

Objectivity and Perfection in Hume's Hedonism

Dale Dorsey

Department of Philosophy
University of Kansas
1445 Jayhawk Boulevard
Wescoe Hall, rm. 3090
Lawrence, KS 66045
ddorsey@ku.edu

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David Hume's value theory—in particular, his theory of prudential value or self-interest—is rarely investigated in any depth. Though he makes a number of claims about what is in someone's interest (including his discussion of the prudential value of the virtues in the second *Enquiry*¹), there is very little material in Hume's philosophic writing that yields a clear statement of his theory of what makes people better-off, and why Hume's various claims about the prudential value of virtue or any other qualities might or might not follow from them.

In this essay, I intend to investigate Hume's account of the nature of self-interest (or, interchangeably, “happiness”, “welfare. In essence, my reading is this: Hume was a hedonist. He believed that pleasure and pain are the only things that influence the prudential value of a life. But Hume was a hedonist of extraordinary sophistication. His hedonism intriguingly blends traditional hedonism with a *perfectionist* value theory leaving a version of *qualitative* hedonism with—in something of a coup for qualitative hedonists—a clear and compelling rationale for the relative value of higher and lower pleasures.

My reading of Hume's view arises in the main as a result of trying to answer one simple question about Hume's hedonism. In §2, I raise, for Hume, a “meta-evaluative” question that arises for any hedonist theory of prudential value: what is the *source* of pleasure's goodness? Is it the case that pleasure is good *because* pleasure is desired, or wanted, or is otherwise the subject of an authoritative pro-attitude (call this “subjective hedonism”)? Or is it the case that pleasure is good *independently* of such pro-attitudes (call this “objective hedonism”)? I discuss the answer to this question in

¹David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005 [1751]), xi 14-25.

§3: I hold that, contrary to some suggestive textual remarks, Hume is an objective, rather than subjective, hedonist. However, an objective response to this meta-evaluative question gives rise to further *first-order* evaluative questions, in particular, how one might rank-order various pleasurable experiences if they aren't to be ranked on a subjective basis. I discuss this question in §4. My answer to *this* question gives rise to a further *explanatory* question: what *explains* the relative prudential value of such pleasures. I discuss this in §5. In §6, I argue that the method by which I answer the above questions sheds substantial light on a classically puzzling passage in Hume's corpus: his discussion of the sensible knave. §7 concludes.

1. Hedonism, Good, and Personal Good

The claim that Hume is some sort of hedonist is not particularly revolutionary. Consider: "Nature has implanted in the human mind a perception of good or evil, or in other words, of pain and pleasure, as the chief spring and moving principle of all its actions," (T 1.3.10.1). In explaining the sources of the direct passions, Hume writes: "Beside good and evil, or in other words, pain and pleasure, the direct passions frequently arise from a natural impulse or instinct, which is perfectly unaccountable," (T 2.3.9.8). Not only does he characterize pain and pleasure as the "chief" motivator of humankind, he appears to claim, in so doing, that the connection between pain and pleasure and good and evil is extremely tight. Good and evil just *are* pain and pleasure, "in other words".

And though Hume clearly treats pleasure and pain as good and evil, this does not guarantee any particular reading of his theory of *welfare* or prudential value. His hedonism could, in principle, be a conception of many different concepts. For instance, one could be a hedonist about *moral goodness* (i.e., moral quality requires individuals to promote pleasure in some specified group—call this "moral hedonism"); a hedonist about the good *simpliciter* or *impersonal* good (call this "axiological hedonism"); in addition to a hedonist about well-being or the personal good (call this "welfare hedonism"). It would appear that the passages above indicate only a form of axiological hedonism: pleasure is *good*, pain is *evil*. Does Hume, then, also accept a form of welfare hedonism?

Were he to do so, he would certainly not be alone among his contemporaries. Shaftesbury, for instance, claims that pleasure constitutes self-interest.² Hutcheson also appears to squarely identify pleasure with self-

²See, for instance, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, "Inquiry into

interest or prudential good:

Because we shall afterwards frequently use the Words Interest, Advantage, natural Good, it is necessary here to fix their Ideas. The Pleasure in our sensible Perceptions of any kind, gives us our first Idea of natural Good, or Happiness; and then all Objects which are apt to excite this Pleasure are call'd immediately Good. . . Our perception of Pleasure is necessary, and nothing is Advantageous or naturally Good to us, but what is apt to raise Pleasure mediately, or immediately.³

Of course, that Hutcheson and Shaftesbury believe ϕ is no reason in itself to believe that Hume accepts ϕ . But I think we should read Hume as a hedonist about welfare or well-being rather than *strictly* a hedonist about the good *simpliciter*. First, Hume clearly possesses the concept of an individual good distinct from the impersonal good. Hume often speaks of “self-interest” (as Hutcheson discusses “Interest, Advantage, natural Good”), as in discussing the “interested obligation” to virtue in book IX of the second *Enquiry*. Hume writes: “Having explained the moral *approbation* attending merit or virtue, there remains nothing, but briefly to consider our interested *obligation* to it, and to enquire, whether every man, who has any regard to his own happiness and welfare, will not best find his account in the practice of every moral duty,” (E IX.14). Here Hume makes use not just of the concept of good *simpliciter*, but of the concepts of happiness and welfare. Given that Hume treats good and evil as pleasure and pain “in other words”, it would be strange for him not to hold that hedonism, in some form or other, is not also the proper concept of happiness or the personal good.

Second, in the first appendix of the second *Enquiry*, Hume writes:

Thus the distinct boundaries and offices of *reason* and of *taste* are easily ascertained. The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: The latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. . . Reason, being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination, by showing us the means of attaining happiness or avoiding misery. Taste, as it gives pleasure or pain, and thereby constitutes happiness or misery, becomes a motive

Virtue or Merit” in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund), 57-59.

³Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, ed. Liedhold (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2004 [1725]), II intro. 1, 86.

to action, and is the first spring or impulse to desire and volition.

(E App. 1, 21.)

According to Hume, “happiness or misery” is constituted by the faculty of *taste*, not reason (though reason will show us the proper means by which to develop our happiness). But the explanation of this refers explicitly to the fact that taste “gives pleasure or pain”. Thus *happiness*, it would appear, is constituted by pain or pleasure. And hence there is good reason to believe that Hume is some sort of hedonist about self-interest even if he is *also* an axiological hedonist (which, it seems, he clearly is).

