

On the Origin of Hume's Philosophy in the Passions

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Abstract: Hume's longest analysis of man's rational faculty— Book 1 of *A Treatise of Human Nature* 1—"concludes" with philosophy seemingly pronounced illegitimate, just before Hume then puzzlingly resumes the philosophic life. I argue that the section serves a crucial function in Hume's overall project: it guides thinkers through a series of introspections, leading them to both reconceive and reorient themselves as driven by the passion of curiosity. This oddly truth-directed passion redefines both reason's relationship to the passions and the nature of philosophy. Though reason and passion are prima facie antagonistic, I argue that the greater role Hume gives to the passions is the precondition for his subsequent justification of moral-political philosophy as oriented towards wisdom rather than merely towards pleasure. I then show how this justification for philosophy illuminates Hume's connection of liberal education to liberal politics, and his political philosophy's emphasis on liberal maxims.

Written for the *Smith, Hume, Liberalism, and Esotericism* project.

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Hume frequently refers to nature's secrets, suggesting he endorses Heraclitus's famous maxim: nature loves to hide.¹ Apparently imitating nature, Hume leaves a key insight concerning the nature of man's mind opaque in *A Treatise of Human Nature*.² Though Book 1 of *Treatise*, "Of the Understanding," provides Hume's most sustained analysis of man's intellect, only in the conclusion of Book 2, "Of the Passions," does Hume disclose that a passion—curiosity—is "the first source of all our enquiries" (2.3.10.1).³ This central claim's only clear precedent comes in Book 1's conclusion, when Hume remarks that "the origin of [his] philosophy" is the pleasure philosophy provides him (2.3.10.1, 1.4.7.12).⁴ Since he sees an idea's origin as central to the proper understanding of it, Hume's silence concerning philosophy's origin in the passions is puzzling.

This silence is all the more remarkable given the stakes. Hume famously, albeit ambiguously, claims that "reason is, and ought only to be a slave of the passions" (2.3.3.4). But philosophy's legitimacy as the quest for wisdom hinges upon whether thinking is anything more than a passion's nonrational pursuit of pleasure.⁵ If the pleasure of thought is not inextricably tied to a rationally justifiable pursuit of wisdom, then philosophy, the love and pursuit of wisdom, is illusory. Philosophy would be an incoherent way of life. And, of more widespread concern, if social-political philosophy is not directed towards truth, then there would be no

¹ I am indebted to Erik Matson, the participants at the 2018 conference on this volume's theme, and the reviewers of this special issue for providing valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this article. Gratitude is further due to Jane Shaw Stroup for her patient editorial work.

² Benardete terms this reason for opaque writing "metaphysical esotericism" (Benardete 2000, 409). Melzer gets close to this motive in his account of pedagogical esotericism (Melzer 2014, 232-4). However, Melzer's overall focus is on the potential knower's situation—viz., his starting point within the realm of the "cave of opinion or convention"—rather than the nature of that which one seeks to know. The distinction between metaphysical and pedagogical esotericism is worth emphasizing because I, like Pruffer, consider the uncovering of human nature's essentially elusive character—quite aside from any additional elusiveness arising from received opinions coloring our experience of human nature—to be central to *Treatise*.

³ These numbers correspond to Book 2, Part 3, Section 10, Paragraph 1 of *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Similarly, I will refer to passages in Hume's *Enquiry concerning the Human Understanding* (hereafter *EHU*) and *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (hereafter *EPM*) by section and paragraph number. References to Hume's *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* (hereafter *EMPL*) cite the page numbers in Miller's (1985) edition.

⁴ Hereafter, I will refer to Book 1 of *A Treatise of Human Nature* simply as *Treatise 1*, and so on.

⁵ Ainslie likewise takes the philosophical enterprise's theoretical justification to be this section's animating question (Ainslie 2015, 7, 219). However, he frames the issue differently. His focus on the cognitive reorientation neglects the in-tandem passionate reorientation. The fundamental change according to Ainslie is a change in "the model of the mind philosophers endorse" and the different "theoretical system[s]" this produces (7).

possible ascent from membership in a party of passionate interest to genuinely understanding political life and perhaps thereby refining it for the better. My intention in this article is to elucidate the way in which Hume ties the pleasure of thought to a rationally justifiable pursuit of wisdom, and the distinctive understanding of philosophy that this tie entails. These epistemic roots of Hume's approach to social-political philosophy are the vantage point from which we can understand the forcefulness of Hume's political liberalism.

Hume portrays this crisis of skepticism in *Treatise 1*'s dramatic climax (1.4.7.1-7). Here, Hume concluded that reason cannot justify itself, causing him to throw his hands up at the very possibility of philosophy. Hume reached this turning point, in brief, because *Treatise 1* showed that reason and belief depended upon the imagination and upon feelings. Consequently, reason could not approximate the certainty that was modern philosophy's hallmark for knowledge. My approach to showing how Hume overcame this crisis of philosophy's legitimacy is to judge the three ways of life Hume considered adopting after this crisis (1.4.7.8-15). Each way of life—even those Hume ultimately rejects—clarifies human nature. These insights prove crucial for reevaluating the nature of philosophy as a human activity. But before I begin that analysis, let me explain why this passage merits our focus, and sketch how and why it is esoteric.

If one had to pick a natural focus for understanding the relationship between reason and passion when philosophizing, *Treatise 2*'s final section, "Of Curiosity, or the Love of Truth," might seem more appropriate. But *Treatise 1*'s concluding section is, in fact, preferable because 1.4.7.8-15 represents the first stage of Hume's evaluation of philosophy's origin in the passions. It supplies the new conceptual framework for *Treatise 2*, including the framework for 2.3.10's account of the relationship between passion and reason in philosophy (cf. Kemp Smith 2005, 159, 218-223; Baier 1991, 1-2, 24; Ainslie 2015, 5). "Of Curiosity," consequently, should be considered a refinement building upon 1.4.7.8-15's account of the role of reason and passion in philosophy. A sufficient account of 1.4.7.8-15 must, then, precede an analysis of "Of Curiosity" (Harris 2009, 135).

Although 1.4.7.8-15 is thus singularly important, it has been subject to surprisingly little analysis (in contrast to 1.4.7.1-7) (Baier 1991, 171-3). There are two reasons. Many undervalue the passions' *contribution* to the process of thinking, and instead focus on it as the object of thought (Buckle 2012, 187; Radcliff 2015). When acknowledging philosophy's origin in the

passions, scholars tend to fall back on Hume's claim that philosophy is more useful and agreeable than the alternative (superstition), considering this a sufficient foundation to understand Hume's moral-political philosophy (Ardal 1989, ix, xxiv-v; Baier 1991, 130, 138). Even so, Hume's claim raises essential questions. How could Hume's activity qualify as philosophy if its core purpose is not to satisfy our quench for wisdom? And how could satisfy this quench, given the skeptical challenges raised in the first half of 1.4.7? By what means can Hume's conception of philosophy avoid relapsing into self-destructive skepticism?⁶ The usual reading, as Hume simply changing his emotional attitude toward philosophy, fails to address this crucial question of philosophy's theoretical prospects.⁷

Though the term "esotericism" is controversial, that 1.4.7 is esoteric—as I understand the term—is less so. Scholars widely acknowledge 1.4.7's multilevel character: the defining feature of esotericism's predominant form (Melzer 2014, 34).⁸ At its most obvious level, 1.4.7 does not say enough. Key points are presented in metaphors that must be unpacked (Melzer 2014, 307). *Treatise 1*'s coolly analytic air is replaced by a dramatically passionate tone—the cause and effect of which passions, left largely unstated by Hume, must be inferred by the reader (Melzer 2014, 320).⁹ Its dramatic structure is 1.4.7's most commonly appreciated esoteric device (Ainslie 2015, 218; Box 1990, 97; Williams 2004, 267). The section's first half revisits *Treatise 1*'s conclusions, but with a twist: they now lead Hume, the tragic figure in this drama, to reject reason, which appears destroyed by *Treatise 1*'s attempt to perfect it (Melzer 2014, 321; Baier 1991, viii; Merrill 2015a, 17-18). In the section's second half, Hume's tragic haze dissipates to reveal his sanguine renewal¹⁰ of philosophy. Understanding Hume's purpose requires that the

⁶ Ribeiro vividly articulates the probability and severity of this threat (Ribeiro 2009, 218).

⁷ Baier, for example, claims this section establishes a "mental state stable enough to serve to launch Books Two and Three" (Baier 1991, 24). She focuses upon the emotional-social aspect of this mental state, and the conception of philosophy being left behind. But she does not provide a corresponding account of the new conception of philosophy Hume is developing, or how one's attitude and conceptual framework develop in tandem with one another (Baier 1991, 24-27, cp. 159).

⁸ Some have proposed using the term "rhetorical sophistication," rather than "esotericism," to avoid the common misgivings associated with the latter term. I do not see what would be essentially lost by this substitution. Melzer's evidence and his classification of the motives for such rhetorical sophistication is indeed invaluable. But since "esotericism" generally evokes the idea of only one type of esotericism—political esotericism, to whose purpose we today are generally quite averse—"rhetorical sophistication" may in fact provide a clearer impression (e.g., Price 1965, 58).

⁹ See Melzer concerning the role of such devices in making ideas intentionally obscure in order to require the reader's active understanding (Melzer 2014, 299, 307-8; cf. Box 1990, 92-98).

