspended for a moment” and we are justified in punishing him (EPM 3.10; SBN 187). The presence of wrongdoing, in this case, seems to prevent the displeasure of the criminal from being seen as resentment.

In order to warrant inclusion in the scope of justice, the pain the imagined species feels from being placed in a dependent position must be capable of being seen as a source of resentment. Thus, Hume has a good reason for framing his discussion of this issue in terms of resentment as opposed to the pain of dependence itself. The point he is making in this passage has to do with how we ought to diagnose the resentment of the imagined species (and non-human animals). Given that they cannot feel the pain of dependence, the imagined species’ resentment cannot be felt as a complaint about exclusion from the scope of justice. If the powerful are well informed about the nature of this species, they should recognize that their resentment can only be addressed by benevolent treatment.

Yet, the idea that genuine resentment requires the presence of some moral wrong may cause us to question whether resentment can play the role that Hume gives it within his theory.

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52 I thank a reviewer from The Southern Journal of Philosophy for bringing this point to my attention.
Specifically, we might question whether resentment is actually capable of acting as a catalyst for the inclusion of those who lack coercive power. It is important to distinguish between two questions here. First, we might ask the more empirical question of whether resentment is actually capable of motivating those who are more powerful of advocating for the inclusion of the powerless. Hume seems to think so, and Adam Smith certainly characterized resentment in this way. He describes resentment as “the safeguard of justice and the security of innocence” (TMS II.i.1.4). When properly tempered (TMS I.ii.3.1), and utilized in the proper circumstances (TMS II.i.1.4), expressions of resentment serve as protections against harm and injustice and can make others “ready to assist” those who have been wronged (TMS II.i.2.5). This makes it “dangerous to insult or injure” other individuals (TMS I.ii.3.3).

However, a number of commentators have been more skeptical about the level of efficacy that resentment can have. Consider again the examples Hume provides of the relationship between men and women and the relationship between the Europeans and Native Americans. Regarding the Native Americans, Brian Barry accuses of Hume of “drawing back from the full implications of his doctrine,” and Martha Nussbaum points out that “Hume must be well aware that women’s sexual attractiveness does not always supply men with a reason not to use force against them; indeed, it often gives men an additional incentive to use force.” Hume believes that resentment is what allows those who lack coercive power to be included within the scope of justice, but his account will likely not be fully satisfactory to those who doubt that resentment can accomplish this task.

There is, however, another problem with Hume’s appeal to resentment that is more internal to the theory itself. Apart from the empirical issue of how effective resentment actually is, there is also the issue of whether (given Hume’s understanding of justice) the displeasure expressed by the powerless would even qualify as resentment. We have already seen that Hume, like Smith, holds that some expression of pain only qualifies as resentment if it is expressed toward some wrongdoing. This means that there must be something wrong with exclusion itself in order for the displeasure they feel to be recognized as legitimate resentment. If their displeasure is not capable of being seen in this way, then the situation of the powerless begins to resemble the situation of the justly convicted criminal: the complaint expressed is not supported by any actual moral wrong. Consequently, if we would not be motivated to relieve the pain of dependence felt by the prisoner, then neither should we be motivated to relieve the pain of dependence felt by the powerless.

Smith is capable of providing an explanation of why the powerless’ displeasure would qualify as resentment based upon his view of how our sense of justice arises. He holds that “[w]hen a single man is injured or destroyed, we demand the punishment of the wrong that has been done to him, not so much from a concern for the general interest of society, as from a concern for that very individual who has been injured” (TMS II.ii.3.10). For Smith, our sense of when one has been treated unjustly comes from the concern we have for the harm that befalls our fellow human beings. This concern is not as “exquisite” as the “love, esteem, and affection” which we reserve for our “friends and acquaintance” (ibid.). Still, there is some degree of concern “we have with every man merely because he is our fellow-creature” which allows us to recognize the harm done to them as injustice (ibid.).
For this reason, while the ill effects of injustice for society provide one source of our disapproval (TMS II.ii.3.7), its main source is the harm injustice does to individuals. Smith emphasizes that “our regard for the individuals” does not “arise from our regard for the multitude” (TMS II.ii.3.10). Instead, “our regard for the multitude is compounded and made up of the particular regards which we feel for the different individuals of which it is composed” (ibid.). Our concern for the individual is primary and our concern for society, while important, is secondary as a source of our sense of injustice. Assuming that excluding one from the scope of justice merely because he or she is powerless does harm to that individual (if Hume is right it will make them feel the pain of dependence), Smith could explain why doing so is improper. When, through sympathy, we “[bring] the case home to our own breast” (TMS II.ii.3.9), we will find that those perpetrating the exclusion have failed to concern themselves with the welfare of their “fellow creatures.”

Whatever the advantages of disadvantages of this explanation, it is not an explanation that Hume could provide. There are two main reasons for this. First, Hume only thinks that injustice is connected to individual harm in a derivative sense. As noted by D.D. Raphael, Hume does say “a little” about the connection between justice and private harm to individuals.55 These comments are largely confined to the following passage from the second Enquiry.

By the laws of society, this coat, this horse is mine, and ought to remain perpetually in my possession: I reckon on the secure enjoyment of it: by depriving me of it, you disappoint my expectations, and doubly displease me, and offend every bystander. It is a public wrong, so far as the rules of equity are violated: it is

a private harm, so far as an individual is injured. (EPM App. 3.11; SBN 310-11, original emphasis).

The private harm done by injustice that Hume identifies is not what we might initially suspect. It seems most natural to think that someone who has their property stolen is harmed primarily insofar as they are no longer capable of using that item. For Hume, however, the private harm stemming from injustice is not primarily dispossession, but the fact that one’s expectations were upset. In this case, a person who had “reckon[ed] upon secure enjoyment” of a coat or horse, was “disappoint[ed]” in that expectation by theft.

We may agree with Hume that upset expectations are part of the harm that occurs from theft. Yet, intuitively this sort of consideration seems secondary to the harm of dispossession. As pointed out by A.D. Woozley, however, Hume has good reason for conceptualizing private harm in this manner.

Hume mentions only that harm [the harm of having one’s expectation disappointed], because the other harm, the owner no longer having the use or possession of the horse, would be merely contingent and nothing to do with justice; if the horse-owner had a sufficiently large number of horses not to be inconvenienced by the loss of one of them, he would not suffer that harm.56

In many cases dispossession itself will cause harm to the person who has been stolen from. Nevertheless, this is not always the case because there is no essential connection between injustice and this sort of harm. Previously we saw Hume appeal to examples where one can have their property taken while scarcely feeling any ill effects and where respecting another’s property rights can actually harm that person. Thus, the only sort of private harm that injustice necessarily

perpetuates is the disappointment of the expectation one has of perpetually possessing his or her property.

This means that injustice can only cause private harm if the conventions of justice have already been put into place (otherwise we would have no expectation about owning property). This can be seen in the second half of the block passage cited above.

And though the second consideration [of private harm] could have no place, were not the former [public wrong] previously established: for otherwise the distinction of mine and thine would be unknown in society: yet there is no question but the regard to general good is much enforced by the respect to the particular (EPM App. 3.11; SBN 310-11, original emphasis).

Hume’s point here is not that it is impossible to wrong others before the conventions of justice have been put into place. Instead, Hume is claiming that if the private harm of injustice only occurs insofar as there is the expectation that others will follow the relevant rules, then the very presence of such harm requires that those rules have already been established. Consequently, those who are not already included within the scope of justice will not have any expectation that could be upset, and therefore no reason to be resentful about injustice.

Second, and perhaps more fundamentally, it does not seem that Hume’s theory allows for the possibility of evaluating (morally) the manner in which the conventions of justice are established. This can be seen from Hume’s discussion of the two questions regarding justice he poses in the Treatise. The first question concerns how the conventions of justice are formed (T 3.2.2.1; SBN 484). As we have seen Hume believes we put these conventions into place because they serve the common interest we have in maintaining society. The second question Hume poses is the following: what causes us to consider justice a virtue and injustice a vice? His
answer is that “sympathy with public interest is the source of the moral approbation, which attends to that virtue [justice]” (T 3.2.2.24; SBN 498-500, original emphasis). For the moment, the specific way in which Hume answers this question is less important than the scope of the question. In formulating the second question, Hume explains he will consider why “we attribute to the observance or neglect of these rules a moral beauty or deformity” (T 3.2.2.1; SBN 284, original emphasis). It is crucial that Hume mentions “observance” of the rules here. When Hume raises the question “why is justice a virtue” he does not mean “why does the manner in which we have formed the rules of justice receive moral approbation?” Instead, he means “why does following the rules that have already been established receive moral approbation?”

Hume never explicitly considers whether we would approve of how the rules of justice have been structured from a moral point of view, only whether they serve our mutual interest in maintaining society. This implies that the issue of how the rules of justice should be formed, including who should be included, is a prudential question but not a moral one. Consequently, it seems there could be nothing morally wrong with the decision to exclude the powerless, and thus their discontent could not be seen as genuine resentment. Brian Barry describes this issue in the following way.

Even if we concede that institutions such as those regulating property may well have grown up originally in the form that Hume describes, and also that the original motive for conformity with them was self-interest, what we have to recognize is that these institutions can be assessed in terms of the second theory of justice [Hume’s explanation of why we consider justice a virtue]. Thus, institutions that reflect relations of power may be criticized as failing to measure up to the criteria of justice in the sense that detaches it from mutual advantage.
That Hume did not acknowledge and investigate the implications of this possibility shows that at this point in the development of his theory he proved to be a better conservative than he was a philosopher.  

Barry points out here that while Hume may be able to explain why see adherence to the conventions of justice as morally praiseworthy, he provides no way of evaluating the formation of the conventions themselves. For this reason, Barry argues that Hume’s theory unduly supports the status quo.