Thus Hume is a hedonist, not just about the impersonal good but also the personal good. However, to better understand the nature of his value theory, it is worthwhile to ask a question that arises for any hedonist axiology (whether welfare or merely axiological). This question is “meta-evaluative”; it is not a question about what is valuable, but rather *how intrinsic values come to have that status*. For a hedonist, one could frame this question simply: what grounds the value of pleasure? In other words, what makes it the case, or explains, the value of pleasure and the disvalue of pain? Broadly speaking, there are two potential answers to this question. First, one might be a *subjective* hedonist. On this view, pleasure’s goodness is explained by its accordance with value-imparting pro-attitudes or sentiments. Classically, subjective hedonism claims that that which is intrinsically valuable is the object of an individual’s desires or pro-attitudes and that humankind is in agreement concerning what is the ultimate object of such value-authoritative attitudes, viz., pleasure.⁴ Second, one might be an *objective* hedonist. In other words, one might say that pleasure is good, or constitutes well-being, independently of any pro-attitude possessed by observers or evaluators. Pleasure just *is the good* and does not permit of any further grounding.⁵

⁴P. J. E. Kail refers to this as the distinction between desire-constituting and desire-determining models, i.e., hedonisms that declare pleasure ultimately valuable *because* they accord with desire, or hedonisms that claim that pleasure is ultimately valuable independently with desire, but nevertheless determine or direct desire. See P. J. E. Kail, *Projection and Realism in Hume’s Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 185. Classic versions of subjective hedonism are found in Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus”; Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1981 [1907]); J. C. B. Gosling, *Pleasure and Desire: The Case for Hedonism Reviewed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). (Gosling rejects this account of the grounding of pleasure’s value, but nevertheless holds that it is a substantive and plausible proposal.)

⁵For more on this distinction, see Dale Dorsey, “The Hedonist’s Dilemma” in *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 8 (2011).

3. *What Grounds Pleasure's Value?*

The standard reading of Hume's axiology is subjectivist.⁶ In other words, the fact of pleasure's goodness is explained or determined by the fact that pleasure is an object of value-authoritative attitudes. There is good reason to regard Hume's hedonism in precisely this way. First, Hume seems to hold that moral virtue is itself a product of approval or disapproval: "To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. This very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration. We go no farther," (T 3.1.2.3). And if Hume believes that virtue is itself a function of approval or disapproval, praise or admiration, then it would appear strange to treat his axiological theory asymmetrically. Why should moral value be dependent on the sentiments of humans, but welfare or prudential value be independent? This is especially the case if, as some read Hume, evaluative judgments are taken just to be expressions of affective or conative states.⁷ For it would seem quite false to say that moral judgments are the expression of such states of approval or disapproval *and* that judgments about the good can nevertheless be understood as true or false independently of any attitude of approval or disapproval—which, of course, just *is* the objective view.

In addition, Hume appears to consistently deny that anything could have value in and of itself apart from the operation of human sentiment.⁸ Hume writes: "If we can depend upon any principle, which we learn from philosophy, this, I think, may be considered as certain and undoubted, that there is nothing, in itself, valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed; but that these attributes arise from the particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection."⁹ Here it would appear that the ultimate standard of value *must* be "the particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection". And if this is correct, to say that pleasure is valuable, or "good" (as Hume does consistently) one must say that pleasure itself is recommended by human sentiment and affection: pleasure's value must be grounded by some authoritative pro-attitude directed toward pleasure and away from pain.

⁶See, for instance, D. A. Lloyd Thomas, "Hume and Intrinsic Value" in *Philosophy* 65 (1990), 419.

⁷See Terence Penelhum, *Hume* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 141.

⁸Hume appears to make this claim explicitly when concerned with the origin of virtue and vice. See T 3.1.1.26.

⁹"The Sceptic" in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1985 [1777]), 162.

For any sentimentalist, not all pro-attitudes will be what we might call “value-authoritative”, or possessed of the power to declare ϕ good or bad. Hume—at least on the subjective reading—is no exception. As noted previously, he groups the value-authoritative sentiments under the general heading of the faculty of *taste*. For Hume, taste is the collection of sentiments that assigns any particular object as “valuable or despicable” (E App. 1.21). Hume writes that reason “conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood”, but taste “gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue”. Taste, for Hume, “has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises, in a manner, a new creation,” (E App 1.21). And insofar as our taste itself orients toward pleasure, pleasure is declared good, and therefore constitutes the personal good, happiness, or welfare, just as particular character traits to which taste orients characterize the nature of a virtuous character.

This reading comports with the general understanding of a sentimentalist axiology: moral facts, including facts about the good, are grounded in facts about that to which human beings are attracted or which human beings approve. Anything one wishes to call “good” must be the subject of value-authoritative pro-attitudes, i.e., *taste*, of humankind.

3.1. A Problem for the Subjective Reading: Pleasure as Value-Authoritative

The subjective reading of Hume’s hedonism, however, gives rise to an interpretive puzzle. Consider Hume’s discussion of *how* the faculty of taste imparts value. Take a classic example from the *Treatise*. Hume writes: “A good composition of music and a bottle of good wine equally produce pleasure; and what is more, their goodness is determin’d merely by the pleasure” (T 3.1.2.4). But here it is obvious *how* the goodness of the composition of music and bottle of wine are determined by the pleasure: they *produce* a sentiment of pleasure, which is itself good. Our sentiments “gild and stain” the value of objects in the world insofar as those objects are good *because* they produce sentiments of pleasure. Hume holds roughly the same thing when it comes to good and evil *characters*, or moral good and evil: here the “gilding” is the result of a particular causal relation. Hume writes: “An action, or sentiment, or character is virtuous or vicious; why? because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind,” (T 3.1.2.3). Again: “virtue is distinguish’d by the pleasure, and vice by the pain, that any action, sentiment or character gives us by the mere view and contemplation,” (T 3.1.2.11).