¹⁰ "Renewal" indicates the delicious ambiguity: in what way it is a *resurrection*, and in what way it is entirely new?

reader unpack each of this drama's stages.¹¹ This is further complicated by Hume's use of other rhetorical devices: Hume is frustratingly *terse*, declaring that "Human Nature is the only science of man" without apparent justification (1.4.7.14, Melzer 2014, 305-6). And he is admirably *ambiguous*: providing little clarity about how pleasure originates philosophy, or the way in which his renewal of philosophy is "careless" and "truly skeptical" (1.4.7.12, 14; Melzer 2014, 305-6). For these reasons, if we were to put 1.4.7.1-5's statements in the form 'Hume claims X about Y'—without specifying in each instance 'Hume' as the Hume of a particular stage in this drama, or without clarifying which sense of X or type of Y we should take him to mean, the passage would be riddled with *contradiction* (Melzer 2014, 302; Baier 1991, 26-27). The most glaring instance of this is Hume's opposing claims that "all those who reason or believe anything *certainly* are [fools]" and that philosophy provides us the hope of establishing opinions that can withstand "the most critical examination" (1.4.7.10, 14).

This raises the question: *why* would Hume use these devices? 1.4.7's structure as a first-person drama affects Hume's reader in a distinctive way: it invites her to enter this drama herself—and to enter it with emotional investment, since like Hume we desire to use reason to see ourselves and the world more clearly.¹² This suggests Hume is particularly concerned that in establishing the philosophy's true nature he avoid abstruse philosophy's common problem of using "words for ideas, and talk[ing] instead of thinking in [one's] reasoning" (1.2.5.21). Were we to receive a straightforward account of the relationship between one's reason and one's passions as a passive reader, we would not genuinely understand it. A first-person experience of the successive states—each partly intellectual and partly emotional—leading from the tragic rejection of reason to philosophy's sanguine renewal is required. We must, so to speak, live inside of each one and discover its principles for ourselves (cf. Melzer 2014, 216). 1.4.7's dramatic structure, its ambiguities, and its contradictions serve the pedagogical function of motivating the reader's active engagement, on the basis of which one can arrive not only at a

¹¹ Its placement as a "Conclusion of This Book," despite being in many ways disjointed from that book, suggests Book 1 must be reread in light of it (Melzer 2014, 321; cf. Danford 1990, 56). I indicate only a few key ways in which 1.4.7 revises *Treatise* 1.

¹² Danford (1990) and Pruffer (1993) both adeptly captures the need for this first-person involvement in the *Treatise* for understanding Hume's treatment of reason. Box identifies Hume's artful presentation of himself as if he were "in the act of thinking" with the essay genera, but fails to explain why Hume should be "less interested in expounding his system than in self-portrayal" in his "Conclusion to this Book" (Box 1990, 97). Consequently, Box thinks that 1.4.7 is "engaging in something other than his "close examination" of *Treatise*'s proper subject: it is a "diversion" (Box 1990, 101-5).

better understanding of philosophy, but of oneself as philosophically engaged. In the final section of this paper, I will show how this pedagogical reason dovetails with a second, political reason Hume uses these devices.

I. Option One: Reject Philosophy

In the wake of 1.4.7.1-7 skeptical crisis, the first way of life Hume attempts is one of intellectual and practical conventionalism. It originates in an emotional rather than rational rejection of reason and philosophy. When one has no “tolerable prospect of arriving ... at truth and certainty,” despair is one’s natural response (1.4.7.10, “Introduction” 9). The desire for truth is replaced by a positive aversion to philosophic inquiry and a pleasure in common life. In this frame of mind, one limits one’s reason to directly serving common life, where only “natural and agreeable” errors can arise (1.4.7.10). This way of life thereby sacrifices reason’s highest ambition, to find “the original and ultimate principle,” to preserve reason’s remnants: the “common sense” of practical men (1.4.7.5, 10).

Hume signals his rejection of this way of life in calling it “the sentiments of [his] spleen and indolence” (1.4.7.11). But rather than explaining this rejection, this phrase raises a question: if reason could not be justified as our proper guide, why not be guided by these feelings? On what grounds should we reject splenetic sentiments? Hume’s rejection is practical rather than rational: it is an unsustainable life. Though Hume tries to hold an “indolent belief in the general maxims of the world,” his energetically inquisitive disposition lingers (1.4.7.10). To end this internal discord, Hume considers destroying the books and papers that fuel his intellectual disposition and resolving to prevent philosophy from ever undermining the “pleasures of life” (1.4.7.10). But this willful resolution is indeed insufficient: his intellect would remain even if his library was ash. This anti-philosophic inclination is not on its own strong enough to conquer the counter-inclination to philosophize.

So, Hume attempts to actively suppress this inclination to philosophize by turning reason on itself. But fortifying this splenetic life from the inclination to philosophize, as Hume adeptly captures in the second half of this paragraph, requires abstruse reflection on man’s intellectual situation, and a *certainty* (Hume’s emphasis) that reasoning is foolish because it necessarily leads, sooner or later, to the skeptical crisis represented in 1.4.7.1-7 (1.4.7.10, cf. Livingston 1998, 40). The “blind submission” to custom is impossible for the philosophically inclined. In

practice, this way of life consists of an ever-tenuous alliance between one's anti-philosophic nature and extremely skeptical philosophy against the ever-present threat of positive philosophy's insurrection. Precisely because this alliance is necessary, one cannot establish a way of life separate from philosophy. Its unsustainable 'victory' is always as much of a victory for its adversary as for itself. The bedrock of Hume's rejection of this way of life, then, is its lack of fit with the more permanent disposition of the intellectually inclined (cf. 1.4.7.14). A thoughtful person cannot inhabit a thoughtless life; she must think her way of life rationally justified.¹³

II. Option Two: Philosophy Enfeebled

The shortcomings of that way of life lead Hume to consider adopting another way of life, one animated by a "serious, good-humour'd disposition" that arises after one experiences the splenetic humor's limitations. Here too an arational feature of human nature produces a distinctive way of life as an alternative to the philosophic life that was undercut by 1.4.7.1-9. But *this* arational feature supports constrained philosophic activity, and may thereby produce a sustainable, mixed way of life that meets the thinker's practical and intellectual needs. In this section, I provide a minimal account of this state that does not substantively consider Hume's rhetorical devices. This will show that, without the reader's more active engagement with the text, it elicits key questions and problems that remain unaddressed. This then becomes the impetus for the next section, in which actively engaging the text leads to a further revision of our understanding of philosophy and its justification.

The transition from the way of life proper to the splenetic humor to one proper to a "serious, good-humour'd disposition" requires an intermediary step. The splenetic humor turned one toward "the common affairs of life," especially to "the commerce and society of men" from which philosophy required seclusion (1.4.7.10). Upon dissatisfaction with the splenetic life,

¹³ Box claims Hume's "suasive art" here consists of knowing that responding to his audience's flirtation with misology is "more a matter of rhetoric than logic" (Box 1990, 35-6). I think it is true, as will become clear, that the emotional involvement traditionally associated with rhetoric is necessary for addressing this issue. But Box construes rhetoric and logic as overly disjunctive, as if these are serving two wholly separate functions (Box 1990, 53-61). Hume aims to win over one's heart and mind (not just one's heart), in part because the mind's proper function depends upon the appropriate activation of the heart. Box conceives rhetoric as producing "assent and action" and argument as producing "reasoned conviction" (Box 1990, 56). But reasoned conviction is a type of assent, and philosophic thinking a type of action. Contrast Price who, without the terminology, links metaphysical esotericism to pedagogical esotericism precisely in order to force the reader to reason through and judge the matter for himself (Price 2015, 109-110).

Hume leaves “amusement and company” to “indulg[e] a *reverie* in [his] chamber, or in a solitary walk by a river-side” (1.4.7.12).¹⁴ These reveries offer a private, leisurely engagement with oneself and the world in general: a counterpoise to the splenetic humor’s social and practical focus. It provides an unstructured outlet to indulge one’s intellectual inclination, which the splenetic humor could neither suppress nor satisfy. Seclusion is no longer the gloomy act of self-imposed intellectual discipline. Rather, it is a welcome ancillary to the imagination’s spontaneous engagement with nature—internal and external.

Upon indulging these reveries, the next step in the process occurs: Hume “feel[s] [his] mind all collected within itself” and again inclines to philosophize (1.4.7.12). Having found its bearings through unstructured reveries, the mind renews philosophy’s more disciplined intellectual engagement with the world. The bearings by which the mind orients itself are the issues disputed in “reading and conversation” (1.4.7.12). These confine one to philosophizing about human nature exclusively, particularly those features of it that commonly raise disagreement: the principles governing the passions, aesthetic and intellectual judgments, and morality and politics (1.4.7.12).

In its maturity, this philosophic disposition seems closer to the splenetic humor than the reveries produced by this disposition in its nascency *insofar as* both take their bearings from society’s disputes, focus one’s attention on the human, and seek to “[instruct] mankind” with its discoveries. One implicitly understands man as oriented by social-political life and returning, eventually, both to acting in it and intellectually benefitting it with one’s philosophic conclusions.¹⁵ Further, this anticipation of returning to social-political life infuses an active concern for man’s social-political situation into one’s philosophic activity. This provides philosophy with sharper focus and a more purposive structure. Consequently, the philosopher as

¹⁴ Baier overemphasizes the social moments in 1.4.7’s dialectic, producing the impression that social passions are more fundamental to philosophy than curiosity, the very strange and distinctively human passion that, I will claim, displaces sympathy and sociality as philosophy’s driver (Baier 1991, 3, 16, 24, cf. 138).