In response we might pick up a suggestion made by Rachel Cohon for how Hume’s theory could justify extending the conventions of justice. She argues that Hume’s theory implies it should be possible to create new artificial virtues in response to emerging problems created through the human weaknesses of selfishness and partiality. As an example, she points to the virtue of environmental responsibility. The sorts of problems posed by environmental degradation threaten the security of society, but are not covered by the standard conventions of justice. This is because the activities which threaten to cause environmental harm generally do not violate our conventions of property and promising. The same “avidity” and “confined generosity” which tempts us to take another’s property also “inclinès us to exploit resources as fully as we can to profit ourselves and our families and friends; but of course this results in over-fishing, destruction of eco-systems, depletion of fossil fuels, and the like.” For this reason, we must invent a new virtue of environmental concern that impels us to not engage in these sorts of mutually destructive behavior.

Cohon’s suggestion shows how Hume’s theory is elastic enough to support new artificial virtues as changing conditions demand them. However, this aspect of Hume’s theory cannot

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resolve the present problem dealing with the exclusion of the powerless. New artificial virtues are only invented when some new conflict arises. However, in the present case the fundamental problem is that there is no conflict. Because Hume cannot explain why we should see the displeasure of the powerless as resentment instead of mere complaint, there is no reason to think that their displeasure will motivate any of the powerful to advocate for them (thereby “making trouble” for society). The task facing Hume, then, is not one of responding to a new conflict caused by the resentment of the powerless, but explaining how their resentment could be effective in the first place.

7. Hume’s Ambivalence about Justice

In order to understand fully the significance of the above criticism we need to distinguish between two different meanings of the term “resentment.” To this point I have largely understood resentment in a moralized sense. Resentment is a passion of displeasure that is expressed toward some moral wrongdoing. However, we might also understand resentment in a more general non moralized way as a cognate for anger. In fact, it seems that Adam Smith utilizes these two different senses of resentment. At one point, Smith speaks of resentment as an “unsocial passion” arising from our “undisciplined nature” (TMS I.ii.3.1). Smith notes that in these more instinctive and unreflective reactions to the provocations of others there is “something disagreeable in the passions themselves, which makes the appearance of them in other men the natural object of our aversion” (TMS I.ii.3.4). This passion, because of its unsociable nature, is immediately disagreeable to those who observe it. For this reason, Smith

59 Although there is some controversy as to whether Smith had two different understandings of resentment or if his moralized discussion of resentment simply draws out aspects that are not present in his non moralized discussion. See Stephen Darwall, “Smith’s ambivalence about honour,” The Adam Smith Review 5 (2010): 106-123, and Alice MacLachlan, “Resentment and moral judgment in Smith and Butler,” The Adam Smith Review 5 (2010): 161-177, for discussion of this issue.
notes that “[b]efore resentment, therefore, can become graceful and agreeable, it must be more humbled, and brought down below that pitch to which it would naturally rise, than almost any other passion” (TMS I.ii.3.1). Immediate resentment must be tempered before it can garner the sympathy of others. Later in The Theory of Moral Sentiments, however, Smith points out that when we find the motives of the person who is being resented to be improper, “we then heartily and entirely sympathize with the resentment of the sufferer.”\(^{60}\) This moralized sort of resentment makes us “call aloud for, a proportionable punishment.”\(^{61}\)

The criticism from the previous section shows that it would be problematic if Hume was using resentment in a moralized sense. It is impossible, on Hume’s account, to act unjustly toward those who are not already included in the scope of justice. Nevertheless, I argue here that the standard of moral revision I have attributed to Hume here would be capable of making non-moralized resentment an effective catalyst for including the powerless. While, as noted previously, in one passage Hume does explicitly describe resentment in a moralized fashion (T 2.3.3.9, SBN 417-418), this does not mean that Hume could not be invoking a more general non-moralized sense of resentment in the PC passage. Understanding how this strategy could work first requires seeing that in important places Hume expresses an ambivalent attitude about the virtue of justice. Consider again the response that Hume provides to Hutcheson’s CV criticism in the conclusion of Treatise Book 3. As discussed in chapter 2, Hume argued that his moral theory should increase our commitment to virtue because it reveals that our moral sentiments are based upon sympathy (and later in the second Enquiry that our moral sentiments are based upon humanity). In the set of four paragraphs where Hume responds to the CV criticism Hume also provides a separate discussion of the virtue of justice. He emphasizes that while the conventions

\(^{60}\) Ibid., II.i.4.4.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., II.i.4.4.
that constitute justice are artificial, our approval of those who abide by the conventions is natural.

This observation may be extended to justice, and the other virtues of that kind. Tho’ justice be artificial, the sense of its morality is natural. ’Tis the combination of men, in a system of conduct, which renders any act of justice beneficial to society. But when once it has that tendency, we *naturally* approve of it; and if we did not so, ’tis impossible any combination or convention cou’d ever produce that sentiment (T 3.3.6.4; SBN 619-620).

As discussed previously, once the conventions of justice are put into place we sympathize with the public benefits of just actions. Thus, our approval of actions that abide by its dictates is just as natural as our approval of any other virtue.

If our approval of justice is not significantly different from the approval of the rest of Hume’s catalogue of virtues, then Hume’s account of how justice serves the cause of virtue should be the same as his account of how other virtues serve the cause of virtue: by engendering reflexive approval. However, I think there is an underlying tension here that comes to light in the third paragraph of the four paragraph addition to the *Treatise’s* conclusion.

Most of the inventions of men are subject to change. They depend upon humour and caprice. They have a vogue for a time, and then sink into oblivion. It may, perhaps, be apprehended, that if justice were allow’d to be a human invention, it must be plac’d on the same footing. But the cases are widely different. The interest, on which justice is founded, is the greatest imaginable, and extends to all times and places. It cannot possibly be serv’d by any other invention. It is obvious, and discovers itself on the very first formation of society. All these
causes render the rules of justice stedfast and immutable; at least, as immutable as human nature. And if they were founded on original instincts, cou’d they have any greater stability (T 3.3.6.5; SBN 620)?

What should strike us here is that the reason he offers for why his account of justice serves the cause of virtue is different from the reason he outlined just two paragraphs prior for why the moral sense, in general, serves the cause of virtue. In this passage Hume does not appeal to the fact that our approval of justice is based in sympathy (which at least in the Treatise is what Hume points to as representing what is best about human nature). Instead, he appeals to the idea that justice (although a human invention) is strongly entrenched because it is based upon the “greatest imaginable” interest (i.e. the preservation of society). This should be even more surprising given that Hume previously admitted that Hutcheson’s original instinct theory “defend[s] the cause of virtue with sufficient authority” (T 3.3.6.3; SBN 619). If moral approval arises from original instincts that are implanted in us by God, then we need not worry that virtue will go out of fashion. Yet, Hume only brings this up to show that this sort of authority is not sufficient to ensure that our moral sense will enjoy full reflexive approval. Thus, it is not clear why the fact that justice is in no danger of “sink[ing] into oblivion” should allow our approval of justice to achieve reflexive approval.

If our moral approval of justice arises from sympathy, then why does Hume feel that he needs to provide an additional explanation, based upon what is necessary for the survival of society, for why his theory of justice will not undermine the cause of virtue? I hold it is because Hume has a somewhat ambivalent attitude about whether reflection upon our praise of justice can generate full reflexive approval. While Hume thinks that justice is necessary for “the support of society” and even “the well-being of every individual” (T 3.2.2.22; SBN 497-498), there are a
number of places where he expresses a significantly less positive attitude. As already pointed out, Hume makes clear that there are a number of instances where an individual act of justice can be harmful. In addition to the “prolifigate debauchee” and the “miser,” Hume also uses the example of paying a loan to a “seditious bigot” even when doing so will cause the public to suffer (T 3.2.2.22; SBN 497-498). These sorts of examples lead to Korsgaard’s criticism, which I considered in chapter 1, that Hume cannot adequately explain why reflection upon the nature of just actions would cause us to approve of them.62

I think, however, that Hume’s ambivalence about justice in the conclusion to the Treatise arises from a deeper issue than merely the fact that just acts can have bad consequences. We can see this by returning to Hume’s discussion of the “circumstances of justice” in both the Treatise and second Enquiry. Earlier we saw that Hume thinks justice is a virtue that only arises under certain conditions (limited benevolence, moderate scarcity, and rough equivalence of power). Outside of these conditions justice is an “idle ceremonial” that is completely “useless” (EPM 3.3; SBN 183-184). For the present purpose, it is instructive to note how Hume evaluates some of the situations which fall outside of these conditions. In the Treatise he notes that if selfishness were wholly eliminated from human nature, and instead “[c]ordial affection, compassion, and sympathy” prevailed, that the result would be a “happy race of mortals” that had no need for property rights (T 3.2.2.15; SBN 493-494). In the next paragraph he again reemphasizes that if selfishness was replaced with benevolence, then justice could be dispensed with in favor of “nobler virtues, and more valuable blessings” (T 3.2.2.16; SBN 494-495). In the second Enquiry Hume points out that if material goods were no longer scarce we would live in a “happy state” where every “social virtue would flourish,” and the “cautious, jealous virtue of justice” would be

forgotten (EPM 3.3; SBN 183-184). For these types of reasons, Michael Sandel has argued that justice is not just a circumstantial virtue, but a remedial virtue as well. This means that, in certain instances, instituting rules of justice does not necessarily constitute a moral improvement. While justice is an improvement where before injustice was present, it would not seem to be an improvement where a formerly happy family became stricken by conflict and could only preserve their bond by adhering to a set of formal rules.63

