

The Virtues of Curiosity in Hume's Epistemology

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Abstract: This paper explores a new account of Hume's relationship to skepticism - and, in particular, of his relationship to the skeptical arguments outlined in Part 1.4 of the Treatise. Following recent work on these issues, I endorse a generally non-skeptical interpretation of Hume's response to these arguments - one which sees the so-called "Title Principle" as summing up Hume's views about how we ought to reason. This, though, only raises a further question: namely, why Hume endorses this principle. I consider and criticize a popular response to this question: the Practical Reading, according to which his positive evaluation of certain patterns of reasoning at the close of Book 1 is based on purely practical grounds. Although I agree with this interpretation's observation that Hume's evaluation of his faculties in 1.4.7 has deep structural similarities with Humean moral evaluation, I argue that the former mode of evaluation is best thought of as concerned - not with practical considerations - but instead with a related, but distinct, form of epistemic virtue. I then go on to outline the theory of epistemic virtue that I take to be implicit in Hume's account - one which focuses on the role of the "intellectual" passions of curiosity and ambition in determining our epistemic evaluations.

1 Hume's Relationship to Skepticism

From a brand-management perspective, the core of the “Hume brand” has always consisted in the various forms of skepticism associated with his name. And certainly Hume is a great marshaler of skeptical arguments - most notably over the course of Part 4 of Book 1 of the *Treatise*. There Hume considers a series of skeptical arguments which, as described by him, appear to threaten nearly every aspect of our epistemic lives - undermining our faith in the senses, our belief in external bodies, the coherence of our common-sense beliefs, and even our trust in reason itself. Thus, it is hardly surprising that after considering these arguments Hume finds himself thrust into a state of skeptical melancholy, resolved “to perish on the barren rock, on which I am at present, rather than venture myself upon that boundless ocean, which runs out into immensity.” (T 1.4.7.1)

But while Hume plainly takes these arguments very seriously, and despite the popular association of Hume with skepticism, his actual relationship to them is far from clear. Does he, as a result of these arguments, come to believe that these features of ordinary belief formation lack all epistemic merit?¹ Or does he instead find some way of escaping their apparent force that allows him to endorse - perhaps with some modifications - our ordinary belief forming practices?²

Traditionally, the most popular responses to this question may be divided into three broad camps. According to what we might call the Radical Skepticism Reading, Hume believes that the skeptical arguments he considers are in fact successful in demonstrating that there is no epistemic merit in reasoning as we do - even if he finds it impossible to stop reasoning in this way.³ Alternatively, according to what we might call the Naturalized Epistemology Reading, Hume does not fall prey to radical skepticism of this sort, but only because he turns his back on the sorts of normative questions that have been the traditional

¹Following Don Garrett's useful discussion of these issues, it is important to distinguish the question of whether some way of forming beliefs has *epistemic merit* from the question of whether this way of forming beliefs has *rational support*. As will become clear, an important element in Hume's response to these skeptical arguments involves the insistence that a way of forming beliefs may be epistemically virtuous even though we can provide no further rational support for it.

²In the following, I will focus on Hume's views in the *Treatise* - bracketing for the most part the question of whether his views on these issues shift substantially by the time he composes the *Enquiries*. But I will say a bit along the way about why I think the view I am outlining here remains central to Hume's response to skepticism there as well.

³This is, of course, the most common reading of Hume historically. For example, see Reid and Russell's readings of Hume - as well Barry Stroud's *Hume* (London: Routledge, 1977).

focus of epistemology.⁴ Finally, according to what might be called the No Resting Place Reading, Hume simply has no stable or all-things-considered attitude towards these sorts of skeptical questions - oscillating instead between a state of skeptical despair and a state of unreflective acceptance of “common sense”.⁵

Each of these ways of reading Hume has obvious attractions, and yet each has equally serious problems. The Radical Skepticism Reading faces several challenges - none more serious than the challenge posed by Hume’s apparently untroubled acceptance of ordinary forms of empirical reasoning throughout the *Treatise*, both before and after the skeptical passages in Part 1.4.⁶ And while the Naturalized Epistemology Reading rightly stresses Hume’s interest in the functioning of the human mind, naturalistically conceived, it seems unable to account for the passages in which Hume appears to engage in a normative evaluation of his faculties - passages which are most common at the close of Book 1. Finally, the No Resting Place Reading faces the obvious complaint that Hume seems at the close of Book 1 to have at least achieved a sufficiently stable and reflective point of view to be able to continue his investigation of the human mind in the manner he does for the remainder of the *Treatise*.

Ingenious solutions to all of these problems abound in the literature, but given these problems I believe that Hume is best read as reaching, at the close of Book 1, a relatively stable perspective on the normative standing of our basic epistemic faculties, one which involves only a limited degree of skepticism about ordinary empirical reasoning. Following Hume’s own terminology, we might call this the Mitigated Skepticism Reading.

In fact, Hume himself appears to endorse just such a response to skepticism at the crucial moment of 1.4.7, when he states what has come to be called the “Title Principle”:⁷

⁴For the classic articulation of this interpretation, see Norman Kemp Smith’s *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London: Macmillan, 1941).

⁵For an example of this reading, see Robert Fogelin’s *Hume’s Scepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (Boston: Routledge, 1985). As the case of Fogelin makes clear, one can endorse this last reading, while also endorsing the other reading as true from some particular perspective. Thus, there are in fact all sorts of possible combinations of these views in the literature. Similarly, the points I will be making below can be combined with a No Resting Place reading in various ways as well.