¹⁵ Though sympathy is thus the precondition for the emergence of the philosophic disposition, Ardal goes too far in claiming that “Hume thinks human life is social at the deepest emotional level” (Ardal 1989, xxiii, 53). See the next section. In general, scholars tend to hold too firmly to the “vulgar” distinction, to use Hume’s phrase, between thinking and acting. Human life—particularly that of the philosopher—is composed just as essentially of the action of thinking as of action in the ordinary sense. If the emotional impetus to philosophize is among one’s predominant passions, then there is a sense in which one’s orienting frame of reference—emotional and cognitive—is asocial. Hume was notably jovial, but he was also notably comfortable undermining socially sacred beliefs.

well as the practical man comes to desire reputation, which is both an effect and partial cause of successfully instructing social-political life (1.4.7.12).¹⁶

Despite these common threads, the philosophic disposition's sources of pleasure and pain diverge from the splenetic humor's so significantly that they are ultimately worlds apart. When splenetic, common life's activity and maxims pleased Hume, and the intellectual impulse to linger on its problematic character pained him. By contrast, when in the "good humor'd disposition," one encounters the latent problems of common life as one's own painful ignorance, to which philosophy seems an irreplaceably pleasant remedy.¹⁷ This distinctive pleasure is crucial: Hume claims that "his philosophy" originates in the feeling that a life without philosophy would give less pleasure (1.4.7.12). No less crucial is the well-disposed Hume's emotional response to common life. The "good humour'd disposition" only temporarily dampens rather than negates, the splenetic humor's pleasure in common life. Taking the microscope to common life requires distance from it. But one anticipates with pleasure the return to common life—both to engage in it again and to enrich it with one's philosophic discoveries (1.4.7.10). The upshot is that philosophy and common life no longer appear as mutually exclusive ways of life, but as mutually enriching activities. Together they form "a mixed kind of life," in which the splenetic humor's sense of internal conflict between the two has been resolved (*EHU* 1.6;¹⁸ Baier 1991, 7). This "good humor'd disposition" therefore appears to establish a more stable, satisfying way of life (Baier 1991, 24).

But living this life, in expectation of its stable satisfaction, requires knowing the precise character of the philosophic activity that—in contrast to that mode of philosophizing characteristic of *Treatise* 1—will be pleasant and beneficial rather than terminating in the painful Pyrrhonian crisis of 1.4.7.1-7.¹⁹ The nature of the subject matter requires more than a "purely intellectual or academic" engagement; it requires an engagement in which "one thinks for one's

¹⁶ This illuminates Hume's claim that "love of literary fame" was his life's "ruling passion" (*EMPL* xl; cf. Sabl 2006, 68).

¹⁷ The crux of difference in their respective sources of pleasure and pain, then, is the (temporary) asociality of the "serious, good-humour'd disposition." In failing to treat the passion at the root of man's philosophic practice—which is "of so peculiar a kind, that 'twou'd have been impossible to have treated of it under any of those heads, which we have examin'd [in *Treatise* 2]"—scholars like Baier understate the role man's private inner life plays in the discovery of moral truth (broadly conceived) (2.3.10.1).

¹⁸ See footnote 3, above.

¹⁹ Baier remarks that "one resolution of the conflict [of contrary passions, like that first displayed in 1.4.7,] turns out to be alternation or turn-taking" (Baier 1991, 131). But this cannot be the resolution to the particular conflict of 1.4.7, as the analysis of the previous section showed.

own case, thinks from out of one's own care, future, and fate": a key reason for pedagogical esotericism (Melzer 2014, 215; cf. 1.4.6.5). Consequently, I now turn to drawing the implications of Hume's statements about the second option in order to depict the way of life that it would produce.

Here, misgivings arise over philosophy's defining pleasure. When the sources of one's pleasure and pain change, Hume now claims, reason does not have "*any* title to operate upon us" (1.4.7.11, my emphasis). The possibility of discovering truth, the seal of philosophy's legitimacy, seems irrelevant.²⁰ Because it is philosophy's origin, human nature's arational pleasure appears to be its sole justification as well. The apparent disjunct between philosophy being truth-directed or pleasure-directed is driven home in *Treatise* 2. The curiosity about philosophy's objects reported in 1.4.7.12, Hume reveals in 2.3.10, is the passion responsible for producing philosophy's distinctive pleasure. The pleasure of philosophizing is not a pleasure internal to the understanding; it is extrinsic to the rational faculty upon which its ability to discover truth depends.²¹ Indeed, a cacophony of such sentiments guide Hume's philosophic inquiry in 1.4.7.12: curiosities, inclinations, concerns, uneasiness, and ambition "spring up" to direct philosophy's course (1.4.7.12). The sensible concern is whether locating philosophy's driving force and "title to operate" outside of the understanding allows one the "glorious" title: lover of wisdom (1.4.7.4; Baier 1991, 6-7). Can philosophy, in Baier's words, "bear its own survey"?²²

We have reason to think not. *Treatise* 1.4 argued that, when philosophy ascribes "new causes and principles to the phaenomena," whether these novelties are real discoveries is highly contingent (e.g., 1.4.7.13). The pleasure of supplanting the received opinions with one's own inventions often suffices (cf. 2.1.11.9). And given philosophy's inability to justify itself in 1.4.7.1-7, any expectation that one will do more than invent further errors seems unreasonable. If

²⁰ Ardal, for example, appears to make this claim (Ardal 1989, xxiv-v, xxxvi).

²¹ Contrast *Treatise* 1's account of philosophy's incitement. Ideas received their liveliness by its transference from impressions through regular patterns of thought. The lively unease of contradictory ideas that were created motivated one to refine these patterns of thought through reflection and, ultimately, philosophy. If we only consider these feelings intrinsic to the understanding, Hume's exclusive focus on human nature in his renewal of philosophy cannot be explained. Though the recent experience of others' written and verbal disputes about human nature would originally enliven them, it provides no reason why these ideas remain vivid, even after one's tiring of the company that conveyed them and indulging one's mind in reveries on all of nature in the interim.

²² Baier's own answer seems to be that it is not: in her brief discussion of 2.3.10, she claims Hume's presentation of the passion of curiosity, and the pleasure of philosophy that arises from it, "may not be a perfectly coherent reflexive turn. Difficulties remain unsurmounted" (Baier 1991, 173).

this concern is left unaddressed, endorsing this disposition appears just as specious as loving another simply for flattering one's pride, regardless of how justified that pride is (2.2.3.2; Ardal 1989, 35; cf. Baier 1991, 145). If this is all that can be said, Hume's recommendation of a "careless manner" for philosophy and its "skeptical principles" would need to be taken in the most uncharitable sense: they would be aftereffects of a love of reason aware of itself as no less foolish and no more valuable than the splenetic humor's hatred of reason (1.4.7.14, 11). Philosophy's aim would be to maximize pleasure *rather than* to pursue the truth.

Hume does not critique this second alternative, but simply insinuates that some further justification for philosophy may exist (cf. Price 1965, 62).²³ He claims philosophy is not only the "most agreeable" but also the "safest" guide to the "speculations without the sphere of common life" (1.4.7.14).²⁴ He admonishes philosophers not to endorse ideas "*merely* for being specious and agreeable" (1.4.7.14, my emphasis). And philosophy's narrow focus, Hume claims, is not haphazard: only human nature can be made a "science" in which one can have "assurance and conviction" (1.4.7.14). If this advice to have some higher authority than pleasure is followed, Hume expects the emergence of a "set of opinions, which ... might stand the test of the most critical examination" (1.4.7.12). But such claims only *potentially* contravene this minimal account of philosophy. It remains possible that these convictions are simply the pleasing illusions of a form of reason problematically enslaved to a rationally unjustifiable passion. In that case, it would be the outcome of overlooking, rather than overcoming, 1.4.7.1-7's Pyrrhonian skepticism (1.4.7.15).

III. Option Three: A Robust Form of Philosophy

Rather than telling his reader whether philosophy is a science or simply a pleasing illusion, Hume leaves us to engage with his description of the mode of philosophy produced by this "serious, good-humour'd disposition," inhabit it from the inside, and on that basis determine for ourselves whether these grander ambitions for philosophy can be justified.²⁵ This pedagogy leads those with a passion for philosophy to cultivate both their intellectual capacity and their self-understanding through the process of answering this question. As the remainder of this

²³ If this proves to be the case, as I argue in the next two sections it is, then this passage can be considered an instance of what Price calls Hume's "both-and irony" (Price 1965, 37).

²⁴ Compare Flew's reading of this section as episodic and disjointed in character (Flew 1986, 114-5).

²⁵ For a like account of Hume's pedagogical employment of dramatic structure and obscurity, see Heydt (2007).

article will make clear, this device is invaluable, since self-knowledge—a type of knowledge that cannot be imported into the self from another person, but must arise from one’s own experience of oneself—is central to Hume’s new conception of philosophy.²⁶ I argue that, with self-knowledge as its basis, Hume’s new conception of philosophy constitutes a cooperation of reason and nature that reason as well as man’s nonrational nature can endorse as justified.