I hold that this explains why Hume felt he had to offer a special explanation of justice in his response to the CV criticism. Upon reflection, we should see that our approval of justice arises from sympathy and concerns us with the public interest. To this extent, our approval of justice demonstrates both the amiable “generosity and capacity” of human nature. However, Hume’s positive evaluation of the hypothetical situations where extensive benevolence would render justice superfluous suggests that our approval of justice does not present “what is laudable and good” on all “side[s]” (T 3.3.6.3; SBN 619). That is because the virtue of justice itself is a response to the selfish side of human nature.64 We only need justice because our social affections, when pitted against self-interest, are not strong enough to allow “the whole human race” to exist as “one family” (EPM 3.6; SBN 184-185).65 However, our moral sense only

64 As pointed out by Gerald Postema, there is an important sense in which justice arises from the social nature of human beings (“Hume’s Reply to the Sensible Knave,” History of Philosophy Quarterly 5:1 (1988): 23-40, 26). This is because, as noted previously, one of the major benefits of society is the social enjoyments of living with others. However, it is still the case that justice is only necessary for enjoying these benefits because our natural selfishness and partiality threatens to undermine them.
65 One might suggest that Hume could preserve the idea that justice is a reflection of our social nature in a manner similar to how Hutcheson argues that mixed actions, ones motivated both by benevolence and self-interest, should still be seen as benevolent (IBV 104). Douglas Paletta points out that in these situations Hutcheson believes that “if a jointly excited act could have been excited by either benevolence or self love, but in fact is excited by both, we assess the act as benevolent” (Douglas, Paletta, “Francis Hutcheson: Why Be Moral,” The Journal of Scottish
garners reflexive approval insofar as it displays the other-regarding social aspect of our nature. Consider Hume’s circumstances of justice example where there is too little benevolence. If a “virtuous man” had the misfortune of having to reside in a “society of ruffians” who lack any concern for the public interest, then the only option left for this man is to “arm himself” and “consult the dictates of self-preservation alone” (EPM 3.9; SBN 187). While Hume describes the hypothetical situation where benevolence prevails as “happy,” he evaluates this world where benevolence is nearly non-existent as a “melancholy situation” (ibid.). Since in each of these cases the conventions of justice are dispensed with, although for different reasons, the presence of justice is not what determines how Hume believes these situations ought to be evaluated. Rather, it is the presence or absence of the disposition to benevolence that determines which situation would be preferable.

I believe that the idea that our moral sense garners reflexive approval only insofar as it represents human sociality left Hume uncomfortable with applying this insight to our approval of justice. It is here that we see a tension in Hume’s attempt to use the artificial-natural virtue distinction to split the difference between the moral sense theorists (such as Hutcheson and Shaftesbury) and the egoists (such as Hobbes and Mandeville). If justice is essentially a crutch that allows us to overcome human selfishness, or in Cohon’s words one of the “conventional and

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Philosophy 9.2 (2011): 149-159). It is true that Hume’s genealogy of how we come to be able to approve of justice involves both the self-interested motive that drives us to establish the conventions of justice and our sympathetic recognition of the public benefits those conventions provide. However, Hume could not then argue that our approval of justice can be seen as wholly a sign of our social nature in the way that Hutcheson argues that mixed actions should be seen as benevolent. This is because Hume explicitly rejects that public benevolence could have been the original motive to establish the conventions of justice (T 3.2.1.13; SBN 482).

emotional prostheses that remed[ies] our natural defects,” 67 then it represents human ingenuity and inventiveness. Yet, given this it seems that justice would not represent what is best about human nature: our sociality. 68 Thus, in the case of justice Hume defends himself against the CV criticism by stressing to his reader the absolute importance that justice has for the preservation of society. Yet, I believe Hume was also aware that this means our sense of justice cannot garner the same degree of approval as our sense of the natural virtues. We should be more reserved about our approval one who repays a loan than, for instance, about our approval of parents who provide excellent care for their children.

Thus, for Hume, it was not the artificiality of justice itself which left it in a precarious position regarding reflexive approval. In the 1745 *A Letter from a Gentleman*, Hume’s response to criticisms leveled against him by William Wishart (another who opposed Hume’s appointment to the Edinburgh chair), 69 he pointed out that just as nobody takes the fact that language is artificial to be “pernicious,” that neither should anyone be troubled by the fact that justice is artificial. 70 Reflection upon this example, I believe, supports the explanation for Hume’s reserve about justice that I have provided here. The question of whether language is natural or artificial is less important than the question of what type of role it plays in human life. Language, like sympathy, is a means of communication that allows us to have more meaningful social

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68 In fact, some have argued that Hume’s account of justice is actually quite close to that of Mandeville in that what ultimately lies behind our approval of justice is the social conditioning of politicians and society at large (see Marcia Baron, “Hume’s Noble Lie: An Account of his Artificial Virtues,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 12:3 (1982): 539-555, and Mikko Tolonen, *Mandeville and Hume: Anatomists of Civil Society*, (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013)).


interaction with one another.\textsuperscript{71} Similarly, it is not primarily the artificiality of justice that gives Hume pause about our approval for it. Rather, it is the fact that justice is based upon our selfish motivations, and not the social generosity and capacity which Hume believes underlies the reflexive approval of our moral sense.

8. Reforming the Structures of Justice

Thus, while Hume emphasizes the absolute necessity of justice for preserving society, he also recognizes that it is not the virtue which represents what is best about human nature. I contend that this could provide Hume a method of explaining why we ought to extend the conventions of justice. What the resentment of the powerless does, even if it is non-moralized, is make us confront the unsociable aspects of justice. A parallel can be drawn here with Hume’s discussion of the sensible knave. The knave, according to Hume, is someone who attempts violate the rules of justice without being detected by others. One way that Hume attempts to show that the knave’s strategy is self-defeating is that it is unlikely to have long term success. At some point the knave will be caught and then they will lose “all future trust and confidence with mankind” (EPM 9.24; SBN 283). However, he also believes that knavery is a poor approach even if the knave does succeed in hiding their wrongdoing.

But were they ever so secret and successful, the honest man, if he has any tincture of philosophy, or even common observation and reflection, will discover that they themselves are, in the end, the greatest dupes, and have sacrificed the invaluable enjoyment of a character, with themselves at least, for the acquisition of worthless

\textsuperscript{71} This is not to deny that, as argued in chapter 3, Hume later came to see the universal sentiment of humanity as that which allows for reflexive approval of our moral sense. Instead, the point is simply that it is the fact that question of whether our moral sense represents human sociality, and not whether it is artificial, that Hume thinks is essential for reflexive approval.
toys and gewgaws. How little is requisite to supply the *necessities* of nature? And in a view to *pleasure*, what comparison between the unbought satisfaction of conversation, society, study, even health and the common beauties of nature, but above all the peaceful reflection on one’s own conduct: What comparison, I say, between these, and the feverish, empty amusements of luxury and expense? These natural pleasures, indeed, are really without price; both because they are below all price in their attainment, and above it in their enjoyment (EPM 9.25; SBN 284-285, original emphasis).

What the knave fails to understand, according to Hume, is that whatever advantages can be gained from violating the rules of justice, these pale in comparison to the pleasure of being able to enjoy our character. Yet, it is not immediately clear what Hume means here by the “enjoyment of character.” If he simply means being able to enjoy our own virtuous qualities, then, as pointed out by Gerald Postema, this still leaves unexplained why this sort of enjoyment has should be valued “without price.” The question Hume must address is not merely whether we can derive some sort of pleasure from considering our own just conduct, but why this provides the incomparable sort of pleasure that Hume describes here.

Postema identifies another understanding of “enjoyment of character” which he believes provides a more plausible explanation of this point. In Hume’s view, our very sense of self is dependent on our social interactions with others: “[m]en always consider the sentiments of others in their judgment of themselves” (T 2.1.8.9; SBN 303). In fact it is only through our commerce with others that Hume believes we are even capable of understanding the significance and meaning of our emotions (T 2.1.6.9, SBN 293-294). As Postema explains the point, “[t]he

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72 Postema, “Hume’s Reply to the Sensible Knave,” 34.
pleasures and satisfactions of conversation and intercourse are essential to human life, because they are essential to one’s continuity through a constantly changing external and internal world.” The assessments others make of us provide a foothold upon which we can establish our identity amidst fluctuating circumstances. However, if the knave’s strategy is going to be successful then the he or she must hide from public view the principle governing his or her conduct (i.e. the strategy of violating the rules of justice whenever it is possible to do so without suffering the consequences). This means that, for the knave, others may assess the false persona that the knave displays to the public, but not the perspective from which she actually lives her life. Consequently, she is denied the opportunity for the “enjoyment of character” insofar as she forgoes the opportunity to even have a character.

Thus, Hume believes that we must conduct our lives in a way that allows our behavior to be publically observable if we are to negotiate our sense of self. I believe Hume could make a similar type of reply in the present case. When forming, and possibly revising, the structures of justice what is at stake is not so much the formation of our personal identity and character, but the character of the human species. Recall from chapter 3 that Hume believes the common identity which ties the human species together, and forms the “party of humankind,” is our mutual approval of the social basis of morality. The traits we place in our catalogue of virtues are supposed to derive from, and be associated with, humanity and mutual concern. It is for this reason that we “cherish” this identity. It seems this conception of our species identity is compromised to some extent if any of the qualities in the catalogue are revealed to have significant anti-social elements. Yet, this is precisely what is occurring in the situation Hume

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73 Ibid., 35.
74 Ibid., 35.
outlines in the PC passage. The manner in which the structures of justice have been formed is responsible for producing the unsocial passion of resentment, anger, and dislike.

The following second Enquiry passage sheds some light on why we would be motivated to change this situation.