For Hume, the process by which, say, a character or a bottle of wine

come to be regarded as good is the product of the faculty of taste, which is itself (or so it would appear) constituted by a capacity to take pleasure in individual objects or characters.¹⁰ Though these pleasures will differ in tone (insofar as moral assessment will differ from assessment of a symphony as beautiful), their having been caused by a particular object is sufficient to render that object good or valuable in a way appropriate to its kind. But herein lies the puzzle. If the goodness of a particular character, say, is just a matter of the right kind of pleasure having been caused by this particular character, it would appear that sentiments of pleasure itself does the “gilding and staining”. But notice how awkward this is for the subjective reading. If the manner in which goods are determined *as* good is by causing a particular kind of pleasure, and pleasure itself is the good, how could it be that pleasures render *themselves* valuable?

Perhaps there is solution. Value-authoritative sentiments could operate reflexively.¹¹ That is, insofar as they possess the power to determine that which is valuable or beautiful, they turn their focus inward and declare *themselves* valuable or beautiful, or constitutive of happiness or misery. Pleasure is valuable insofar as it causes a particular kind of value-authoritative pleasure. Of course, we must put this point in a way that does not end up in a regress: we don’t want it to be the case that the only method by which a particular impression of pleasure is deemed valuable is a result of having caused some other value-authoritative impression of pleasure, which itself causes a further value-authoritative impression of pleasure, etc. But there’s a better way to read the claim that pleasure is reflexively value-authoritative. According to Hume, we can also have an *idea* of pleasure, as well as particular impressions (i.e., the sentiment itself) of pleasure (T 1.3.10.2). When pleasure is considered as an idea, one might have an impression or sentiment of pleasure in the idea, which thereby grounds the fact that pleasure—not just some particular impression, but pleasure considered in the abstract—is valuable, just as one has an idea, say, of a virtue or virtuous behavior generally, and can take a value-authoritative sentiment in consideration of that. In this way, then, the subjective view treats the value of pleasure as

¹⁰Note again Hume’s claim that “[t]aste, as it gives pleasure or pain, and thereby *constitutes* happiness or misery,” (E App. 1, 21).

¹¹This proposal reflects a common account of Hume’s theory of normativity. As Korsgaard writes, for Hume, “a faculty’s verdicts are normative if the faculty meets the following test: *when the faculty itself takes its own operations for its object, it gives a positive verdict.*” (Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 62. See also Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 97-101.

an interaction between value-authoritative impressions along with ideas of pleasure.

This solution fails. In particular, this proposal appears unable to capture a number of crucial claims Hume makes regarding the epistemology of goodness. For Hume, we *perceive* goodness and that this perception itself is a motive to action. “Nature has implanted in the human mind a perception of good or evil, or in other words, of pain and pleasure, as the chief spring and moving principle of all its actions,” (T 1.3.10.2). Now for Hume, perception can refer both to impressions and ideas (T 3.1.1.3). But, as we all know, for Hume ideas are “deriv’d from impressions, and are nothing but copies and representations of them,” (T 1.1.7.5). And hence if we are to have an idea of goodness at all, we must first have an impression of goodness, from which this idea could be copied. But if this is right, though we *can* have an idea of goodness, we also *can* have a direct impression of goodness. But according to the subjective reading, this direct form of evaluative epistemology is not available. Given that our knowledge or ascertainment of goodness must function as the relation between an impression and an idea, there is no room for Hume to allow the possibility of a direct perception in the form of an impression *of goodness*. Evaluative epistemology, or so it would appear, is the result of a relation between an impression (of pleasure) and an idea (i.e., an abstract idea of pleasure itself). For Hume, our ascertainment of value can, at least, be more direct.

3.2. *A Problem for the Subjective Reading: Hedonism as Analytic*

But even if this solution to above puzzle works, there remains a challenge for the subjective reading. For Hume, the identification of goodness with pleasure and evil with pain is a matter—or so it would seem—of concept. For Hume, pain and pleasure are simply good and evil “in other words” (T 1.3.10.2; T 2.3.9.8). Indeed, throughout Hume’s discussion of the direct passions, he treats these terms as interchangeable (T 2.3.9). But it would appear odd for Hume to make a conceptual identification between pleasure and pain, good and evil, if he felt that the value of pain and pleasure *depended* upon an empirical psychological fact, viz., that the sentiments of humanity generally evaluate pleasure positively. In discussing the value of individual characters, for instance, Hume provides lengthy psychological explanations for why we should find a particular trait useful or agreeable. (See especially E V-VII.) But he appears to claim that the source of pleasure’s value is just a matter of the terms in question and offers no further psychological explanation. For this reason, we should be wary of the subjective

reading: Hume nowhere allows that the value of the hedonic states, i.e., their goodness or evil, is dependent upon a psychological explanation. But this is precisely what he *should* say if he accepts the subjective reading. But for Hume the ground of pleasure's goodness is not a contingent matter of human psychology. Pleasure simply *is* good, pain *is* evil "in other words". There is no further ground.

3.3. *Objection: Asymmetry*

It would appear, then, that there are good reasons to read Hume as an objective rather than subjective hedonist. But it is too early to conclude that we should read him this way all things considered. Two important objections to an objective reading arise.

First, if we reject a subjective reading of the value of pleasure we must read Hume as holding that the ground of value (in particular, the ground of the value of virtuous character traits and the ground of the value of pleasure) is asymmetric: pleasure, for Hume, just is *good* in a way that is independent of psychological fact. The value of particular characters, bottles of wine, symphonies, however, must be grounded by our sentimental reactions and are not valuable independent of same.¹² This may, in itself, constitute an objection to my proposal. Why should pleasure be special?

The purported asymmetry, however, is not unusual among sentimentalist writers. Compare, for instance, the following passages from Hutcheson. Opening the *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions*, Hutcheson writes: "Objects, Actions, or Events obtain the Name of *Good*, or *Evil*, according as they are the Causes, or Occasions, mediately, or immediately, of a grateful, or ungrateful *Perception* to some sensitive Nature".¹³ This passage is reminiscent of Hume's own declaration that "there is nothing, in itself, valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed; but that these attributes arise from the particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection." But for Hutcheson, the "grateful, or

¹²Kail argues that Hume embraces the objective view. However, his argument relies on the claim that Hume embraces "metaphysical hedonism" (or the claim that "only pleasure is essentially valuable and pain essentially aversion-worthy" (177)), which I think is correct, and that the best account of the connection between desire and pleasure is the claim that we desire pleasure insofar as it is good, rather than that desire imbues pleasure with intrinsic or "essential" goodness. But this says very little about what Hume *himself* thinks, especially in light of the passages that seem to indicate that value of *any* kind must be vindicated by sentiment.