The soil for this self-knowledge is the apparently fallow ground left by 1.4.7.1-7’s Pyrrhonian skepticism (cf. Price 1965, 50). In its wake, one becomes aware of one’s own ignorance, particularly regarding oneself as inquirer. While Hume claims to be “ready to reject all belief and reasoning,” the core of this “deepest darkness” is an ignorance of the self: “Where am I, or what?” is his first question (1.4.7.8).²⁷ 1.4.7’s first half threw into question reason’s, and hence one’s own, nature and power (cf. Merrill 2015a, 17-18). For the first time one realizes just how unaware of oneself one has been, even while one’s understanding was the object of inquiry.²⁸ The self was markedly absent at the start of Hume’s philosophic project, in *Treatise’s* “Introduction.”²⁹ Hume’s subsequent splenetic mood, his reveries, and his present exploration of the philosophical disposition, are attempts to replace this newfound awareness of ignorance of the self with a positive self-understanding. The disorientating awareness of ignorance effected by 1.4.7.1-7 allows the opportunity to replace it with a distinctive conception of philosophy that will not terminate in the same Pyrrhonian skepticism.³⁰ This is a new beginning with as much openness as *Treatise’s* beginning had ill-founded self-assurance.

So, disoriented, philosophy begins again with a less pre-defined purpose. What one is drawn to philosophize about is the basis for acquiring knowledge of oneself and for giving

²⁶ The “self” I refer to is not an indivisible, perfectly identical “Cartesian” self, but one akin to “a republic or commonwealth, in which the several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons, who propagate the same republic in the incessant changes of its parts” (1.4.6.19).

²⁷ The monumental paradigm shift this questioning of the self as philosophical enquirer enacts leads Livingston to call it the “master philosophical question,” “the defining moment and the key in which all [a philosopher’s] thought is played” (Livingston 1998, 12).

²⁸ In line with my claim in the next section, Ievers claims that this represents a sort of madness (Ievers 2015, 24). But she claims the return to common life provides the emotional reset to overcome this madness, whereas I think it requires a cognitive and emotional reframing to prevent its reemergence.

²⁹ *Treatise* began with an impersonal “state of the discipline” address, whose call to action was overcoming the failings of impersonal philosophical systems. No personal desire to know or dissatisfaction with one’s own ignorance appears. Its inquiry began with human nature because this was requisite to found the “compleat system” it called for. This is the conception of philosophy destroyed by 1.4.7.1-7’s Pyrrhonian skepticism (cf. Merrill 2015a, 17).

³⁰ For this reason, I am sympathetic to the claim that this dramatic structure of 1.4.7 is a “natural history of philosophy,” in which “true philosophy requires a progression *through* false philosophy” (Costelloe 2018, 262; Ainslie 2015, 236).

philosophy definite shape and justification. Attention to 1.4.7.12’s structure clarifies the materials from which Hume constructs this new understanding of himself and of the nature of philosophy:

| | A. State of the Inquiring Subject | B. Object of the Subject’s Inquiry |
|---------|---|---|
| I. | “...I feel my mind all collected within itself, and am naturally <i>inclin’d</i> to carry my view...” | “into all those subjects, about which I have met with so many disputes in the course of my reading and conversation.” |
| II.i | “I cannot forebear having a curiosity to be acquainted with...” | “the principles of moral good and evil” |
| II.ii | | “the nature and foundation of government” |
| II.iii | | “the causes of those several passions and inclinations, which actuate and govern me.” |
| III.i | “I am uneasy to think I [X] ³¹ without knowing upon what principles I proceed.” | “approve of one object, and disapprove of another” |
| III.ii | | “call one thing beautiful, and another deformed” |
| III.iii | | “decide concerning truth and falsehood” |
| III.iv | | “[decide concerning] reason and folly” |
| IV. | “I am concerned for...” | “the condition of the learned world, which lies under such a deplorable ignorance in all these particulars.” |
| V.i | “I feel an ambition to arise in me...” | “of contributing to the instruction of mankind” |
| V.ii | | “of acquiring a name by my inventions and discoveries.” |

Like the conception of philosophy in *Treatise*’s “Introduction,” here philosophy focuses upon understanding the human being. But only here is this focus bidirectional: man qua the *subject* enquiring (column A) is given as much attention as man qua object of inquiry (column B).³² Examining each of these in turn will show us philosophy’s new contours.

The new focus upon the self qua *subject* is the effect of 1.4.7.1-7’s “deepest darkness”:

³¹ See column B.

³²The paragraph contains twenty-two first-person-singular pronouns (ten percent of its words), and the self or its experience is the agent of every independent clause. By contrast, in “Introduction” Hume uses the first person singular seventeen times (less than one percent). Including first-person-plural references only raises this number to fifty-one (three and one-half percent).

ignorance of the self. Feeling pathless, one's attention shifts from what one had imagined to be philosophy's path to oneself, who yearns for such a path despite the specter of Pyrrhonian skepticism. The central insight into this puzzling subject inquiring is the omnipresence of passions in the philosopher: every clause in column A includes one (cf. 2.3.3.8).³³ Inclination, curiosity, uneasiness, concern, ambition, dispositions, feelings, pleasures, a sense of weakness rapidly present themselves as the forces guiding one's inquiries. These forces are composed of two distinct groups: those associated with curiosity and those associated with ambition (cf. 1.4.7.13). Curiosity and its companions, inclination and uneasiness, are philosophy's primary drivers (rows I-III.iv). These sentiments are then reinforced by a set of second-order sentiments: concern for the intellectual community's condition, the ambition to ameliorate this condition, and the judgment that seeking philosophic answers is more fitting than religious answers (rows IV-V.ii).³⁴

Reflecting on the role of uneasiness—one of curiosity's companion sentiments—makes clear that attention to one's own inner experience as subject inquiring shapes the new mode of philosophy emerging here. Within the horizon of *Treatise 1*'s more limited self-awareness, only the uneasiness of sensed contradictions incited inquiry. One now becomes aware of a subtler cause of uneasiness (cf. Baier 1991, 20). In the disposition that now animates philosophy, simply an awareness of ignorance of the principles of one's belief—no matter how hegemonic or consistent that belief is—suffices to produce uneasiness (rows III.i-vi). Consequently, philosophy directs its inquiries toward more numerous and varied objects.

The causes of the uneasiness that incite philosophy having become subtler, philosophy's purpose also becomes subtler and, indeed, more modest. Philosophy qua a response to sensed contradiction resulted, by the end of *Treatise 1*, in the demand to attain perfect certainty, as higher-level problems revealed themselves in the attempt to resolve lower-level contradictions with significant certainty. Unmet, this all-or-nothing demand played a significant role in producing 1.4.7.1-7's catastrophic lack of faith in philosophy. But now that one is aware of the subtler uneasiness of simply realizing one's ignorance of principles, philosophy's less ambitious

³³ While Livingston draws attention to the various emotions present when one is in the "philosophical melancholy and delirium" of skepticism (Livingston 1998, 23-27), barely a word is said about the passion of curiosity by which it is remedied (Livingston 1998, 35).

³⁴ Explaining the role of these second-order sentiments is beyond the scope of this article, but see footnote 13, above.

aim becomes simply to deepen one's understanding. Refining or overturning one's earlier judgments—rather than attaining perfect certainty—is a satisfying enough outcome (Baier 1991, 11-12). Before these self-discoveries, the failure of *Treatise 1*'s project appeared as the unexpected disappointment of reason's fundamental aspiration. It now appears as an aspiration bound for failure because guided by a self-misunderstanding.

Greater awareness of the sources of uneasiness to which philosophy can direct itself leads to a further, broader increase in one's awareness of oneself as inquirer. It clarifies that reason's operation is animated by, and thus has its purpose fundamentally shaped by, man's sentiments. In other words, contrary to *Treatise 1*'s presentation, philosophy is not the autonomous, and therefore sterile, operation of reason. Instead of being a closed system with a definite end, philosophy is the open-ended process of deepening one's understanding, continually set in motion by another of man's capacities: passions.

We turn now to consider the self qua *object* of inquiry (column B). Self-knowledge has come to seem particularly worth pursuing, for three reasons.³⁵ First, confrontation with 1.4.7.1-7's catastrophic lack of faith in reason has made one newly aware of one's ignorance of the self, and illustrated that such ignorance can have catastrophic ramifications for the philosopher's way of life (1.4.7.8-10). Second, this then allows one to become aware of oneself as an enquirer animated by sentiments, of whose principles one is ignorant (column A). Both 1.4.7.1-8's overturning of *Treatise 1*'s approach to philosophy and Hume's trial-and-error approach to choosing a way of life in 1.4.7.9-14 illustrate just how elusive knowledge of the self is.³⁶ And, finally, increased attention to the multiple types of uneasiness to which philosophy responds greatly multiplies the types of questions regarding the self that philosophy will pursue (rows II.i-III.iv). For these reasons, the self—centrally, the passionate features of the self (rows II.iii-III.ii)—becomes philosophy's objects.

³⁵ Baier acknowledges the new role of self-awareness, particularly of one's sentiments, in philosophical subjects and objects (Baier 1991, 20-22). However, she limits this self-awareness to the understanding that "philosophy is now recognized as the self-indulgence of self-conscious animals, their discovery and cultivation of the pleasures peculiar to such animals" (Baier 1991, 22). It thus seems as though philosophy is a mere indulgence, pleasure-directed rather than truth-directed, and has self-awareness only as its precondition and not, as I am arguing, also as its end. Further justification, for Baier, lies in its usefulness for action—particularly among persons operating within the same framework (Baier 1991, 171-172).