Who would live amidst perpetual wrangling, and scolding, and mutual reproaches? The roughness and harshness of these emotions disturb and displease us: We suffer by contagion and sympathy; nor can we remain indifferent spectators, even though certain, that no pernicious consequences would ever follow from such angry passions (EPM 7.21; SBN 257-258).

It is simply unpleasant be present in situations where unsocial passions predominate. Importantly, it is not primarily unpleasant because of the “pernicious consequences” that such unsociable circumstances bring about. Hume suggests here that it is because this state of affairs is immediately disagreeable. In fact, Hume describes how something of this sort motivates us to adopt rules of “good-breeding.”

In like manner, therefore, as we establish the laws of nature [the rules of justice], in order to secure property in society, and prevent the opposition of self-interest; we establish the rules of good-breeding, in order to prevent the opposition of men’s pride, and render conversation agreeable and inoffensive (T 3.3.2.10, SBN 597-598, original emphasis).

Just as our mutual interest in the stability of society founds the conventions of justice, so our mutual interest in pleasant and agreeable conversation and relations with one another motivates us to establish rules of proper manners that conceal prideful displays.
However, this idea takes on greater significance when applied to justice than when applied to good manners which Hume describes in the second *Enquiry* as a “lesser morality” (EPM 4.13, SBN 209). My suggestion here is not merely that the structures of justice should be revised because doing so would make co-existence more pleasant. More fundamentally, we should revise the structures of justice because if we do not then the unpleasant emotions in question will have their foundation in justice – a trait which occupies an important place in the catalogue. In the same way that Hume thought emphasizing the ways in which military heroism is connected to inhumanity would make us change our sentiments about it, so emphasizing how the current structure of justice produces resentment and anger could make us willing to engage in reform. In each case, what is fundamentally at stake is our common human identity based upon the belief that our catalogue of virtues and vices represents what is best about human nature.

Thus, even if the type of resentment felt by the powerless is non-moralized anger, the disagreeable nature of this passion can explain how resentment could act as a catalyst for reform.

Of course, the extent to which such a strategy of extension could be employed, for Hume, will be always tempered by broader considerations of social utility. David Miller explains this point in the following way.

[I]f you want to speculate on improved rules of justice, do so by all means, but recognize the uncertainty of such reasoning, and above all do not erode people’s attachment to the rules of justice that they now follow. Improvement here is limited not merely by the natural boundaries of the imagination, but also by the necessity of maintaining a set of artificial rules.\(^75\)

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The possibilities of reform are limited by the fact that, for Hume, the conventions of justice are absolutely necessary for the preservation of society. Consequently, no reform could be worth the price of undermining these conventions.

Hume makes this point regarding the distribution of property. If we were going to design a system of property from scratch, the “most obvious thought would be, to assign the largest possessions to the most extensive virtue, and give every one the power of doing good, proportioned to his inclination” (EPM 3.23; SBN 192-193). Or perhaps, like the “levellers” Hume discusses, we would decide to give equal possessions to each person (EPM 3.24; SBN 193). Such top-down organization might be effective in a “perfect theocracy, where a being, infinitely intelligent, governs by particular volitions” (EPM 3.23; SBN 192-193), but it would be detrimental for mere humans to attempt to design society in this way.

But were mankind to execute such a law; so great is the uncertainty of merit, both from its natural obscurity, and from the self-conceit of each individual, that no determinate rule of conduct would ever result from it; and the total dissolution of society must be the immediate consequence (ibid.).

It is a similar idea which motivates Hume to state that, while he does not support wholly passive obedience to an oppressive political regime (T 3.2.9.4, SBN 552-553), he “shall always incline to their side, who draw the bond of allegiance very close, and consider an infringement of it, as the last refuge in desperate cases” (EMPL 490). However, if including those in a disadvantaged position of power will not threaten to undermine the conventions of justice, then the present account can provide one good reason for reform.
9. Conclusion

Ultimately, the connection between justice and sociability is complex for Hume. Justice is essential for the maintenance of society and allows us to take advantage of the social pleasure of conversation and commerce with one another. In fact, in a paragraph occurring after the PC passage Hume notes that that if we were completely self-sufficient and “solitary” beings, who could satisfy our needs for both “safety and happiness” without the assistance of others, then we would be as “incapable of justice” as we would be of “social discourse and conversation” (EPM 3.20, SBN 191-192). As noted by Donald Hubin, the point of this passage is not just that justice would be unnecessary did we not rely upon others for “physical necessities such as food, water, air, and shelter,” but also because we rely upon others for certain social necessities such as “companionship, intellectual stimulation, and love.”

On the other hand, justice is firmly founded upon mutual self-interest and it is only because the human species is not characterized by the sort of benevolence that prevails in well-functioning families we need to establish it for the regulation of our conduct. For Hume, this is a hard fact of human nature that is beyond our power to change. However, my arguments here suggest that we can at least structure the conventions of justice such that they do not incite “wrangling, and scolding, and mutual reproaches.” Furthermore, such revision of the conventions of justice is necessary to the preserve the connection between our moral sentiments and human sociability: the connection which forms the basis of the “party of humankind.”

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CHAPTER 6
RECONSIDERING HUME’S CONSERVATISM

1. INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I discussed the theme of revision and criticism in Hume’s moral philosophy and established three main conclusions. First, that there is a theoretically coherent standard of revision underlying Hume’s work based upon the fact that it is pleasing to find that our moral sentiments are the product of human sociability. We see this idea at play not only in those passages where Hume explicitly discusses the process of reflexively evaluating our moral sense, but also in his account of moral judgment. The very fact that we view others from an impartial standpoint is evidence of our desire for social union and the confirmation of our peers. Second, I argued that Hume wields this standard of revision by attempting to change our feelings about immediately agreeable traits that are socially harmful. He does this by showing how our approval of such traits is in tension with the approval we feel for benevolence. Third, I considered how this account could provide Hume with a response to the objection that his theory of justice unjustifiably excludes the least powerful groups in society.

These arguments have important implications for how he should understand the overall structure and aims of Hume’s work. In the first chapter I explained that Hume’s work is imbued with important practical concerns that guide his theory. We should now be able to see that this concern forms a continuous thread that ties together Hume’s work on morality with his conception of the purpose of philosophy as a whole. In Chapter 1 I argued that one of Hume’s practical concerns was to protect the value of philosophical inquiry from those who considered it to be pointless. Hume addressed this concern by holding that abstract theoretical investigation is
only warranted to the extent that it is capable of arriving at some productive end. At minimum, philosophical inquiry must at least be capable of satisfying our curiosity by producing stable conviction and belief in the inquirer. In many cases (most notably when the philosopher is attempting to question the foundation of our knowledge gaining faculties) this goal requires a concerted effort to constrain our intellectual ambitions. A philosophical system which terminated in the abyss of skepticism would only fuel those who think abstract inquiries, and difficult reasoning in general, is futile. To this end, Hume urges: “[b]e a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man” (EHU 1.6; SBN 8-9). Consequently, the negative aspect of Hume’s system, his skeptical critique of the understanding, is undertaken for the expressed purpose of justifying the positive claim that the human mind largely operates by custom and habit. The philosopher must delimit his or her investigations to first order questions that have some connection to common life, and not second order questions about the veracity of our knowledge-gaining faculties. Hume adopts this limitation precisely because it is only by doing so that philosophical investigation can terminate in stable beliefs. This allows Hume to remain optimistic that theoretical inquiry is capable of establishing knowledge that can “bear the examination of the latest posterity” (T 1.4.7.14, SBN 272-273) despite the fact that not all of the skeptic’s challenges have been given a theoretical refutation.

A similar type of practical concern is present in Hume’s moral philosophy. However, the threat that Hume confronts here is not that we will find it impossible to explain where moral principles come from. This is made clear in the following statement occurring at the outset of Book I of the Treatise.

Morality is a subject that interests us above all others: We fancy the peace of society to be at stake in every decision concerning it; and ’tis evident, that this
concern must make our speculations appear more real and solid, than where the subject is, in a great measure, indifferent to us. What affects us, we conclude can never be a chimera; and as our passion is engag’d on the one side or the other, we naturally think that the question lies within human comprehension; which, in other cases of this nature, we are apt to entertain some doubt of (T 3.1.1.1, SBN 455-456).

In contrast to the “long chain of reasoning” (ibid.) which he often has to employ in his more abstruse metaphysical and epistemological discussions, Hume believes our natural interest in morality already places it on a more solid foundation. In the second Enquiry he makes a similar comment.

Yet, I must confess, that this enumeration puts the matter in so strong a light, that I cannot, at present, be more assured of any truth, which I learn from reasoning and argument, than that personal merit consists entirely in the usefulness or agreeableness of qualities to the person himself possessed of them, or to others, who have any intercourse with him (EPM 9.13; SBN 278).

Hume thinks the idea that the we find agreeable and useful qualities praiseworthy is so obvious that he states, ironically,¹ that finding some have denied it makes him “fall back into diffidence and scepticism” (ibid.).

Instead, Hume’s practical aim in this context is the protection of our motivation to cultivate a virtuous character. In this case, the threat derives not from the philosopher who destructively critiques our knowledge gaining faculties, but from the philosopher who believes that delving into the origins of our moral sense will reveal something disagreeable. The threat

comes from the philosopher who believes the discovering the true origin of our moral sense will make us feel that developing a virtuous character is not worth the effort. Hume’s response is again attentive to what practical effect his theoretical work will have upon his reader. He emphasizes that our moral sense is a product of human sociality and reminds us that it is this aspect of our nature which we find most agreeable. It is here where Hume most explicitly takes on the role of the philosophical painter, or practical moralist, and portrays virtue in an engaging and appealing light. However, Hume’s concern with the effect that his philosophical speculations will have upon his audience is present throughout his work. Furthermore, I believe the idea that Hume’s work is guided by the practical goal of preserving our commitment to those aspects of human nature that we find most valuable is also instructive for understanding the nature of Hume’s conservatism. In this concluding chapter I consider more directly the implications that my argument has for understanding what it means to call Hume a conservative.