¹³Francis Hutcheson, *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions, With Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. Garrett (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2002), 15.

ungrateful *Perception*” is intended to be a product of the “several *Senses* natural to us”,¹⁴ which are themselves identified as “*Determination[s] of our Minds to receive Ideas independently on our Will, and to have Perceptions of Pleasure and Pain.*”¹⁵ Thus the “grateful” perception to some sensitive nature appears, simply, to be pleasure itself: good “Objects, Actions, or Events” are good insofar as they are productive of the pleasure of one of our sensitive capacities. Hutcheson confirms this claim by holding:

The following *Definitions* of certain Words used on this Subject, may shorten our Expressions; and the *Axioms* subjoined may shew the manner of acting from *calm Desire*, with the Analogy to the *Laws of Motion*.

1. *Natural Good* is Pleasure: *Natural Evil* is Pain.
2. *Natural good Objects* are those which are apt, either mediately or immediately to give Pleasure; the former are called *Advantageous*. *Natural Evil Objects* are such as, in like manner, give pain.¹⁶

Hutcheson adopts very different evaluative stances with regard to the “natural good” (characterized by pleasure and pain) and good *objects* (such as actions or events). The goodness of the latter class is a product of our sentiments (in particular, the *pleasurable* ones). But the goodness of the former is not grounded by sentiment or a product of “sensitive nature”. For Hutcheson, it just *is the case* that pleasure is good and pain is bad. Hutcheson’s hedonism, therefore, is objective. It seems to me that Hume is saying precisely the same thing. Notice, however, that there is no incoherence or implausibility in adopting the asymmetry so described. Ultimately, the value that Hume imparts to characters or bottles of wine is *derivative*: it is derived from its capacity to cause fundamentally valuable sensations and sentiments in observers or experiencers. Indeed, in “The Sceptic”, Hume says precisely this: “even when the mind operates alone, and feeling the sentiment of blame or approbation, pronounces one object deformed or odious, another beautiful and amiable; I say that, even in this case, those qualities are not really in the objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment of that mind which blames or praises.”¹⁷

3.4. *Objection: Textual Incoherence*

¹⁴Hutcheson, 15.

¹⁵Hutcheson, 17.

¹⁶Hutcheson, 34. See also Kail, 178.

¹⁷Hume, “The Sceptic”, 163.

Places in Hume’s text suggest an objective reading. But to conclude that he is an objective hedonist on this basis is to ignore a range of passages that suggest the opposite. Most importantly, recall that in “The Sceptic”, Hume declares that “there is nothing, in itself, valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed; but that these attributes arise from the particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection”. This might be thought to cause problems for an objective reading, insofar as Hume doesn’t just say “no *objects*” are valuable in and of themselves. But rather *nothing*; nothing is valuable in and of itself without its value being grounded by value-conferring pro-attitude or sentiment.

We misread this passage if we take Hume’s claim as a rejection of objective hedonism. As is clear from the context of this essay, he intends simply to examine the value of good “objects”, rather than—to use a Hutchesonian phrase—the natural good of pleasure. Note that the topic to which the essay with which we are concerned is the various “methods of obtaining happiness”.¹⁸ In other words, Hume is seeking to provide *prudential advice*. Naturally, then, Hume is most interested in considering different “pursuits among our species”,¹⁹ or courses of life. Hence from the context of “The Sceptic”, we should read “nothing” as ranging over only objects, pursuits, actions, activities, etc., viz., the sort of thing you might *pursue* with an eye toward happiness. This is clear from the passage immediately following: “What seems the most delicious food to one animal, appears loathsome to another: What affects the feeling of one with delight, produces uneasiness in another.”²⁰ In essence, Hume is saying this: we ought to pursue those objects, activities, etc., that are most pleasurable to us. There isn’t any other fact about such pursuits that would render them valuable *other than* that they cause pleasure. This claim, however, says very little about the nature of the value of *pleasure itself*, or how pleasure gets its evaluative stripes.

3.5. A New Question

To read Hume as an objective hedonist is to uncover a new and interesting question about his value theory. Any value theory ought to provide at least a rubric to determine what intrinsic values are more valuable than others: this is a simple first-order evaluative question. Were Hume’s hedonism

¹⁸ “The Sceptic”, 160.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “The Sceptic”, 160.

subjective, however, this question would simply be answered by conducting a socio-psychological inquiry. To figure out the rank-ordering of particular pleasures (say, the pleasure of reading Buchan's *Greenmantle* versus the pleasure of listening to the Rebirth Brass Band), we must simply figure out the extent to which those pleasures are valued or desired by individuals, or some subset of value-authoritative individuals. But if Hume's account is objective, determining the relative value of pleasures is no longer a strictly psychological, but rather a philosophical, or evaluative, task. Given Hume's objective hedonism, it seems sensible to ask what his position is with respect to the relative value of individual pleasures.

There are, roughly speaking, two potential answers I will explore here. One view holds that pleasures are rank-ordered simply by their pleasurable-ness: the more pleasure, the better. This is a *quantitative* hedonism. But hedonists can consistently deny that pleasures should be rank-ordered simply on a quantitative basis.²¹ One might hold that the relative value of individual pleasures is in part dependent upon additional properties, e.g., extrinsic properties concerning the independent value of the objects in which pleasure is taken, etc. This is a *qualitative* hedonism: different kinds of pleasures are of differing quality in a way that is distinct from their differing pleasurable-ness. What is Hume's view?

4. *Is Hume's Hedonism Quantitative or Qualitative?*

It seems fair to say that the default hedonist position is that pleasures are to be rank-ordered according to their *intensity* and *duration*, i.e., by their *pleasurable-ness*.²² After all, if one values pleasure, or believes that pleasure is the good, it is natural to say that more pleasure is better than less.