³⁶ Pruffer articulates exceptionally well the way in which the *Treatise* uses human nature to reveal the ever-elusive human nature to itself, and in doing so transforms itself into its self-knowing version (Pruffer 1993, 45-6; cf. Baier 1991, 153).

Hume's lists of philosophy's objects clarify the aspects of the self on which philosophy focuses, and the method used to philosophize about these objects. The first list (rows II.i-iii) presents objects of curiosity, the second of uneasiness (rows III.i-iv). The two lists are parallelly structured, suggesting a paradigm on which Hume's new mode of philosophy proceeds. Each list begins with a general and abstract object of inquiry (rows II.i, III.i; the principles of morality and of value judgments, respectively). From there, each list turns one's attention to these abstract concepts' more concrete, external instantiations (rows II.ii, III.ii). In the end, each introspectively seeks the origin of this phenomenon in the human soul. This amounts, in the first list, to Hume asking about *his* governing passions and inclinations that produce moral-political action (row II.iii). In the second list, this amounts to Hume shifting from his focus on the principles of truth-judgments to the principles of the self that makes these truth-judgments: reason and folly (rows III.iii-iv).

The repetition of this structure indicates two general points. First, awareness of oneself as the only partially known subject philosophizing leads one to enact a distinctive method. *Treatise 1*, in its excessive self-assurance, first approached human nature's simpler internal elements and attempted to use those as bricks out of which to construct the more complex phenomena of human life. Now, by contrast, one begins by approaching the more complex, everyday phenomena of human life (rows II.i-ii, III.i).³⁷ From that orienting awareness of its complexity and its salient features, one turns to clarifying its varied originating phenomena within the self (rows II.iii, III.ii-iv).³⁸ This, the two lists show, will be a recursive process: while the first list (row II.iii) ends with a focus upon the originating phenomena of moral-political life in the principles of human soul, the second list (row III.i) begins by re-broadening one's view to our evaluations of that is which outside of ourselves, before again returning to the origin of this phenomenon in the soul. Second, oscillating one's attention from one's private, internal principles (row II.iii) back to the external manifestation of internal principles (row III.i) indicates a tight connection between understanding man in action—paradigmatically in social-political life—and the pursuit of self-knowledge more generally. Increasing self-knowledge is

³⁷ Along these lines, Baier traces the origin of many of *Treatise 1*'s concepts to man's social-political experience (Baier 1991).

³⁸ This approach pervades both *Treatise 2* and *Treatise 3*: Hume begins his analysis of the passions with the more complex indirect passions, and his analysis of morality with the artificial virtues. However, this structure may be overdetermined by other considerations as well. Compare the structure of *A Dissertation on the Passions* and *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume's later reworking of *Treatise 2* and *3*, respectively.

philosophy's key purpose, and social-political philosophy—no matter how far it may seemingly wander from this goal—provides key insights into the self in all its various aspects.

This becomes clearer when, having seen the centrality of *the passions* to the subject philosophizing's self-awareness, we ask how this shapes the way in which the passions are made the *object* of inquiry (column B, cf. Box 1990, 105; Siebert 1987, 181-183). The passions function as the central turning point in each list: Hume's curiosity about the passions marks the transition from viewing human life in a general, abstract, and outward-looking light (row I) to looking at its internal principles and concrete operation in the self (rows II-III). In the first list, moral and political phenomena find their origin in individuals' passions (row II.ii). The passions' role in the second list is of even more interest (row III). After the first list has shifted focus to the passions, the second list maintains and further sharpens that focus on these passions' internal objects and operation. The first two items in the list concern the passions, conventionally understood: approval and disapproval (row III.i), especially of beauty and deformity (row III.ii). Only after attention to these recognizably passionate judgments does Hume turn to judgments of truth and falsehood (row III.iii), and the principles animating these judgments: reason and folly (row III.iv). Judgments of truth and falsehood, of reason and folly appear to be particular ways of approving and disapproving (row III.i), and thus animated by passions like the rest. The passions are the privileged access point to understanding human nature as a whole—private and intellectual as well as public and social-political. Private and public phenomena (rows II.i-ii, III.i), are illuminated by their origin in the internal passions (rows II.iii, III.ii-iv), and the character of intellectual judgments is illuminated by broader attention to the sentiments of which they are simply one type. Only at this point can we understand Hume's claim, near the start of *Treatise* 1, that “the impressions of reflection, viz. passions, desires, and emotions . . . principally deserve our attention” (1.1.3.1).

Contrast the relative importance originally given to the passions and the understanding in “Introduction.” Though “Advertisement” claimed that “*The subjects of the Understanding and the Passions make a compleat chain of reasoning by themselves,*” after which an “*examination of Morals, Politics, and Criticism*” can separately follow, the passions vanished from this list in Hume's opening enumeration of the sciences of man (“Introduction,” 5). In excluding the passions, that schema implicitly rejected the idea that the passions either accompany reason as an essential part of the philosopher's activity *or* are even important objects for philosophy

(“Introduction,” 4). Knowledge of reason alone was presumed necessary to understand, and potentially reshape, the interplay of reason and passion present in morals, politics, and criticism. At *Treatise*’s beginning, then, reason aimed to override the passions in these matters rather than ceding the passions any legitimacy. Now, by contrast, an understanding of passions is not only fundamental to an understanding of morals, politics, and criticism, but it also informs one’s understanding of reason itself.³⁹

IV. Justifying the Robust Form of Philosophy

Having clarified philosophy’s origin in the passions and in self-awareness, its new modest aim of reducing our ignorance and increasing our knowledge (particularly self-knowledge), and its general method, we must ask whether philosophy *can* accomplish its aim. Whether philosophy can be justified as a pursuit of wisdom with some rational hope of success depends upon how precisely the passions guide inquiry, and what role the understanding plays in this activity. We have already seen that while the passions provide the philosopher’s motive force, the passions also become the object of her philosophic scrutiny. But to what degree are the passions animating this inquiry directed towards wisdom? To what extent (and how) can one critically evaluate, refine, and endorse these passions? These questions are at the heart of 1.4.7.13-15. In claiming that philosophy, not passion, “expects the victory” by the passions’ activity, Hume hints that the understanding and passion function more as allies with a shared purpose than, in *Treatise 2*’s famous formulation, as master and slave (1.4.7.11; cf. Kemp Smith 2005, 132).⁴⁰ But we need more than a hint of the relationship between the understanding and passion in order to answer these questions. The remainder of 1.4.7 establishes how they pursue this shared purpose, an analysis of which allows us to determine if philosophy is a justifiable or an illusory pursuit of wisdom.

Hume’s two-part advice to would-be philosophers is pivotal for understanding how reason and passion jointly pursue truth. Hume cautions us to limit “those fiery particles” that produce an excessively “warm imagination” and to maintain some “gross earthy mixture”

³⁹ While Harris nicely captures the tight connection between *Treatise 1*, “Of the Understanding,” and *Treatise 2*, “Of the Passions,” he stops short of seeing how radically *Treatise 1*’s claims—and therewith Hume’s conception of the nature of philosophy—have been undermined (Harris 2009).

⁴⁰ Contrast this to Kemp Smith’s account, in which he considers skepticism the ally “in due subordination and not as an equal” of natural sentiments (Kemp Smith 2005, 132). On my account, reason is reanimated as self-awareness and not mere skepticism.

(1.4.7.14). Hume promises that if we adhere to this advice, our pursuit of truth will progress satisfactorily. But this advice is, of course, maddeningly vague. Consequently, Hume forces us to think through for ourselves what this advice means and why, if followed, philosophy can be rationally justified. As we shall see, this advice is motivated by one's proper awareness of philosophy's passionate origins and the passionate state *not* oriented towards wisdom into which it can devolve. When followed, this advice keeps both reason and passion in check, so that they may maintain an alliance that successfully pursues truth.

Treatise 1 clarifies, somewhat, the nature of the philosopher's excessively warm imagination. There Hume attributes the poet's genius to his warm, or vivid, imagination; and he attributes the madness of some poets to the excess of this warmth (1.3.10.10). On the one hand, it allows the poet to clearly conceive of and connect ideas that by their own internal force would remain obscure or only loosely connected. But, when the poet's imagination is excessively warm, these fabrications of the poet appear just as vivid, and thus as true, to him as that which really exist.⁴¹ For a similar reason, the philosopher needs a warm imagination (1.3.13.2-3, cf. "Introduction," 2). Because ideas become fainter the further removed they are from concrete experience, a warm imagination is necessary to maintain the vivacity of thought needed to handle philosophy's abstract objects and abstruse inquiries. This is especially the case if one's philosophic conclusions are going to feel vivid enough to produce belief. The self-destruction of *Treatise 1*'s project in 1.4.7.1-8 showed the philosophic analogue of the poet turned mad by the very source of his genius in his art.⁴² Uncontained, the warmth of philosophic inquiry, like that of poetic production, can intensify into the heat of madness (cf. 1.4.7.8).⁴³

But *Treatise 1*'s illumination of Hume's concept of a warm imagination leaves significant details in the shadows.⁴⁴ What, precisely, is the difference between the poet's warmth, which has no regard for truth, and the philosopher's warmth, which seems to have such a regard? How does this philosophic warmth become excessive, so that its regard for truth becomes obstructed? And

⁴¹ Costelloe points out that Hume links poetic madness, warmth of imagination, and religious enthusiasm in his later works—an important association that, we shall see, is already present here (Costelloe 2018, 233-5).