2. SENTIMENTALISM AND THE “WISDOM OF REPUGNANCE”

One answer to the question of what it means to call Hume a conservative that I believe we should reject is that Hume is a conservative insofar as he lends unconditional support to the status quo. Of course, there are important places in Hume’s writings where he resists reform. As I mentioned at the close of the previous chapter, Hume criticizes those who would organize the distribution of property in a top-down fashion and holds that the right to resistance should be rather limited. However, neither does Hume wholly follow Edmund Burke who emphasized “the happy effect of following nature, which is wisdom without reflection, and above it.” As argued by John B. Stewart, Hume’s philosophy is characterized by the goal of reforming society by

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replacing the unreflective beliefs of the vulgar about how society should be structured.\(^3\) Additionally, as I have argued here, Hume also employs a method for reforming our immediate moral sentiments where those feelings can be shown to conflict with our approval of benevolence. Thus, the conservative element of Hume’s thought cannot be characterized as blind support for whatever practices, attitudes, and institutions happen to be in place at the time.

Yet, this does not necessarily imply that Hume is not accurately characterized as a conservative of some sort. Donald Livingston has argued that we do not do the notion of conservatism justice when we construe it as merely support for the status quo.

Conservatism, then, is not a timeless disposition to defend the status quo but a historically limited movement that appears on the scene only to defend a certain sort of value and to combat a certain sort of enemy. Although differing widely on many things, conservatives have agreed about the enemy: the violent intrusion of rationalistic metaphysics into politics.\(^4\)

Livingston explains elsewhere that what is essential to Hume’s conservatism is the rejection of the foundationalist liberal project. This project attempts to produce arguments that show that the fundamental elements of civil society, “an ethic of individualism, civil society, private property, representative government, and the rule of law,” constitute the only legitimate social order.\(^5\) For Hume there is no universal standard, which exists independent of human nature, that could justify such a claim. Any attempt to fundamentally design our values and social arrangements

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according to an ahistorical ideal, which does not take into account the current situation humans find themselves in and the traditions they have inherited, is misguided from the outset.

Nothing in the argument I have offered here conflicts with this construal of Hume’s conservatism. My reading of reflexive approval does, of course, give an important role to reflection, but such reflection cannot be considered a “violent intrusion of rationalist metaphysics.” This sort of reflection stays squarely within the confines of human nature. We are to sort through the various dispositions of our nature, determine which of those aspects represent us at our best (a determination which Hume does not think should take much effort once we appreciate the inherent agreeability of human sociability when contrasted with human selfishness), and aim to ensure that our catalogue of virtues reflects this. Our moral sentiments are not forced into line with a standard that is foreign to human nature (or as discussed in chapter one as standard that alienates us from our nature), but are simply made consistent with what we already find most valuable.

We can further confirm that Hume’s conservatism does not necessarily require support of the status quo by seeing that the “intrusion of violent metaphysics” Hume is eager to avoid would not just arise from the work of theorists with liberal or reformist aims. This threat is present in the work of thinkers with a conservative outlook as well. We can see this by considering recent conservative critiques of emerging bio-technologies such as cloning, in-vitro fertilization, and biomedical enhancements (including genetic engineering). One of the more prominent of these so-called “bio-conservatives” is Leon Kass whose article “The Wisdom of Repugnance: Why We Should Ban the Cloning of Humans” is especially relevant for the present
purpose. This is because Kass’ criticism of cloning seems to proceed from a broadly sentimental framework.

Revulsion is not an argument [...] In crucial cases, however, repugnance is the emotional expression of deep wisdom, beyond reason's power fully to articulate it. Can anyone really give an argument fully adequate to the horror which is father-daughter incest (even with consent), or having sex with animals, or mutilating a corpse, or eating human flesh, or even just (just!) raping or murdering another human being? Would anybody's failure to give full rational justification for his or her revulsion at these practices make that revulsion ethically suspect? Not at all. On the contrary, we are suspicious of those who think that they can rationalize away our horror, say, by trying to explain the enormity of incest with arguments only about the genetic risks of inbreeding.7

Perhaps a reasoned argument (the above paragraph suggests an argument of the consequentialist variety) can be offered which explains why incest or bestiality is morally wrong. Kass’ point, however, is that no such argument is needed. Our immediate feeling of revulsion should be sufficient to inform us that such practices are misguided. In fact, the attempt to explain our feelings about these technologies rationally will inevitably fail to capture the profound sense of “horror” that Kass believes is revealed by our repugnance. A similar, albeit more reserved, view can also be found in Peirce. While Peirce believes that “radical reforms” may be necessary in some instances, he emphasizes that someone who would allow “a philosophy of religion” or “philosophy of ethics” to fundamentally change his or her moral stance ought to be cautious.

[The person] who would, let us say, hastily practice incest, is a man whom we should consider *unwise*. The regnant system of sexual rules is an instinctive or Sentimental induction summarizing the experience of all our race.\(^8\)

According to this view, the strong repugnance or disgust that we feel toward some action provides a strong *prima facie* consideration for classifying it as morally wrong. It is the responsibility of the reformer to explain, then, why these feelings are misguided. In Kass’ words, “[t]he burden of moral argument must fall entirely on those who want to declare the widespread repugnances of humankind to be mere timidity or superstition.”\(^9\)

Thus, Kass’ outlook approximates a Humean view of morality insofar as sentiments have a central role in moral evaluation. Furthermore, Kass (like Hume) believes that our moral feelings tell us something important about our humanity.

Sexual reproduction—by which I mean the generation of new life from (exactly) two complementary elements, one female, one male, (usually) through coitus— is established (if that is the right term) not by human decision, culture, or tradition, but by nature; it is the natural way of all mammalian reproduction. By nature, each child has two complementary biological progenitors. Each child thus stems from and unites exactly two lineages. These biological truths about our origins foretell deep truths about our identity and about our human condition altogether.\(^10\)

For Kass, our moral feelings, at least about emerging bio-technologies and certain putatively “unnatural” sexual practices, reveal something important about the proper place and purpose of

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human beings. He holds that human cloning is a “pollution and perversion”\textsuperscript{11} of “inherent procreative teleology of sexuality.”\textsuperscript{12} Importantly, our “generalized horror and revulsion” is supposed to provide “prima facie evidence” that the natural purpose of human sexuality has been perverted.\textsuperscript{13}

3. RELIGIOUS ENTHUSIASM AND SOCIAL FACTION

Consequently, Kass’ conservative critique of human cloning, and procreative bio-technology more generally, relies upon two general commitments that are also shared by Hume: (i) the dependence of morality upon sentiment and (ii) the fact that our moral sentiments represent important truths about human nature. Additionally, Kass and Hume are united in having been subjected to the criticism which motivates this project: that moral sentimentalism unthinkingly legitimizes a range of moral attitudes that are the product of nothing more than prejudice or bias.\textsuperscript{14} However, while Hume and Kass may be similar in their general sentimentalist orientation, I believe a more detailed examination reveals crucial differences. By examining these differences, and drawing a clear line of differentiation between the considerations which motivate Kass and those which motivate Hume, a clearer answer emerges to the question of what it means to consider Hume a conservative.

First, it is important to note that Hume would be wary of moral evaluations that are based upon pure disgust and repulsion. Disgust, like resentment, is an unsociable passion. While we have seen that Hume believes resentment has its legitimate place, the unsociable nature of the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{11} Ibid., 689.
\bibitem{12} Ibid., 682.
\bibitem{13} Ibid., 689.
\end{thebibliography}
nature means we need to approach it cautiously. Specifically, a moral sentiment based purely in immediate disgust should not garner reflexive approval. Yet, as we have seen, Kass thinks there is a deeper significance to our disgust – our disgust signifies that the given action is at odds with the telos of human beings (in the case of cloning, the telos of human sexuality). I hold that Hume would be uncomfortable with the mental disposition underlying Kass’ brand of teleological sentimentalism. Here I will draw a parallel between Kass’ approach to emerging biotechnologies and the mental disposition underlying a particular sort of religious attitude Hume found to be socially destructive: the religious attitude Hume referred to as “enthusiasm.” Hume’s most explicit discussion of enthusiasm comes from his essay “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm.” He states there that both superstition and enthusiasm are “corruptions of true religion” (EMPL 73). There is disagreement in the Hume literature over what Hume means by “true religion” as well about in what sense that religion can be said to be true.\(^\text{15}\) What is important for the present discussion, however, is how Hume understands these two supposed perversions of “true religion.”

Superstition is a product of the human mind’s susceptibility to “certain unaccountable terrors and apprehensions” when placed in an “unhappy situation of private or public affairs,” “ill health,” “a gloomy and melancholy disposition,” or some combination of these (EMPL 73). People turn to superstition when they are in some sort of compromised situation often characterized by physical, emotional, or cognitive vulnerability. For instance, on the individual level, one can be driven to superstition in times of failing health or depression. This is also confirmed in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* where Hume states, in the guise of the character Philo, that “men never have recourse to devotion so readily as when dejected with grief.”

or depressed with sickness” (DNR 12.26). Additionally, in a particularly caustic remark from the *Natural History of Religion*, Hume describes such religious propensities as “sick men’s dreams” (NHR 15.6). On the macro level, Hume notes that ancient societies which are less advanced in the arts and sciences tend to find refuge in superstition: “all ignorant ages are infested with superstition” (EMPL 273). In modern times, when there has been greater advancement in scientific knowledge, widespread religious superstition has a much different source: the intentional deception of “clergymen.” Hume notes that in order to “support the veneration paid them by the multitude” they “must promote the spirit of superstition” (EMPL 199n2). It is for this reason that Hume finds superstition to be generally destructive of civil liberty.