And though this position is natural, it is by no means universal or conceptually required. One could consistently be a hedonist and hold that there are

²¹Of course, this claim is controversial, and has been the source of a number of influential critiques of Mill's value theory. See, for instance, Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 6th ed., 1931), 247; Ernest Albee, *A History of English Utilitarianism* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1902), 252. However, this critique clearly relies on an assumption about the nature of hedonism, viz., that any hedonist value theory must accept that more pleasure is better than less. But there's no reason to accept this as a canonical account of the nature of hedonism. For the purposes of this paper, I identify hedonism simply with the view that all and only pleasure is a benefit. How pleasures are rank-ordered is an entirely open matter.

²²Jonathan Riley writes, for instance: "ethical hedonism requires that any human capable of rational persuasion *ought* always to prefer more pleasure to less." (Riley, "Interpreting Mill's Qualitative Hedonism" in *The Philosophical Quarterly* 53 (2003), 415.)

facts *other* than the *amount* of pleasure that help to determine the relative value of individual pleasures. For instance, Shaftesbury seems to indicate that some pleasures *lack value*, given the fact that they are taken in objects that themselves have no value: “And for some low and sordid *Pleasures* of human Kind; shou’d they be ever so lastingly enjoy’d, and in the highest credit with their Enjoyers; I shou’d never afford ’em the name of *Happiness* or *Good*.”²³ Hutcheson, however, takes a more conservative stance. According to Hutcheson, “The *Value* of any Pleasure, and the *Quantity* or *Moment* of any Pain, is in a compounded Proportion of the Intenseness and Duration.”²⁴ Though Hutcheson does, in fact, claim that “low and sordid” pleasures contain less enjoyment than the “higher” pleasures, he does seem to claim that the value of any pleasure just is the quantity of its enjoyment: its intensity and duration.²⁵ Shaftesbury disagrees. Shaftesbury claims that even some very long-lasting and intense pleasures are not valuable *at all*. Where is Hume in all this?

I think we should read Hume as a qualitative hedonist. Note that, for Hume, *taste* (in particular, the sentiments of pleasure that constitute the faculty of taste) constitutes happiness and misery. But Hume famously suggests, first, that there is a very wide variation in taste. According to Hume, “The great variety of Taste, as well as of opinion, which prevails in the world, is too obvious not to have fallen under every one’s observation.”²⁶ But Hume does not claim that though there is a great variety of taste there is, as it were, no accounting for it. Rather, Hume holds that “[i]t is natural for us to seek a *Standard of Taste*; a rule, by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least, a decision, afforded, confirming one sentiment, and condemning another,” (ST 229). Hume lists a number of potential factors that distinguish a finely tuned and appropriate taste from an inappropriate one. Among others, Hume lists “delicacy”, “practice”, “comparison”, and, importantly, a lack of “prejudice”. Writes Hume: “Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true

²³Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, II, 227.

²⁴Hutcheson, *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. Garrett (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2002), V i, 87.

²⁵For a defense of this reading of Hutcheson, see Dale Dorsey, “Hutcheson’s Deceptive Hedonism” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48 (2010).

²⁶“The Standard of Taste” in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, op. cit., 226. Hereafter: “ST”.

standard of taste and beauty,” (ST 241).

The importance of Hume’s discussion of the standard of taste for our first-order understanding of his hedonism is, I think, significant. If taste constitutes happiness and misery and permits of a recognized *standard*, i.e., if some taste can be deformed, it seems natural to say that pleasure that fails to meet the standard of taste is less valuable than pleasure that constitutes a faculty of taste that, in fact, meets the standard. After all, why believe that such perverted or deformed sentiments themselves are *just as valuable* as sentiments that are, instead, “perfected by comparison”, etc? Why believe that a faculty of taste that is itself out of whack produces pleasure that is just as good as pleasure that arises from a faculty of taste that isn’t out of whack? It would seem natural for Hume to claim that pleasure taken in Singer-Sargent’s “Portrait of Madame X” rather than C. M. Coolidge’s “New Year’s Eve in Dogville” or a collection of “Precious Moments” figurines, is simply better.

This, then, is the reading I propose: pleasures that constitute an adequately functioning faculty of taste (i.e., pleasures that conform to the standard of taste) are more valuable or “higher” than pleasures that constitute a deformed faculty of taste in a way that goes beyond a consideration of their relative quantity.

4.1. *First Argument: the Derivative Value of Good Objects*

Besides its natural fit, I think there are two arguments for this reading of Hume’s hedonism. First: Hume insists that there is a particular relationship between the *objects* of value and the *value-authoritative sentiments* that determine the value of such objects. Allow me to quote again this passage: “even when the mind operates alone, and feeling the sentiment of blame or approbation, pronounces one object deformed or odious, another beautiful and amiable; I say that, even in this case, those qualities are not really in the objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment of that mind which blames or praises,” (“The Sceptic”, 163). As noted before, the value of objects is derivative for Hume, derived from the *value of the pleasures they cause*. And hence any value possessed by individual *objects* must ultimately rest in the *fundamental* value of the pleasures one maintains upon contemplation (the sentiments of “blame or approbation”, etc.). But then Hume cannot say that the pleasure that arises from a consideration of “New Year’s Eve in Dogville” would be *just as good* as the pleasure that praises “Portrait of Madame X”. The beauty of the latter outshines that of the former, and hence any value that is accorded to the pleasure that praises the former

rather than the latter must be substantially diminished in value.

Let me put this point in a slightly different way. If the value found in the objects is derivative of the value of the sentiments, Hume, on a quantitative reading, would have no cause to say that there should be a standard of taste beyond, simply, that which provides more pleasure rather than pain. This is because “Portrait of Madame X” and “New Years Eve in Dogville” can generate the *same amount* of pleasure depending on one’s taste. And hence if the value of the object is to be found in the value of the sentiments, there is no cause for saying that we should attune our sentiments toward the Singer-Sargent: it generates the same amount of pleasure as “New Years Eve in Dogville”, and hence there is no grounds for claiming that it is superior, or that a superior taste would be oriented toward it. But he does, in fact, say that there *is* a standard of taste that goes beyond the quantity of pleasure that faculty produces and that a superior taste would be oriented toward it. And hence the value of the pleasures that arise by virtue of a faulty faculty of taste cannot maintain the same value as pleasures that arise by virtue of a properly operating faculty of taste.