⁴² In fact, Hume's attunement to the danger of this madness begins in 1.1.1.1 (cf. Ievers 2015, 9).

⁴³ Hume's earlier claim that the "intense view" of reason's dilemma so "heated [his] brain" that he arrived at a temporary standstill of Pyrrhonian skepticism then acquires greater significance (1.4.7.8).

⁴⁴ This is not accidental: the imagination's excessive warmth can only be understood by also looking at what is occurring outside of that faculty, to which *Treatise 1*'s view is limited, and considering the operation of one's whole psyche, including the passions that animate it. This is the limitation of Costelloe's account (Costelloe 2018, 230-8, 271-3).

how can this excess be prevented?

Clarifying Hume's preventative measure—the admixture of something “earthy”—will clarify the philosopher's proper, truth-regarding warmth and the excessive warmth she must avoid. The earthy mixture Hume prescribes inheres in England's “honest gentlemen” (1.4.7.14). To understand the philosopher's proper earthiness, then, we must determine what characteristics the gentlemen possess that the philosopher himself can adopt.

Hume describes these honest gentlemen as people “always employ'd in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, [and] have [consequently] carry'd their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are every day expos'd to their senses”(1.4.7.14). Superficially, this is worlds apart from the philosopher, ethereal or earthy. In the preceding paragraph, Hume distinguishes philosophers by their inability to remain among the “narrow circle of objects, which are the subject of daily conversation and action” (1.4.7.13). Conversational disputes may incite philosophy's renewal, but clarifying these subjects' elusive principles requires withdrawing from the everyday—both in action and in thought. Accordingly, in the section's final paragraph Hume professes it “proper” to “indulge our inclination in the most elaborate philosophical researches” (1.4.7.16). The sufficiently cool, earthy philosopher cannot distinguish himself from the overly warm philosopher, and align himself with the ‘honest gentlemen,’ by singularly focusing upon everyday sensuous objects (1.4.7.14).

To see what “gross earthy mixture” the philosophers *can* share with the gentlemen requires a further step in our analysis. These two character types, the philosopher and the gentlemen, are presented alongside a third type: the superstitious.⁴⁵ As we shall see, the earthy philosopher occupies a mid-point between the gentlemen and the superstitious (while the overly-warm philosopher devolves into a subtype of the superstitious). Where the rule of the gentlemen's passions for common affairs and a “narrow circle of objects” ends, either philosophy or superstition begins.⁴⁶ A *feeling* of restlessness with the gentleman's narrow focus

⁴⁵ Baier aligns religious superstition with “cynical extravagances of despair,” but without explaining their precise relation (Baier 1991, 23). Superstition is a mixture of beliefs and attitudes, while despair is a feeling that may or may not have a cognitive cause. In what follows, I aim to explain the psychological orientation that produces both superstition and the understanding of philosophy that subsequently produces 1.4.7.1-8's despairing crisis. Once framed in this way, the question of what philosophic orientation does not produce despair demands an answer.

⁴⁶ Contrast Livingston's “anthropology of philosophy,” in Chapter 3 of *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium* (1998).

leads both the superstitious and the philosophic to flee that limited orientation (1.4.7.13). The decisive difference between superstition and legitimate philosophy, its “safest and most agreeable” alternative, consists in the way this restlessness is indulged (1.4.7.13).

Restlessness with common life, or this world, leads the superstitious to construct an imaginary “world of [one’s] own” (1.4.7.13). One invents “scenes, and beings, and objects which are altogether new,” an activity for which an imagination as warm as the poet’s is perfectly suited and for which the agreeableness, rather than truth, of its ideas is the natural standard (1.4.7.13). Philosophy’s trajectory is also a response to this restlessness with the everyday. But this aversion to the everyday is only one of philosophy’s impetuses. Its second positive and primary impetus is the passion of curiosity: the desire to assign “new causes and principles to the phaenomena” of *this* world (1.4.7.13).⁴⁷ The worldly affairs that, on one hand, constitute the gentleman’s entire horizon and that, on the other, lead to the superstitious’ disdain thereby form philosophy’s point of reference. Philosophy goes beyond everyday experience’s narrow circle of objects, but not into boundless speculation. It is bounded by the desire to better understand the hidden causes and principles of those objects. Guidance by the passion of curiosity can thus accomplish two tasks simultaneously. It allows us to satisfy the restless urge to escape the everyday, an impulse that is on its own indifferent to truth (cf. Merrill 2015a, 19). But, on the other hand, guidance by curiosity allows us to remain tethered to the everyday, seeking discoveries regarding this world rather than indulging in ridiculous, and potentially dangerous, ideal constructions.⁴⁸

Examining, at the a finer grain, the emotional and intellectual aspects of the honest gentleman’s response to everyday experience will allow us to see how the philosopher, by analogy, can intellectually and passionately remain tethered to everyday experience. A gentleman’s passions are for objects accessible in everyday experience, whether they be material or social (1.4.7.14). These passions respond to—or, in the language of *Treatise 2*, are caused by—those objects, a reaction as natural and original to man as to “beasts” (1.4.7.13, cf. 1.3.16,

⁴⁷ As we shall see, this distinction between the restless impulse and the passion of curiosity is crucial. Curiosity does not, as Ainslie claims, “drive the narrator into the abyss”: a restlessness exogenous to philosophy proper does (Ainslie 2015, 239).

⁴⁸ Though in 1.4.7.13 Hume claims that “generally speaking, the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous,” this does not mean that philosophical errors are wholly innocuous—a fact Hume has good reason to understate as he strives to make philosophy appear more respectable. See the next section (cf. Merrill 2015a, 22).

2.1.12, 2.2.12). One may refine these passions and their particular objects to fit one's particular context, but their underlying principle remains the same. *Honest* gentlemen are intellectually aware of their passions' earthy nature, and the earthy objects—social and material—to which these passions are directed. And once this honesty is attained, a gentleman is in little danger of becoming untethered from this earthy domain, since the cause, the object, and the means to attaining that object are all themselves earthy. Precisely this awareness of oneself and one's purpose enables the gentleman to take the appropriate means to satisfy his desire.

We can draw an analogy of this earthy orientation for the curious philosopher. Curiosity is a passionate response to common affairs just as original, though less frequent, to human nature as the gentleman's passions. The cause of curiosity, like that of the gentleman's passions, is everyday experience. Its object, however, differs in being further removed from that sensible phenomena: the pursuit of phenomena's concealed conceptual principles "transport[s] [one] into speculation without the sphere of common life" (1.4.7.14). Consequently, the philosopher must be more deliberate if she is to maintain awareness of herself, since the imagination can, without proper attention, imperceptibly begin fabricating principles that do not reflect reality but may nonetheless satisfy the mind's restlessness. The philosopher's self-awareness is the necessary precondition for identifying such missteps and for practicing the self-constraint to only depart from the phenomena in the pursuit of understanding its true principles.⁴⁹ When one fails to do so, philosophy deteriorates from its legitimate, earthy form into its superstitious form; the soul's restlessness overtakes curiosity as its animating force,⁵⁰ and the pleasure of satisfying curiosity's desire for truth is replaced by the pleasure of satisfying one's unconstrained restlessness with this world.⁵¹ One creates fictional beings such as those Hume presents in *Treatise's* "Of the Ancient Philosophy," "Of the Modern Philosophy," "Of the Immateriality of the Soul," and "Of Personal

⁴⁹ This, then, is a second reason why the philosopher needs greater resolution to maintain his self-awareness. *Treatise* 1 illustrated that thinkers tend to become restless from a sustained focus upon the self. After misattributing causality's necessary connection to the mind's impressions rather than to the mind impressed, philosophers place the locus of causal connections progressively further from the self: it eventually lands on superstitious external objects existing independently and persisting through change (1.4.7.13).

⁵⁰ Costelloe sees this final stage of Hume's drama as unstable because he fails to distinguish between an imagination whose temperature is controlled by curiosity and one whose primary impulse has become restlessness (Costelloe 2018, 277). On the other hand, Livingston's failure to adequately distinguish curiosity and restlessness leads him to present superstitious philosophy and true philosophy as separate tracks—and the threat of superstition as not an ever-present risk to be guarded against (Livingston 1998, 27-37).

⁵¹ Hume's discussion of infinite divisibility is a succinct presentation of the slide from curiosity-constrained restlessness into unconstrained restlessness that seeks an otherworldly perfection. That slide seems more innocuous—a mere scholarly quibble—because it does not lead to a disruptive self-misunderstanding.

Identity.” The philosopher’s sentiments—curiosity and restlessness—are kept in their truth-directed form by the co-action of man’s mind—viz. self-awareness—and the influence all these together exert over his will.⁵² As Hume concludes after his analysis of the passions: “the calm [passions], when corroborated by reflection, and seconded by resolution, are able to control [the violent passions] in their most furious movements” (2.3.8.13).