As superstition is founded on fear, sorrow, and a depression of spirits, it represents the man to himself in such despicable colours, that he appears unworthy, in his own eyes, of approaching the divine presence, and naturally has recourse to any other person, whose sanctity of life, or, perhaps, impudence and cunning, have made him be supposed more favoured by the Divinity (EMPL 75).

The propensity to superstition arises when “[w]eakness, fear, [and] melancholy” meet “ignorance” (EMPL 74). Priests must convince the common person that they are unworthy of direct contact with God and require the mediation of the clergy.

Hence the origin of Priests, who may justly be regarded as an invention of a timorous and abject superstition, which, ever diffident of itself, dares not offer up its own devotions, but ignorantly thinks to recommend itself to the Divinity, by the mediation of his supposed friends and servants (EMPL 75).

It is this “dominion of priests” which makes superstition an “enemy to civil liberty” (EMPL 78).
Enthusiasm is similar to superstition in that it is a response to ignorance. Yet, while superstition is caused by a mindset of fear, weakness, and dependence, enthusiasm arises from “[h]ope, pride, presumption, [and] a warm imagination” (EMPL 74). The superstitious’ rather depressed self conception forces them to rely upon authority, while the enthusiast has an elevated self conception which arises “from prosperous success, from luxuriant health, from strong spirits, or from a bold and confident disposition” (EMPL 74). This ambitious enthusiast gives “full range [...] to the fancy in the invisible regions or world of spirits, where the soul is at liberty to indulge itself in every imagination, which may best suit its present taste and disposition” (EMPL 74). Because such “knowledge” extends far beyond “the reach of our ordinary capacities” the enthusiast believes herself to enjoy “immediate inspiration of that Divine being” (EMPL 74). Consequently, not only is the authority of the clergy rejected as unnecessary but “every thing mortal and perishable vanishes as unworthy of attention” (EMPL 74). The enthusiast finds confirmation of her own “taste and disposition” in a divine world to which she has privileged access.

While Hume does note that enthusiasm, unlike superstition, can be a “friend” to civil liberty by undermining the dominion of the clergy (EMPL 78), it also has its own brand of socially destructive effects. We can see this from Hume’s comments on the differences between the Catholic mode of worship which superstitiously emphasized the importance of rites and rituals and the enthusiastic worship of the Protestant Puritans who rejected such ceremonies as pointless idolatry. Hume’s criticism of Catholic superstition was largely based in his view that its practices were not only absurd but useless. This is clear from his comparison between the conventions of justice and religious superstition in the second Enquiry. Hume notes there that a
prima facie view of the rules of property can make them seem just as strange as religious superstition.

Eggs, in this house, and in this diocese, are permitted during Lent; a hundred paces farther, to eat them is a damnable sin [...] Had I worn this apparel an hour ago, I had merited the severest punishment; but a man, by pronouncing a few magical syllables, has now rendered it fit for my use and service (EPM 3.36; SBN 198-199).

The transference of property, like the blessing of food, seems to rely upon the rather strange idea that the merely uttering certain words can effect a profound (even metaphysical) change in the nature of an object. However, Hume argues there is a critical difference between justice and superstition. Superstition is “frivolous, useless, and burdensome” while justice “is absolutely requisite to the well-being of mankind and existence of society” (EPM 3.38; SBN 199). An impartial observer should be able to see how the seemingly odd practices of private property ultimately serve public utility. Contrastingly, Hume predicts that “in a future age, it will probably become difficult to persuade some nations, that any human, two-legged creature could ever embrace” the superstitions of the Catholic religion (NHR 12.5).

Yet, from the History, we see that Hume was arguably more wary of the Puritan’s enthusiastic mode of worship in which “all rites and ornaments” are “disdainfully rejected” (H5, 68). He describes this manner of religious observance in the following way.

A mode of worship was established, the most naked and most simple imaginable; one that borrowed nothing from the senses; but reposed itself entirely on the contemplation of that divine Essence, which discovers itself to the understanding only. This species of devotion, so worthy of the supreme Being, but so little
suitable to human frailty, was observed to occasion great disturbances in the breast, and in many respects to confound all rational principles of conduct and behaviour (H5, 68).

Enthusiastic worship is not grounded in anything sensible, and thus is restrained by nothing more than the worshipper’s own imagination. Consequently, the enthusiast’s mind becomes so “occupied in this inward life” that it rejects “every intercourse of society” and “cheerful amusement, which could soften or humanize the character” (H5, 68). The superstitious worshiper, however naive and deluded, at least concerns herself with the world of sensible objects and traditions of her religious community. The enthusiast’s fanaticism and pride, on the other hand, squelch’s the desire for sociability. As described by Donald Siebert, “[r]ational behavior, sociability and politeness, [and] concern for one's fellow creatures […] are all displaced by the whimsies of solitary man.”16 If such an attitude becomes widespread, then it “threatens to tear apart the outward fabric of society, established by centuries of tradition and gradual progress.”17 Thus, while he thinks that superstition is ridiculous, Hume was more concerned with the socially destructive effects of enthusiasm.

4. The Enthusiastic Impulse

The parallel I wish to draw here is not that Kass’ view of biotechnology is directly motivated by a sort of religious enthusiasm. While Kass’ teleological conception of human beings (and human sexuality) is one that may be attractive to those who believe God has established a particular purpose for human beings, he believes that the repugnance he appeals to is not limited to just those of a particular theological bent: “[s]uch reactions come both from the man or woman in the

17 Ibid., 387.
street and from intellectuals, from believers and atheists, from humanists and scientists.”

Thus, the fact that Kass finds a sign of the telos of human beings within our sentiments of disgust does not necessarily commit him to any particular theological premises. Aristotle’s teleological worldview, for instance, was appropriated by the Christian Aquinas despite the obvious differences in their historical, social, and religious background.

Instead, the parallel I wish to draw relies on the extent to which Kass’ arguments are in line with the general orientation or attitude that Hume describes as enthusiasm. Importantly, Hume believes that the same sort of inclination which drives the fanatical religious enthusiast can be found in other places as well. For instance, at the end of A Dialogue Hume describes the conduct of the eccentric Diogenes, who was reported to have lived in a tub, as arising from a “philosophical enthusiasm” (D 343). Hume describes Diogenes in the following way.

The foundation of Diogenes’s conduct was an endeavour to render himself an independent being as much as possible, and to confine all his wants and desires and pleasures within himself and his own mind […] The ancient supported himself by magnanimity, ostentation, pride, and the idea of his own superiority above his fellow-creatures (D 343).

Diogenes’ enthusiastic pride ultimately left him “in a different element from the rest of mankind” and lead Hume to conceive of him as leading an “artificial li[fe]” (D 343). Instead of engaging in

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18 Ibid., 686.

19 This is not to say that Aquinas’ use of Aristotelian concepts and thought did not differ in certain vital respects. See Joseph Owens, “Aristotle and Aquinas,” in The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), for a discussion of this point.

20 James King, “Hume on Artificial Lives with a Rejoinder to A. C. MacIntyre,” Hume Studies 14:1 (1988): 53-92, 57. Hume also mentions the behavior of Pascal in these passages. However, Pascal’s own irregularities were the founded upon “humility and abasement, of the contempt and hatred of himself” (D 342-343) and thus seem to be the product of “religious superstition” (D 343).
those behaviors which are approved of by the “natural principles” of the human mind, Diogenes guides his conduct by his own artificially constructed set of norms. The “affective disorders of superstition and enthusiasm,” as Kate Abramson describes them, cause Diogenes (and other eccentrics) to lead lives that are not “alternative moralities but alternatives to morality.”

What parallel can we find here between religious enthusiasm and the philosophical enthusiasm of Diogenes? Why did Hume find the term “enthusiasm” appropriate in each case? Like the religious enthusiast, Diogenes is also quick to employ his critical “wit” against “every kind of superstition” (D 343). However, this similarity is superficial in that Diogenes (on Hume’s portrayal) found “every kind of religion” to be ridiculous (D 343). I hold that, more fundamentally, what unites enthusiasts of both the religious and philosophical variety is not their opposition to superstition, but the turn toward their own individual sentiments and experience coupled with a lack of concern for the sentiments and experience of others. The religious enthusiast believes they have a direct connection with God not enjoyed by their peers, while the philosophical enthusiast guides their life by their own peculiar inclinations without consideration of the fact that these “depart from the maxims of common reason” (D 343).

We can confirm this by examining Hume’s use of the term “enthusiasm” in a third context – his discussion of belief. In the Treatise, Hume defines a belief as a “LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION” (T 1.3.7.5, SBN 96). What distinguishes those ideas we regard as beliefs from those ideas we regard as fictions is that these two species of ideas feel very differently in our minds (T 1.3.7.7, SBN 628-629). In Treatise 1.3.8 Hume argues that cause and effect is the only relation that produces beliefs.

Now as we call everything custom, which proceeds from a past repetition, without any new reasoning or conclusion, we may establish it as a certain truth, that all the belief, which follows upon any present impression, is deriv’d solely from that origin. When we are accustom’d to see two impressions conjoin’d together, the appearance or idea of the one immediately carries us to the idea of the other (T 1.3.8.10; SBN 102-103).

Whenever we have always experienced two impressions to be conjoined in the past, the appearance of the first impression leads us to form a lively idea of the second impression.