This argument is a touch complicated, so it would help, I think, to put it schematically:

1. The value of objects is derivative of the value of the pleasure they cause. (“The Sceptic”, 163.)
2. Good objects (such as good wine, good paintings, etc.) are praised by the sentiments of a properly operating faculty of taste. (“Of the Standard of Taste”.)
3. If Hume is a quantitative hedonist, then (by (1)), the value of objects is determined by the *amount* of pleasure they cause.
4. Hence (by (2)), if Hume is a quantitative hedonist, there is no standard of taste beyond a proper orientation to that which causes more rather than less pleasure.
5. But the standard of taste goes beyond a proper orientation to that which causes more rather than less pleasure. (“The Standard of Taste”, 229-30.)
6. Hence Hume is not a quantitative hedonist; pleasures that constitute a properly operating faculty of taste are more valuable than those that do not.

4.2. *Second Argument: The Prudential Value of Virtue*

The first argument for Hume as a qualitative hedonist appeals to his claim that the value of objects is derivative of the value of the value-authoritative

sentiments. The second argument, however, appeals to Hume's account of the prudential value of virtue. In "The Sceptic", Hume suggests that

the happiest disposition of mind is the *virtuous*: or, in other words, that which leads to action and employment, renders us sensible to the social passions, steels the heart against the assaults of fortune, reduces the affections to a just moderation, makes our own thoughts an entertainment to us, and inclines us rather to the pleasures of society and conversation, than to those of the senses. ("The Sceptic", 168.)

Hume notes a variety of benefits brought by virtue. Not only does it "steel the heart against the assaults of fortune", but it also "inclines us" to "the pleasures of society and conversation" rather than to those of the senses.

One might be inclined to believe that Hume's latter claim is direct evidence of a form of qualitative hedonism. Why else might he believe that we are better-off with the pleasures of society rather than, e.g., the pleasures of the senses? And while I think this is the right spin to put on the thing, nothing comes so easy. Prior to this passage, Hume notes that the pursuit of the sensorial pleasures is "much more subject to satiety and disgust" ("The Sceptic", 167). And hence one might think that the prudential benefits of virtue might be read in a more straightforward, and quantitative-hedonism-friendly, way: being inclined to the pleasures of the senses, though they are no less valuable in themselves, tends to generate far less pleasure overall, insofar as doing so is subject to the aforementioned handicaps.

But Hume goes further than this. Immediately following his praise of the prudential value of virtue, Hume considers someone who is *insensible* to (read: does not take pleasure in) virtue:

On the other hand, where one is born of so perverse a frame of mind, of so callous an insensible a disposition, as to have no relish for virtue and humanity, no sympathy with his fellow-creatures, no desire of esteem and applause; such a one must be allowed entirely incurable, nor is there any remedy in philosophy. He reaps no satisfaction but from low and sensual objects, or from the indulgence of malignant passions: . . . He has not even that sense or taste, which is requisite to make him desire a better character: For my part, I know not how I should address myself to such a one, or by what arguments I should endeavor to reform him. Should I tell him of the inward satisfaction which results from laudable and humane actions, the delicate pleasure

of disinterested love and friendship, the lasting enjoyments of a good name and an established character, he might still reply, that these were, perhaps, pleasures to such as were susceptible of them; but that, for his part, he finds himself of a quite different turn and disposition. (“The Sceptic”, 169-70).

In this passage, Hume considers someone who appears insensible of the social passions, that is, someone who does not take pleasure in “esteem and applause” or the other features that generally accompany the possession of virtue. Rather, his pleasure is in “low and sensual objects” or “malignant” passions. For Hume, the difference between the lover of virtue and this unfortunate character is a difference in taste: the latter is not “susceptible” to the pleasures of an established character, love and friendship, etc. He is “of a quite different turn and disposition”.

Were Hume a quantitative hedonist, we should have expected one of two things. He should have *either* said that, in fact, philosophy *does* afford a “remedy”: the joys of character are, perhaps, longer-lasting, or produce substantially more intense enjoyment than, say, the joys of the senses or immoral behavior. But he doesn’t do this: there is no appeal, say, to greater amount of pleasure afforded to the virtuous character—this is because, depending on one’s taste (i.e., “turn and disposition”), the virtuous character need not produce a *greater amount* of pleasure. He explicitly *denies* that any such appeal could be made. Second, failing that, he should have backed down from his previous claim, viz., that virtue is in fact a prudential benefit to all. But he doesn’t do this either. Not only does he not take back his previous assertion that “the happiest disposition of the mind is the *virtuous*”, he continues to assert that this individual, pleasurable though his life may be, is *unhappy*: “I must repeat it; my philosophy affords no remedy in such a case, nor could I do any thing but lament this person’s unhappy condition,” (“The Sceptic”, 170). But the only explanation, if Hume is not to reject hedonism altogether, of Hume’s claim that the vicious person is not happy despite the fact that he or she may take the same amount of happiness as the virtuous person is to hold that there is something problematic, i.e., something less valuable, about the pleasures maintained by “such a one”, who is of a different “turn and disposition” relative to the virtuous. Given the weight of the evidence, then, it seems to me clear that Hume is a qualitative, not quantitative, hedonist.

4.3. A New Question

The fact of Hume’s objective hedonism gave rise to a question about its first-order structure. In fact, it seems plausible to say that Hume is a qualitative hedonist rather than a more straightforward quantitative hedonist. However, to say that Hume is a qualitative hedonist rather than a quantitative hedonist gives rise to yet a third question: what *explains* the value of the “higher” pleasures, or the pleasures of an adequately functioning faculty of taste? Why should those pleasures be better? This question is important. Because Hume relies on a qualitative hedonism to help explain the prudential value of virtue, one might believe that his appeal to this view is strictly *ad hoc*. And hence we should ask, of Hume, whether there is any independent explanation of the higher rather than lower pleasures.