Philosophy’s new, modest goal—to incrementally lessen our ignorance, particularly of the self—is the effect of such earthy self-control. In part, philosophy came into question because the foundationalist procedure, and its accompanying aspiration to have certain knowledge of nature’s highest principles, does not comport with the actual functioning of man’s mind. When earthy curiosity guides the philosopher’s restlessness, one pursues the highest principles that are accessible to man dialectically (cf. 1.4.3.9).⁵³ This open-ended pursuit is not frustrated when the highest principles accessible to us turn out to fall short of the highest principles simply and instead reside in the self; this is still a meaningful increase in our understanding.⁵⁴ “*Nothing* is more requisite for a *true* philosopher,” Hume in fact told his audience early on, “than to restrain the intemperate desire of searching into causes, and having establish’d any doctrine upon a sufficient number of experiments, rest contented with that, when he sees a farther examination wou’d lead him into obscure and uncertain speculations” (1.1.5.6, my emphasis). Falling short of ultimate principles would leave the wholly restless superstitious devastated (cf. 1.4.7.5). But the particular desires attending the earthy philosopher’s restlessness are constricted, both by curiosity’s particular concern to know oneself and the human world of which we are a part and by the self-awareness of man’s limited access to the world. When philosophy has been thus reconceived, the dismay “when we learn, that this connexion, tie, or energy [of causality] lies merely in ourselves” diminishes to at least a tolerable pitch (1.4.7.5). And this negative, though

⁵² My emphasis on both the interplay of emotions and thoughts in this passage, together with the emphasis upon self-awareness, enables us to explain “how human faculties can be disciplined to stay within the modest bounds that Hume, in his calmer moments, prescribes”—which on Fogelin’s account, he admits, is “unclear” (Fogelin 2009, 137). Weinsheimer fails to appreciate the central role played by self-awareness, and inquiry into the self, because he takes the claims of *Treatise*’s “Introduction” at face value, rather than constituting an early moment in *Treatise*’s dialectical development (Weinsheimer 1993, 105-6). Because introspection can be “insufficient, even deceptive,” Weinsheimer attributes the understanding of others, rather than the self, as “the condition of the possibility of the science of man” (Weinsheimer 1993, 106; cf. Ainslie 2015, 244).

⁵³ Livingston states nicely the intimate connection between *Treatise* 1.4.7’s dramatic character, its emphasis upon self-knowledge, and its dialectical procedure (Livingston 1998, esp. 12-15, 47).

⁵⁴ As Merrill nicely puts the point: “Hume does not regard his turn [to moral and political philosophy] as an abandonment of radical questioning ... but somehow the only adequate means of pursuing it” (Merrill 2015a, 6).

tempered, emotional response to philosophy's limits is paired with a positive set of emotions: admiration for and further curiosity about human nature and the self.

This understanding of philosophy as dialectical and self-reflective shifts philosophy's standard of "assurance and conviction": one never escapes the qualifier "so I now seem to myself," for one's self-understanding is always provisional (1.4.7.14-15). Even one's own driving force can prove elusive: the passion of curiosity is a case in point. Self-knowledge, accordingly, progresses through incrementally ameliorating one's ignorance and removing positive errors along the way. Understanding is dug up from within the self, rather than being built up from a certain foundation. Consequently, philosophy now aims at establishing "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" (1.4.7.14). The most critical examination, in *Treatise* 1's original assessment, was the application of reflexive probability that led directly the destruction of all belief in 1.4.7.1-7. But 1.4.7.7-15's understanding of man shows that standard's highly *uncritical* nature: its basis is a misunderstanding of human nature, and a specious account of our intellectual abilities (cf. 2.3.3.7). While wisdom remains philosophy's end, the potential elusiveness of ever attaining certain knowledge of the self is factored into philosophy's ambition: "assurance and conviction" are determined by the imperfect actual standard of man's abilities, not by the illusory perfect standard more fitting to a god.⁵⁵

We are now in a position to fully appreciate the dependence of philosophy's distinctive pleasure on discovering truth.⁵⁶ Pleasure may be the *origin* of Hume's philosophy, but it is not its sole *justification*. This pleasure cannot be disentangled from incremental success in a self-aware and self-constrained pursuit of truth.⁵⁷ The philosopher's distinctive pleasures are produced both by the negative insight into one's present ignorance as well as positive insights into human nature. That curiosity's pleasure in discovery can be mistaken for, and without proper care

⁵⁵ See Livingston's discussion of philosophical superstition (Livingston 1998, 27-35).

⁵⁶ Constraints on length, unfortunately, prevent me from fully explaining the relationship between wisdom, on one hand, and the attainability of truth and Hume's understanding of the nature of the human and philosophy, on the other. Making that connection fully explicit must wait for another day.

⁵⁷ On the other hand, since removing errors and ameliorating ignorance are indefinite processes, this renewal of philosophy does retain a dose of enjoyment of the activity apart from the attainment of the end characteristic of the leisurely reveries that preceded it. Philosophy has become a way of life whose particular moments are pleasant in themselves, as well as for serving to bring us closer to the philosopher's end: the attainment of wisdom

overpowered by, superstition's pleasure in ideal constructions does not negate the existence of the former. Unsurprisingly, given the discoveries presented here about the intertwining of thinking and feeling, this knowledge that curiosity-guided inquiry is a legitimate means to discovering truth has an emotional effect, composing one's "temper from that spleen" that characterized Hume's flirtation with intellectual conventionalism and "invigorat[ing] it from that indolence, which sometimes prevail[s]" (1.4.7.14).⁵⁸ Here again, reason is not simply slavishly guided by the passions, but plays an active role as counsel and reinforcement to curiosity, the passionate love of truth.

The conception of philosophy Hume has developed in these pages is philosophy as an activity of man's mixed nature rather than an activity of either pure reason or irrational nature (cf. Kemp Smith, 129-132). This reconception of philosophy is indeed more "truly skeptical," though less extreme, than the Pyrrhonian skepticism of 1.4.7.1-8. For in place of presumptions about the subject inquiring, those inquiries themselves, and their end, Hume's renewal of philosophy is based "upon skeptical principles": it develops one's understanding of oneself and philosophy only in tandem with uncovering the principles at the heart of its activity, an act of self-discovery that is always open to refinement (1.4.7.11).

V. From Liberal Education to Liberal Politics

Before discussing the import of these discoveries for politics, let me restate the liberal education Hume has enacted through his mode of writing. Hume's difficulty is to present, from outside of the reader, what can only be experienced, and consequently understood, internally; Hume's words about the self must come to resonate with, illuminate, and ultimately transform our experience of ourselves (cf. Livingston 1998, 47). Pedagogical esotericism allows Hume to meet this difficulty, in two intertwined ways. First, 1.4.7's theatrical character displays the inner, passionate experience of the philosopher as she searches for a response to radical skepticism. Our sympathy with the philosopher's end allows us to feel, within ourselves, the passions belonging to each stage of this confrontation. Second, 1.4.7's enigmatic character propels us to use our own intellectual resources to reflect on this internal experience in order to form a

⁵⁸ We, of course, should not carry this point too far: indolence still "sometimes prevail[s]" (1.4.7.14). No one can be philosophic all of the time, and there remains a time for social engagements, imaginative reveries, and the common affairs of life (1.4.7.14). When this occurs, one must "wait the returns of application and good humor" and in the interim pursue the objects of other human passions (1.4.7.14).

response to radical skepticism, since Hume has omitted any ready-made answers. Much as a partially concealed painting increases our desire to see the whole canvas, a partially obscure insight increases our curiosity to understand that idea more fully (2.3.4.9, 2.3.10.3, cf. 1.4.6.5; Melzer 2014, 218-226). In thus stimulating our curiosity, we are affected as the subject inquiring, and guided to the essential aspects of the self that must be examined. For Hume, philosophy must engage one's whole soul, not simply one's mind.

The net result is that we become aware of ourselves as restless and curious inquirers and discover with Hume how this passionate, self-aware state is the basis for a form of philosophy that can be justified as the appropriate search for knowledge of human nature. Rather than simply telling us what this *would* consist of, Hume's presentation of philosophy's nature and justification liberates us from the chains of both intellectual conventionalism (Section II) and self-ignorance (Section III-IV): it actually incites our own successful philosophizing.⁵⁹ As we have seen, though, Hume does not consider liberal education to be liberation from all constraint. Conventionalism and self-ignorance are chains that must be broken precisely because they keep genuine insights about human nature and human experience out of reach. By contrast, one constraint we cannot do without is that internal to philosophy, to the love of wisdom. The love of truth—that idiosyncratic passion at the core of the love of wisdom—requires us to take our bearings from the world of experience: our internal experience of ourselves and the human experience more generally. We must eke out as much understanding, but only as much, as finds its source in this experience. Though this way of thinking and living may not terminate in certain knowledge of the world's ultimate principles, it allows a sufficient, steady enough supply of genuine insights to constitute a satisfying life of ever-deepening understanding.

The political impact of this liberal education is quite significant. When Hume renewed the private activity of philosophy, he emphasized that moral-political life's difficulties incited philosophy, and he philosophized in the awareness that he will return to this common life—with an ambition to improve it through philosophy's insights (1.4.7.12). In the final paragraphs of 1.4.7, Hume jolts us back to common life: superstition's threat to philosophy has a clear political

⁵⁹ Box considers Hume's audience in *Treatise 1* to be broader than this, resulting in the opinion that he was aiming at belletrism in *Treatise 1*, and the "pattern of complaint" among Hume's contemporary critics—that "the *Treatise* is bewildering, and one reason was the author's ostentatious paradoxicality"—showed him his failings in this regard (Box 1990, 61, 73; cf. Merrill 2015a, 26). See Merrill on the different effects Hume hopes 1.4.7 to have on Hume's more popular audience and his philosophic audience (Merrill 2015b; cf. Price 1965, 90).

analogue, one that makes clear just how “dangerous” superstition’s corrupting effect is (1.4.7.13). Religious superstition had wreaked havoc on Europe’s moral-political life for centuries.⁶⁰ Hume’s notorious political attack upon religion has its roots in the epistemic insights he explores here: the restless impulse at superstition’s heart and its distorting effect on understanding human life.