In the next section, however, Hume notes that there is an apparent problem with his sentimentalist account of belief. Although experience shows “that belief arises only from causation,” it seems there are other sorts of mechanisms which are capable of enlivening our ideas (T 1.3.9.2; SBN 107). What concerns us here is the enlivening effect that fictitious literature can have upon our minds. Given Hume’s admission in the following passage, this objection should strike directly at the heart of Hume’s account of belief:

’Tis difficult for us to withhold our assent from what is painted out to us in all the colours of eloquence; and the vivacity produc’d by the fancy is in many cases greater than that which arises from custom and experience. We are hurried away by the lively imagination of our author or companion; and even he himself is often a victim to his own fire and genius (T 1.3.10.8, SBN 122-123).

Here Hume notes the ideas we form from reading a particularly eloquent work of literature or poetry can, in some cases, surpass the ideas we derive from common experience. Yet, under normal circumstances, we do not believe that the story we are reading about is true no matter how engaging or well-written. The objection, then, is that the feeling of liveliness and the
circumstances in which we believe something come apart in certain cases. In fact, the following passage which occurs two sections earlier should already have primed the reader to consider this objection.

'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy. When I am convinc’d of any principle, ’tis only an idea, which strikes more strongly upon me. When I give the preference to one set of arguments above another, I do nothing but decide from my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence (T 1.3.8.12; SBN 103).

It may be true that the fictions we deliberately create through the imagination, such as the idea of a unicorn, in many cases feel rather dull. Yet, there is still no guarantee that intensity of feeling will faithfully track belief in every case.

Hume’s response to this objection is important for the present purpose because Hume describes the capacity of fictitious descriptions to enliven our ideas as a “poetical enthusiasm” (T 1.3.10.10, SBN 630-631). Here again we see a connection with the previous two uses of the term that we have examined (religious enthusiasm and philosophical enthusiasm).

We may observe the same effect of poetry in a lesser degree; and this is common both to poetry and madness, that the vivacity they bestow on the ideas is not deriv’d from the particular situations or connexions of the objects of these ideas, but from the present temper and disposition of the person (T 1.3.10.10, SBN 630-631).

It is not the connection which the ideas we derive from the poet’s work has with the ideas we have derived from past experience which makes us conceive them in a more lively manner; rather, it is the predisposition one has to be engaged by these fictions. The fact that some
fictitious idea has become enlivened is a function of the fact that this particular person, at this particular time, has the correct sort of mental disposition. For this reason, the connection between our ideas of poetic fictions, and the “vigour” with which we conceive those ideas, is “merely accidental” (T 1.3.10.11, SBN 631-632).

Thus, we see the enthusiastic inclination, in which one’s conduct or mental operations are determined by one’s particular disposition or circumstance, functions here as well. Furthermore, poetical enthusiasm has an isolating effect similar to its religious and philosophical counterparts. Hume states that “the least reflection dissipates the illusions of poetry, and places the objects in their proper light […] that in the warmth of a poetical enthusiasm, a poet has a counterfeit belief, and even a kind of vision of his objects.”

23 Maintaining one’s belief in poetical fiction requires not reflecting upon how that belief fits in with the other ideas we derive from shared experience (or remaining entranced in the “warmth” of poetical enthusiasm). To see this point, consider the following example provided by Jennifer Herdt.

Similarly, although Scarlett O’Hara may seem very real to me, I do not find her mentioned in any history books, I cannot locate her birth certificate in any archive, and if I were to tell friends that I am her great-great granddaughter they would think I was mad. The connections and reinforcements which would lead me to consider Scarlett a real person are lacking, regardless of the vividness of my conception of Scarlett. 24


It is only by refusing to integrate one’s vivacious idea of a poetical fiction into his or her understanding of common life (a task which requires engaging with a world where others are present as well), that I am able to maintain my belief in the real existence of O’Hara. One can only persist in the “warmth of poetical enthusiasm” as long as one remains isolated from my peers. As Annette Baier explains, for Hume “[a]ll our talk of true images, and of relative accuracy, derives from our social interpersonal world […] Not just the vividness of the memory, but also the coherence of the memory report […] goes into our judgment of whether this is a remembering or a misremembering.”

There is a common thread, then, which ties together each of the three varieties of enthusiasm I have discussed here. Namely, each leads to a sort of social isolation. The religious enthusiast rejects the rituals and rites associated with the community of worshippers in favor of a supposed direct connection with the divine. The philosophical enthusiast abides by a system of conduct that is agreeable to his or her own sentiments, but is seen as absurd and inappropriate by his or her peers. The assent the poetical enthusiast gives to literary fictions can only be sustained by avoiding interaction in the social world. In each case the enthusiast turns inward toward their own experience and away from shared experience with others. They are driven by what John Locke termed, in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the “enthusiastic impulse.” Locke’s explanation of this impulse, given in a religious context, is one which Hume would have been quite familiar with.

Their minds being thus prepared, whatever groundless opinion comes to settle itself strongly upon their fancies is an illumination from the Spirit of God, and presently of divine authority: and whatsoever odd action they find in themselves a

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strong inclination to do, that impulse is concluded to be a call or direction from heaven, and must be obeyed: it is a commission from above, and they cannot err in executing it (Essay, IV.xix.6).²⁷

For the person who is taken by the enthusiastic impulse, the primary determinant of their beliefs and actions is their personal inclination.

5. TELEOLOGY, INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY, AND UNCERTAINTY

Thus far we have seen that the enthusiastic impulse is an aspect of human nature does not produce social union. Consequently, an account of morality in which our moral sentiments were based upon this impulse would not pass Hume’s test of reflexive approval. My claim here is that Hume could criticize Kass’ account upon this basis. Namely, that Kass’ explanation of our sentiment repugnance or disgust is founded upon the enthusiastic impulse. Of course, Kass’ view of our moral sentiments, and the teleological picture of human nature it is based upon, is not isolating to the extreme degree that we saw (for instance) in the poetical enthusiast. However, I believe Hume would worry that the motivating considerations behind Kass’ argument would be likely to produce significant, and recalcitrant, social factions.

As mentioned earlier, Kass believes his feelings about the repugnance of cloning (and other emerging bio-technologies) are shared by different varieties of people: “the man or woman in the street and from intellectuals, from believers and atheists, from humanists and scientists.” Kass may be right that the intuition he appeals to can be found in many different sectors of society; however, this does not necessarily imply that the intuition is approaching universality. Leigh Turner points out that while “proponents of the ‘wisdom of repugnance’ expend a lot of words discussing how ‘we’ feel,” that they have not yet shown that there is a uniform reaction

toward the biotechnologies that Kass is concerned with.\textsuperscript{28} There may be less agreement about the repugnance of cloning than Kass’ discussion would suggest. However, the mere fact that Kass’ account is controversial cannot be a sufficient reason for rejecting it. This criticism would equally redound upon Hume’s own moral theory insofar as, for example, the moral rationalist would find much to disagree with. If Kass’ view makes our moral sentiments the product of the unsociable aspects of human nature, then it must be for a more substantive reason than the mere fact that his view produces considerable disagreement.

I hold that what would be problematic, from Hume’s point of view, with Kass’ account is not the fact that it produces disagreement, but the \textit{manner} in which it produces that disagreement. Recall that Kass bases his argument upon a teleological conception of the human being (and of human sexuality) in which cloning runs counter to the natural functions of the human species. If we return to the letter containing Hume’s response to Hutcheson’s CV criticism (which I discussed in chapter 2), we can see that Hume is critical of a teleological view of nature.

I cannot agree to your Sense of \textit{Natural}. Tis founded on final Causes; which is a Consideration, that appears to me pretty uncertain & unphilosophical. For pray, what is the End of Man? Is he created for Happiness or for Virtue? For this Life or for the next? For himself or for his Maker? Your Definition of \textit{Natural} depends upon solving these Questions, which are endless, & quite wide of my Purpose (HL1 33).

We saw earlier that Hume criticized Hutcheson’s account of the moral sense for making the relationship between our moral sense and benevolence rest upon a tenuous and uncertain

foundation (our putative knowledge of the sentiments of God). Here we see that Hume makes a similar criticism of Hutcheson’s appeal to final causes. The attempt to outline the final cause or purpose of human beings is highly speculative and can only terminate in uncertainty.

This claim is based upon Hume’s view about the limits of human reason. The “rational and modest” philosopher (EHU 4.12, SBN 30-31), should realize the impossibility of even giving the ultimate reason why stones fall and fire burns even after “a thousand experiments” (EHU 12.25, SBN 161). In other words, the philosopher should recognize that “the ultimate springs and principles are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry” (EHU 4.12, SBN 30-31). If human reason is incapable of explaining the influence that common objects exert upon one another, then little will it be capable of determining the natural functions that human beings should serve. If that is the case, then it seems our views about the purpose of human nature will be determined solely by our “present taste and disposition.” The tendency at play here is one which Nietzsche would later assert belongs to the “wretched bigot and prig” who “paints himself on the wall” and then assumes that this self-representation represents the ideal human. For Hume, it arises from finding metaphysical backing for one’s particular conception of the “End of Man.”

The (overly) ambitious metaphysical claims which lie at the basis of a teleological conception of human nature are not only theoretically unsubstantiated in Hume’s view, but more importantly they are practically deleterious. In the introduction to the Treatise Hume decries the fact that “[d]isputes are multiplied” when philosophers employ speculative claims that are not founded upon common experience (T Intro.2, SBN xiii-xiv). Philosophers are divided into

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factions where it is “not reason, which carries the prize, but eloquence” (*ibid*.). In the first *Enquiry*, we see that Hume believes that his mitigated skeptical approach, “the Academic or Sceptical philosophy,” provides an antidote for this tendency.

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 (EHU 5.1, SBN 40-41).