5. Hume’s Hedonism and Human Nature

Hume’s hedonism divides higher and lower pleasures by the extent to which those pleasures are the result of, or constitute, a properly operating faculty of taste. But if this is correct, an explanation of the value of higher pleasures in comparison to the lower pleasures is, for Hume, equivalent to the question: why is this particular standard *the* standard? What is the evaluative significance of a faculty of taste that lacks prejudice, maintains delicacy, practice, and comparison? Once we have determined the source of the authority of the standard of taste as Hume construes it, we will have an explanation of the relative value of the pleasures that *constitute* that standard. One clue, however, is given in the second *Enquiry*. Here Hume writes that the standard of taste, as opposed to the standard of reason, “arising from the internal frame and constitution of animals, is ultimately derived from that Supreme Will, which bestowed on each being its peculiar nature, and arranged the several classes and orders of existence,” (E App. 1.21). For Hume, the standard of taste—at least for humans—is an aspect of their internal frame and constitution: in other words, their *nature*. This point is echoed in “Of the Standard of Taste”: “The general principles of taste are uniform in human nature: Where men vary in their judgments, some defect or perversion in the faculties may commonly be remarked; proceeding either from prejudice, from want of practice, or want of delicacy; and there is just reason for approving one taste, and condemning another,” (ST, 243; see also ST 232).

For Hume, a faculty of taste that does not conform to the true standard is “defective”—defective, precisely, because it does not conform to the general

principles found in human nature.²⁷ It would seem, then, that for Hume the standard of taste—correct sentiment—is determined *by* those sentiments, experience of pleasure and pain, that are present in human nature. Thus one might respond to the question posed in this section in the following way: the normative significance of the “higher” pleasures, for Hume, is explained by the fact that those pleasures are experienced by those whose sentiments conform to human nature. They are the pleasures *of human nature*; other pleasures, such as the empty amusements of luxury and expense, are *defects*, and are worth less because of it.

That human nature should play an important role in Hume’s axiological theory should come as no surprise. It plays such a role in Hume’s moral theory, as well. For instance, Hume writes that: “no action can be virtuous, or morally good, unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it, distinct from the sense of its morality,” (T 3.2.1.7). Hume’s “undoubted maxim” grants a role not just to our *motivations*, but rather the motivations found in *human nature*, and hence grants human nature *in particular* a role in determining the applicability of virtue to particular actions. So, it would be unsurprising for Hume to hold that human nature also plays a role in determining the value of individual pleasures. Of course, this argument is not knock-down. But to say that Hume treats the pleasures experienced by an adequately functioning faculty of taste as “higher” *because* those pleasures exhibit a particular property (i.e., being the pleasures of human nature) explain the axiological distinction between Hume’s higher and lower pleasures, and comports with Hume’s general interest in the significance of human nature for moral theory more generally.

By way of a conclusion to this section, it may help to note that, for Hume, the explanation of the comparative value of “higher” pleasures draws parallels with the theory of welfare sometimes known as “perfectionism”. Perfectionism holds that a person’s life goes better to the extent that he or she *perfects* (or displays to a greater degree) the capacities inherent in the classes in which that person participates. As most commonly articulated, perfectionism holds that a person’s life goes better to the extent that he or she develops and exercises the capacities inherent in human nature.²⁸ These capacities are generally assumed to be rational capacities,²⁹ but need not be

²⁷Importantly, Hume believes that these defects are common, and hence that individuals who possess the standard of taste in perfect fashion are rare. See ST 232, 241.

²⁸Cf. Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), ch. 1; Dale Dorsey, “Three Arguments for Perfectionism” in *Noûs* 44 (2010).

²⁹Cf. Hurka, ch. 2; David Brink, “The Significance of Desire” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, v. 3, ed. Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

characterized as such.³⁰ For Hume, the nature of humanity, or at least the nature of humanity that is significant for determining the value of individual pleasures, is not fixed by humanity's rational nature but rather humanity's *sentimental* nature.

On balance, I think we should read in Hume not just a form of hedonism about happiness or welfare, but a sophisticated and pathbreaking form of qualitative hedonism. Not only does Hume offer an axiological distinction between higher and lower pleasures, he helpfully explains this distinction in terms of their relative conformity to the pleasures of human nature. This is not just a significant result concerning our understanding of Hume's value theory, but a legitimate view worth taking seriously in its own right.

6. *The Sensible Knave in Light of Hume's Qualitative Hedonism*

I have so far argued that Hume is a hedonist of extraordinary sophistication. Not only is he a qualitative hedonist, but he offers an intriguing form of perfectionist hedonism. In addition to contributing directly to our understanding of his moral philosophy, however, reading Hume's hedonism in this way pays substantial dividends when it comes to answering a classic question surrounding Hume's treatment of justice.

The puzzle runs like this. As noted before, Hume devotes the second part of the ninth book of the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, to the question of "our interested *obligation*" to virtue, i.e., "whether every man, who has any regard to his own happiness and welfare, will not best find his account in the practice of every moral duty," (E 9.2.14). According to Hume, "[t]he peculiar advantage of" his account of the nature of the virtues "seems to be, that it furnishes the proper mediums for that purpose," (E 9.2.16). So Hume appears to say that, in fact, virtuous behavior is in the interest of the virtuous (as noted above, this claim is also reflected in "The Sceptic"). And while Hume thinks that it is easy to show that this fact holds for *most* of the virtues, we hit a snag when it comes to *justice*: "Treating vice with the greatest candour, and making it all possible concessions, we must acknowledge, that there is not, in any instance, the smallest pretext for giving it the preference above virtue, with a view to self-interest; except, perhaps, in the case of justice, where a man, taking things in a certain light, may often seem to be a loser by his integrity," (E 9.2.22). The puzzle, then, would be that this person appears not to have any interested obligation to

³⁰Hurka, for instance, includes *physical* as well as rational capacities in the account of human nature.

virtue; Hume has failed in his own stated goals.