While I will say more shortly about the positive role of philosophy as society’s new “guide,” we must first appreciate the liberalizing effect Hume saw his negative project of critiquing religious superstition as serving. The enmeshment of politics and theology had transformed politics into a not infrequently bloody struggle for hegemony over the beliefs and actions of citizens. This, of course, is noxious to the liberation of man’s mind through philosophy, which flourishes in “a land of toleration and of liberty” (“Introduction,” 7). Hume’s quotation of Tacitus on both *Treatise* 1’s and 2’s title pages—“rare are the happy times where one is free to think what one likes and say what one thinks”—both praises Great Britain for the extent to which it has established this freedom and warns of its fragility. But Hume is also concerned to preserve the ability of “honest gentlemen,” and society generally, to live free from the political tumults and violence produced by enflaming men’s political passions with passionate insistence on imaginary first principles.

Hume does not, however, seek to establish philosophy as the same sort of guide to political life that religion attempted to be. His solution is neither reestablishing political institutions on a set of philosophic first principles, nor enlightenment in the sense of making citizens into philosophers. The philosopher is to become like the gentlemen; Hume does not “pretend to make [England’s honest gentlemen] philosophers, nor ... expect them either to be associates in these researches or auditors of these discoveries. They do well to keep themselves in their present situation” (1.4.7.14, cf. 1.3.10.1, 1.4.7.2). The underlying reason for his rejection of these two possibilities is the same: philosophy is in ever-present danger of itself becoming superstitious.

When philosophy is not taken up with the proper self-awareness and resolution, it results in philosophical doctrines as superstitious, and potentially as dangerous, as those of religion. At

⁶⁰ Merrill provides a jarring enumeration of such events that would be brought to the mind of “even a half-awake reader in 1739” (Merrill 2015a, 23-4).

Treatise's start, Hume highlighted his claim that superstitious philosophers, under the illusion of settling all controversies, multiply disagreements "as if everything was uncertain" and maintain these disagreements "with the greatest warmth as if everything was certain" ("Introduction," 2). In *political* philosophy, such warm disagreements are not mere academic quibbles. Superstitious political philosophy produces imaginary first principles of government and claims to ultimate values. Viewed in the isolation of an armchair, these seemingly settle all disagreements. But, viewed in practice, they multiply and inflame political disputes, producing further intellectual intolerance and political instability. Hume directly argues this point nine years later in "Of the Original Contract" and "Of Passive Obedience," and it would be gruesomely illustrated by the French Revolution a few decades afterwards (*EMPL* 465-492).⁶¹

Awareness that embodying true philosophy is not everyman's task means the political problem of superstition requires a different treatment than its philosophic problem. In the first place, then, Hume's project of popular enlightenment consists of the negative task of extricating disagreements over fundamental principles from politics by imbuing skepticism with regard to claimed ultimate principles and values. In Hume's popular writings—his essays and *The History of England*—Hume stops short of emphasizing that this skepticism regarding moral-political life's ultimate principles is merely a particular instantiation of his skepticism regarding all ultimate principles.⁶² As 1.4.7's first half dramatically illustrated, this nonfoundationalism brings into question the realm of custom as a whole, in which social-political life operates, and the legitimacy of philosophy—an issue that can be addressed only by genuinely philosophic self-reflection. In lieu of such abstruse self-reflection, this disorienting insight might lead people to

⁶¹ In his account of the eighteenth-century trend away from systematicity and first principles and toward the idea that "sensibility is not an added extra: it is what underlies our cognitive life," Gaukroger presents a valuable contrast between Hume's approach to the relationship between politics and philosophy and that of the French Enlightenment philosophers (Gaukroger 2012, 393). Hume, having "probe[d] more deeply into the questions of reason and sensibility than anyone else," did not eschew "esoteric philosophical training," as did the French philosophers (Gaukroger 2012, 419-20). Their disregard of the delicate passionate state that animates true philosophy and protects against superstition produced their desire to merge social-political life with philosophical activity (Gaukroger 2012, 419).

⁶² It follows that rhetorical sophistication, or esotericism, would be employed in Hume's more popular works to this purpose: to protect society from philosophy's potentially destructive influence. But the three other motives Melzer provides for esotericism also animate the essays: pedagogical, political, and defensive (cf. Price 1965, 151). Though *Essays* superficially look like "easy philosophy," it is still philosophy and thus serves to engage the reader philosophically, beginning from his audience's starting points (Box 1990, 52). They thus employ pedagogical (and metaphysical) esotericism. It also appears to be political esotericism in the narrow sense insofar as it promotes a "revolutionary politics" that extricates superstition from politics and thereby makes society more in accord with philosophy's conclusions (Melzer 2014, 243). It also defends philosophy as an independent, private pursuit neither subordinate to nor threatening public life (cf. *EHU* 10).

restlessly turn their backs on reason and to reorient themselves through faith in superstition.

But skepticism and the moderation it brings to political life is not Hume's only contribution to liberal politics, though it remains his most widely acknowledged contribution. In the absence of discovering first principles, Hume's political philosophy turns men's minds to becoming self-aware of their animating principles—the passions—and how these may be best satisfied. In political philosophy, as in philosophy generally, we are to take our bearings from the orientation of the “honest gentlemen,” who with a “spirit of sober self-concern . . . put the comfortable settlement of their private affairs above politics,” remaining “grounded in the unpretentious realities of domestic life and the prudent pursuit of self-interest” (Merrill 2015b, 32). This orientation brings us back to know ourselves, to remove the obfuscating veil of imagined first principles to the real conflicts and issues of life. In this earthy orientation lies Hume's positive contributions to liberal politics.

It brings us back to navigating—with moderation, but also with subtlety of thought and prudence—the real tensions of human life. The first of Hume's contributions I will mention appears in *Treatise 3*'s discussion of justice as *the* political virtue. Justice enables politics to operate quite well—indeed, better—precisely because of its diffidence regarding higher principles and values. It establishes the rule of law: a predictable set of rules establishing and enforcing the boundaries of permissible conduct. Since these rules only concern the means of action, they remain flexible enough to allow men's pursuit of a wide range of diverse ends. A social order emerges in which individuals can peacefully pursue values of their own choosing and even assist others in their pursuit of different ends, without agreement on higher values (cf. *EMPL* 16).⁶³ Philosophy can both make clear the valuable service provided by this modest virtue and suggest means by which its practice may be refined to better serve this function (cf. *EMPL* 170, *EHU* 6-8).

We find this same earthy orientation to enabling men to best pursue their own ends, and Hume's second positive contribution to liberal politics, in his essays on political economy. *Political Discourses* begins with “Of Commerce,” whose first pages serve as an “introduction

⁶³ Hayek both draws the link between Hume's “philosophical work” and his emphasis on the rule of law and provides a valuable account of the profound effect the modest goal of justice thereby produces—in contrast to higher (superstitious) political ideals (Hayek 1991). See Hume's “Of Parties in General” and “Of the Parties of Great Britain” (*EMPL* 54-72).

necessary” to the whole volume (*EMPL* 255). Here, Hume distinguishes both “*shallow* thinkers, who fall short of the truth” and “*abstruse* thinkers, who go beyond it” from those whose reflections on political economy’s general principles are “just and sound”: a reiteration of 1.4.7’s distinction between the honest gentleman (the “shallow”), the superstitious (the “abstruse”), and the genuinely philosophic (cf. 1.4.3.9). On one hand, these represent “a gradation of three opinions, that arise above each other, according as the persons, who form them, acquire new degrees of reason and knowledge: ...that of the vulgar, that of a false philosophy, and that of the true” (1.4.3.9). On the other hand, there is a respect in which “the true philosophy approaches nearer the sentiments of the vulgar, than those of a mistaken knowledge” (1.4.3.9). The true, curiosity-constrained philosopher’s inquiries are motivated by a sober concern for, and earthy view of, the effects of economic policies on individuals’ well-being and pursuit of their own ends. But it carries that inquiry from the particular views of honest gentleman to the general view of the underlying principles of political economy.

From this view, at once earthy and synoptic, Hume will argue for liberal economic policies that were “uncommon,” as Hume cheekily understates it, among his contemporary political theorists (*EMPL* 255). Policies like artificially increasing barriers to entry do not solidify the relative strength of the state but actually hinder its strength: they prevent citizens from making valuable innovations, from improving their own condition—from which the strength of the state is derived—, and from replacing a rigid class structure with “such an equality [as] is more suitable to human nature” (*EMPL* 265). Similarly, free trade policies, Hume argues, do not strengthen rival nations and weaken your own, but improve the well-being of members of both societies and, consequently, promote peace and toleration between them. We today may have come to take such ideas for granted simply because these philosophic ideas have come to permeate both our society and its institutions; they may appear as mere “common sense.” But the heated, sometimes violent, ideological disputes of the past decade—not to mention of the past century—should serve as sobering reminders that liberal education and liberal politics need one another today as much as ever.

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