The philosopher, who has had her pride “abate[d]” by a “tincture of PYRRHONISM” (EHU 12.24, SBN 161), will not be arrogant enough to suppose that she could have knowledge of the final ends that human beings are supposed to serve.30

Of course, if the philosopher had to be so modest that it was inappropriate to make *any* claims about the characteristics of human beings, then this would be rather disastrous for Hume’s own system. We have seen that Hume makes a number of substantive claims about human nature. In fact, at the outset of the *Treatise* Hume states that his “science of man” is the “only solid foundation” upon which we can base our knowledge (T Intro.7, SBN xiii-xiv).

Furthermore, many of the claims that Hume makes could be controversial and subject to disagreement. Crucially, however, Hume emphasizes that these claims we make about human nature, which constitute his “science of man,” must be founded upon “experience and observation” (*ibid*.). Instead of examining human beings through a teleological lens, where observation of human behavior is thought to reveal important truths about natural human

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purposes, Hume instead resolves to subject human nature to “experimental philosophy” (ibid.). Investigation of human nature, therefore, remains thoroughly entrenched in what is empirically testable and publically available.

This has important implications for thinking about the nature of the disagreement and faction that would be produced by Hume’s conception of human nature and the teleological conception that we see in Kass’ work. There may be sharp disagreements regarding the accuracy of Hume’s description of human nature, but there is at least some source of public appeal. One who takes issue with Hume’s claims can provide more “careful and exact experiments” in order to rectify his errors (T Intro.8, SBN xvii). However if Hume is right, and teleological claims about the final purposes of human beings are ultimately a product of our particular preferences (which often become reified as metaphysical truths), then this is not an advantage that could be enjoyed by Kass’ brand of sentimentalism. One who does not share Kass’ repugnance for emerging bio-technologies would have to take issue with his views about the natural purpose of human sexuality and reproduction. Yet, again if Hume’s previous claims are correct, then such discussion will increase our uncertainty and fail to terminate in any mutually satisfactory conclusion. Ultimate, this is because the theoretical basis of Kass’ argument relies upon speculative claims which lie beyond the scope of human comprehension.

The consequence, then, would be the persistence of faction and disagreement. Just as the poetical enthusiast retains their view of reality by retreating from social life, so the teleological sentimentalist must find a justification for their claims that exists outside the scope of reflection upon common experience. Hume, on the other hand, founds our moral sentiments upon a foundation he believes any human being should find agreeable: the sentiment of humanity. This is an aspect of human nature which he believes enjoys universal appeal in our species. It may be
common for humans to allow self-interest to overpower their concern for others, but a “creature, absolutely malicious and spiteful” that had no sentiment of humanity would seem inhuman to Hume.

All mankind so far resemble the good principle, that, where interest or revenge or envy perverts not our disposition, we are always inclined, from our natural philanthropy, to give the preference to the happiness of society, and consequently to virtue, above its opposite. Absolute, unprovoked, disinterested malice has never, perhaps, place in any human breast; or if it had, must there pervert all the sentiments of morals, as well as the feelings of humanity (EPM 5.40, SBN 226-227).

Thus, while Hume would agree with Kass’ emphasis on the importance of sentiment, I hold that Hume would argue that Kass’ account makes our moral sentiments that product of an enthusiastic impulse. Insofar as the enthusiastic impulse (unlike the sentiment of humanity) is an unsociable aspect of human nature, Kass’s teleological sentimentalism would fail the test of reflexive endorsement.

6. CONCLUSION: CONSERVATION AND REFORM

Nothing in this discussion commits Hume to any particular view about the acceptability or advisability of emerging biotechnologies. It seems the matter would be left to be settled by considerations of utility. The larger point, however, is that Hume’s wariness of the “violent intrusion of rationalist metaphysics” does not necessarily require us to support the status quo or follow our initially negative feelings about what is novel, different, or seemingly strange. Metaphysical intrusion can accompany both liberal attempts at reform and conservative attempts to constrain innovation. One who claims metaphysical backing for the entrenchment of current
values and institutions imposes just as much upon our natural sentiments as the person who advocates reforming current values and institutions based upon an abstract and idealized conception of human beings and society. Hume’s sentimentalism, then, does not necessarily bias toward the status quo. Instead, it emphasizes our need to see our moral sentiments as the product of what aspects of human nature, subject to empirical investigation, we naturally and immediately find most agreeable. Whether or not this requires revising the current catalogue of virtues is a contingent matter depending upon the circumstance.

If my arguments are correct, then is there any meaningful sense in which we can consider Hume a conservative? Certainly, Hume does at times bring a conservative attitude to bear upon his considerations of social utility. For instance, he claims that he will “always incline to their side, who draw the bond of allegiance very close, and consider an infringement of it, as the last refuge in desperate cases, when the public is in the highest danger, from violence and tyranny” (EMPL 489). The destruction that accompanies civil war, and the risk of rebellion making ruler even more ruthless, moves him to err on the side of caution (ibid.). Yet, there is nothing inherent to Hume’s moral theory that requires this attitude. Hume should admit (upon the pain of become one of the “generality of mankind” instead of a “[man] of cool reflection”) that it is again a matter of social utility, itself subject to revision via empirical investigation, whether this conservative rule of thumb is actually beneficial or not.

However, I believe there is still a significant sense in which we can say that Hume is a conservative. The crucial question is, “what exactly does Hume think is worth conserving?” As I have emphasized throughout, what Hume believes we ought to be conserving is our “cherished” identity as the “party of humankind” or our identity as the species tied together by moral sentiments based in human sociability. If this is the case, then a coherent connection can be
drawn between reform and conservation. We can understand this point by returning to debates surrounding biotechnology with a focus upon debates about the morality of biomedical enhancement. In Beyond Humanity? The Ethics of Biomedical Enhancement Allen Buchanan considers a variety of arguments against enhancement from a conservative point of view. Perhaps surprisingly, one of his conclusions is that certain important conservative values actually support enhancement. Buchanan has in mind the conservative tenet that we ought to appreciate and preserve present goods and not sacrifice them for the potential promise of future improvements. The worry is that in our haste to improve upon our natural human capacities, or to enact reforms more generally, we will ultimately end up destroying important goods that we currently enjoy. For instance, enhanced human beings may lose the sense of continuity they have with previous generations of human beings: “individuals will experience alienation or a sense of purposeless [sic] or at least will not find life as good as it could be, if they identify only with their contemporaries.” If this is the case, then enhancements which could significantly change human nature could pose this risk by making it difficult for the enhanced to see any continuity with their unenhanced predecessors.

Buchanan responds to these types of objections by pointing out that the conservative values which they rely upon (the importance of preserving present goods) may actually speak in favor of enhancement.

In order to cope with some of the environmental problems our cultural evolution has produced, it may be necessary, among other strategies, to employ biomedical

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enhancements – perhaps to improve the body’s capacity for thermal regulation under conditions of global warming.\textsuperscript{32}

Our natural human capacities (or our human capacities as they stand currently) may not be sufficient to allow us to continue enjoying our current level of well-being into the future. Thus, conservation of present goods may actually \textit{require} that we engage in enhancement. These sorts of concerns are not foreign to Hume’s account. As mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, Rachel Cohon argues that Hume’s theory can support the development of additional artificial virtues in response to changing social and environmental conditions (such as a virtue of environmental concern). In fact, the story Hume tells about the origin of the conventions of justice is one in which our need for development in response to environmental changes is crucial. Justice is an artificial construct meant to help us overcome the pernicious effects of our selfishness and confined generosity.

Furthermore, even when society becomes large enough that not every act of injustice will be harmful to our interest, we still retain motivation to follow the rules of justice and a concern for their infringement by others. Our habit of disapproving of injustice makes us partake of the “uneasiness” others feel via “sympathy” (T 3.2.2.24, SBN 498-499). Consequently, we form a “general rule” which connects injustice with wrongdoing that and, thus, extends “beyond those instances, from which it arose” \textit{(ibid.)}. The structures of justice then provide a moral enhancement by inculcating a motive, not \textit{directly} tied to self-interest, for abiding by the rules of justice.\textsuperscript{33} Relying on a similar story about the aspects of human nature that lead us to form

\textsuperscript{32} Buchanan, \textit{Beyond Humanity}, 163.

\textsuperscript{33} Buchanan makes a similar point when points out that “[b]y enforcing rules of peaceful interaction, legal institutions also increase our capacity for restraining our aggressive impulses and provide assurance that others will not take advantage of our restraint” \textit{(Beyond Humanity, 39)}. 

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societal and political institutions, Persson and Savalescu argue that such institutions will not enable us to face future challenges to our security. Meeting the challenges posed by, for instance, the presence of weapons of mass destruction and climate change will require biomedical enhancement of our moral capacities.\textsuperscript{34}

My concern here, however, has not been primarily with existential threats to our safety and security, but with threats to the common identity we share with our fellow human beings that is based in the sociable basis of our moral sentiments. Just as conserving the former may require certain deliberate reforms, so conserving the latter may require revision of our understanding of virtue and vice. Such revision would be guided not by a metaphysical conception of the proper function of the human species. Rather, it is guided by the common feelings of approval that human beings have when reflecting upon their sociable tendencies.

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VITA

EDUCATION

2015       Ph.D. Philosophy, The Pennsylvania State University

2013       M.A. Philosophy, The Pennsylvania State University

2009       B.A. Philosophy, University of Dayton

PUBLICATIONS

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES


BOOK REVIEWS


SELECTED AWARDS

2015       Alumni Association Dissertation Award – Penn State Graduate Council Committee on Fellowships and Awards.

2014       Graduate Student Teaching Award – Penn State Department of Philosophy.

2014       Harold F. Martin Graduate Assistant Outstanding Teaching Award – Penn State Graduate School and the Office of the Vice President and Dean for Undergraduate Education.