Hume's discussion of the *sensible knave*, viz., a person who holds that "*honesty is the best policy*", but nevertheless "is liable to many exceptions" has been the subject of exhaustive comment. Some, focusing on the following passage, seem to believe that Hume simply gives up providing any answer to the knave. Jason Baldwin, for instance, holds that the sensible knave is just an exception to the general rule that virtue is prudentially valuable.³¹ As Hume states, "I must confess, that, if a man think, that this reasoning much requires an answer, it will be a little difficult to find any, which will to him appear satisfactory and convincing," (E 9.2.23). Others hold that Hume, in fact, can answer the knave in a more straightforward way. Gerald Postema, for instance, claims that the sensible knave has a perfectly good prudential motivation to conform to justice, i.e., the esteem of himself and others.³² We may be forced to read Hume in one of these ways. But it is worth noting that neither is particularly attractive. The first, because Hume never retreats from his claim that virtue is in the interest of the virtuous, and in fact *explicitly* claims that his own system can show that "every man" will best advance his own happiness and welfare by conforming to virtue (E XI.16). Had he been unable to show this, he would not have established his own stated conclusion. The second, because immediately after this paragraph Hume notes that he has *nothing to say* to the knave, just as he has nothing to say to the person who is of a "different turn and disposition" from the virtuous in "The Sceptic". Had Hume believed that there was more pleasure to be found in virtue, for any reason, this would have provided a sufficient answer to the challenge of the knave, and he could have addressed this very reasoning (which, after all, is supposed to direct us toward greater happiness, cf. E App. 1.21) to the knave himself. Hume's burden of argument in this passage, therefore, is to show that the sensible knave is worse-off than the just individual *even if* the sensible knave is perfectly successful in carrying out his plans and practice, and even if there is more pleasure, for the knave, to be found in injustice.

If Hume is a qualitative hedonist, however, we have the power to read his discussion of the sensible knave in a way that simply and straightforwardly vindicates his main conclusion.³³ Take the final paragraph:

³¹See, for instance, Jason Baldwin, "Hume's Knave and the Interests of Justice" in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (2004).

³²Gerald Postema, "Hume's Response to the Sensible Knave" in *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 5 (1988). See also Annette Baier, "Artificial Virtues and Equally Sensible Non-Knaves: A Response to Gauthier" in *Hume Studies* 18 (1992), 430-1.

³³The following argument is foreshadowed in Dale Dorsey, "Hume's Internalism Recon-

But were [the sensible knave] 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 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 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. (E 9.2.25.)

Here Hume describes the sensible knave as “the greatest dupe”. In providing a reason for this conclusion, he notes the distinction between the “invaluable enjoyment of a character” and the “empty amusements of luxury and expense”. This should sound familiar. Hume is indicting the sensible knave for failing to possess the proper *taste*. According to Hume, however successful the sensible knave is at procuring these “empty amusements”, the sensible knave will *not* be successful at procuring a better life as compared to the life of virtue. Why? Because the pleasures of virtue are *more valuable*; a person who maintains delicacy, discernment, a lack of prejudice, etc., will enjoy character more than the pleasures of “worthless toys and gewgaws.”³⁴

Note that Hume addresses himself to the “honest man”, and in so doing claims that the sensible knave is the “greatest dupe”. Were Hume a quantitative hedonist, one would have expected that his comments here would beg the question in favor of the prudential value of virtue: after all, the sensible knave will presumably (given that the sensible knave is “ever so successful” at generating the enjoyments of luxury and expense) disagree that he or she is the “greatest dupe”, and will instead say the very same thing about the honest man. But if we read him as a qualitative hedonist, we have the resources to make sense of this passage. Hume is unable to address himself directly to the sensible knave, because *reasoning* will convince the sensible knave to operate otherwise. What must be addressed in the sensible knave

sidered” in *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 3 (2008), 16-20.

³⁴Worth noting in this connection is that Hume explicitly states that an honest man will *seem* to be a loser by his integrity. Hume spends the rest of this section arguing that, in fact, this is a mere seeming: the sensible knave maintains pleasures that are worth *less*.

is not his faulty *reasoning* but rather his *taste*. And insofar as one cannot *reason* one's way to an adequately operating faculty of taste (ST 231) one cannot, presumably, convince the sensible knave to alter his pursuit other than by altering his taste (by, for instance, practice, delicacy, lack of prejudice, etc.). Thus it would appear that Hume's perfectionist hedonism helps us understand his treatment of the sensible knave, and his general claim that virtue is a benefit, and vice a burden (even if the vicious is of a "quite different turn and disposition").

Hume's treatment of the sensible knave is, if we read Hume as accepting a form of qualitative hedonism, utterly unmysterious. For this reason, Hume's discussion of the sensible knave supports my reading of his hedonism. In short, Hume's hedonism is, first, objective: he holds that pleasure and pain are identical to good and evil, and this is independent of any preference or pro-attitude. Second, Hume's hedonism is qualitative. He holds that the pleasure taken by an adequately operating faculty of taste are better than pleasures taken by a poorly functioning faculty of taste, or a faculty that is not practiced, delicate, etc. Third, the proper explanation of Hume's axiological distinction between higher and lower pleasures is an appeal to the evaluative authority of human nature. To accept this view is to explain a passage in Hume's writing that have puzzled those who have read Hume as accepting a subjectivist, or crude hedonist, account of the nature of prudential value. This is enough, I think, to entitle my reading to very serious consideration.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Hume's axiology is an extraordinarily sophisticated qualitative hedonism, which derives, ultimately, from a hybrid of hedonism and perfectionism. This reading, though it is contrary to the widely accepted subjectivist account of Hume's value theory, helps to explain a number of puzzling passages in Hume, and helps to vindicate Hume's own response to the sensible knave in a way that is fully compatible with Hume's goals and self-imposed argumentative handicaps.

There are a number of questions that might still arise when thinking about Hume's hedonism. In particular, one might ask about the metaphysical nature pleasure as Hume conceives it.³⁵ In addition, there are further questions that we might ask of Hume's qualitative hedonism of the sort

³⁵See Stephen D. Hudson, "Humean Pleasures Reconsidered" in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 5 (1975).

that we would ask about any form of qualitative hedonism. In particular, how much more are the “higher” pleasures worth? Should we be willing to trade any amount of the lower pleasures for the higher? This question is also beyond the reach of this paper. (Admittedly, it is difficult to maintain Hume’s confidence in the prudential value of virtue as compared to vice unless one is also willing to grant *very* heavy axiological weight to the “higher” as opposed to “lower” pleasures. But much more should be said to come up with anything like a full picture of the axiological relationship between these pleasures, for Hume.) Even with these questions unanswered, however, it seems to me that uncovering a sophisticated and principled account of qualitative hedonism in Hume’s account of happiness or prudential value is a result worth comment.