⁶For cases in which Hume appears to endorse one way of reasoning as opposed to others, see the passages of 1.4.7 cited below, as well as his “rules by which to judge of causes and effects” in the *Treatise* and his famous argument against miracles in the first *Enquiry*.

⁷This terminology is due to Don Garrett’s extremely helpful discussion of these issues. See his *Cognition and Commitment in Hume’s Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

“Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner. Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us.” (T, 1.4.7.11)

On its face, the Title Principle appears to represent the clear articulation of a distinction between (i) the ways we ought to reason and (ii) the ways we ought not to reason - a distinction which avoids the paradoxes and contradictions of the proposals Hume has considered previously and which will form the basis for the reasoning to come in Books 2 and 3 of the *Treatise*.⁸

If this is correct, then Hume does at the close of Book 1 arrive at a positive normative epistemology of his own, which only implies a limited level of skepticism. Of course, in giving this endorsement of certain forms of reasoning, Hume is not claiming that these forms of reasoning are justified by further reasons that speak in favor of their reliability. For, as his discussion of probable reasoning makes clear, Hume believes that in many cases no further reasons of this sort are available to us. Rather, in endorsing these patterns of reasoning, Hume is simply describing what good reasoning consists in - where this does not require the possibility of supplying further reasons for reasoning in the manner we do.

But even if we take the Title Principle at face value, it alone tells us very little about the nature of this epistemology. At most, this principle sorts cases of reasoning into two piles: one “good”, the other “bad”. In doing so, it tells us very little about why these cases are sorted in this way. And Hume appears to move very quickly from the statement of this principle to further reflections upon his skeptical discoveries that focus on issues, like curiosity and ambition, that may appear to be rather unconnected with the Title Principle itself - so it may appear to the reader that the Title Principle is of relatively little moment for Hume’s response to skepticism.

As should become clear, the proper response to both of these concerns requires a fuller understanding of how the Title Principle relates to those passages which follow it. For by better understanding this issue, we can better understand the manner in which the Title Principle fits into Hume’s more general sense of what “good” reasoning and belief formation consists in. And by doing so, we can also understand the manner in which the reflections

⁸In particular, as will become clearer, the Title Principle represents a way of avoiding these paradoxes because, while it endorses much of our ordinary empirical reasoning, it does not endorse, say, the reasoning that generates the paradoxes that Hume develops in 1.4.1. For more on exactly which sorts of reasoning pass the Title Principle test, see below.

that follow immediately upon the statement of the Title Principle support it, and the more general conception of how one ought to form beliefs of which it is an expression.⁹

2 The Practical Reading: the Title Principle and Moral Virtue

The general interpretation outlined so far has a number of proponents in the recent Hume literature. But even among those attracted to such a reading, there is very little consensus about how we should answer the question of why Hume accepts the distinction between “good” and “bad” reasoning that the Title Principle embodies.

Nonetheless, if I am not mistaken, the most popular response to this question involves what is sometimes called the Practical Reading of Hume’s epistemology.¹⁰ On this interpretation, Hume accepts the Title Principle for reasons that are ultimately practical - as opposed to epistemic - in character. Or, in other words, he accepts that we ought to reason in the manner this principle describes because doing so survives reflection from a practical point of view.

As generally developed, this line of interpretation accepts that no variety of reasoning can be positively evaluated from a purely theoretical or epistemic point of view. This, the proponent of the Practical Reading claims, is exactly what Hume means when he says that the understanding “entirely subverts itself” when it reflects upon itself. (T 1.4.7.7)¹¹

⁹There are a number of important objections to the idea that the Title Principle plays an important role in Hume’s response to skepticism. For instance, it is far from clear that the Title Principle actually delivers the verdicts Hume appears to believe it does in certain important cases. And it is worrisome for defenders of the Title Principle’s significance that it is unclear whether it plays any role in, say, Hume’s response to skepticism in the *Enquiry*. As will become clear, I will be interpreting the significance of this principle differently than is often the case, even among those convinced of its significance. Thus, I will postpone discussion of these objections until I have said more about how I think it is best understood.

¹⁰For examples of this way of reading Hume, see Paul Ardal’s “Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume’s Treatise” in *Hume: A Re-evaluation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1976), Robert Fogelin’s *Hume’s Scepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (Boston: Routledge, 1985), David Owen’s *Hume’s Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), and Michael Ridge’s “Epistemology Moralized: Hume’s Practical Epistemology” in *Hume Studies* (2003).

¹¹An alternative way of developing the Practical Reading would read this claim - and other like it - as purely descriptive, psychological claims. This version of the Practical Reading would agree with Naturalized Epistemology Reading that Hume has no interest in engaging in the normative epistemic evaluation of our faculties and beliefs. But it would add to this the positive claim that Hume does (in 1.4.7) engage in the normative evaluation of our faculties and beliefs from a practical point of view.

Instead, according to the Practical Reading, we can locate a perspective from which we can positively evaluate certain forms of reasoning only when we turn from a narrowly theoretical or epistemic perspective on our faculties to a perspective that embraces our practical - as well as our theoretical - aims.

As such, it is not the case that this line of interpretation does away with any distinction between the theoretical and the practical evaluation of our cognitive faculties. Rather, it respects this distinction, but understands Hume's positive evaluation of our reasoning faculties as made from a practical - as opposed to a theoretical or epistemic - perspective. Thus, according to this line of interpretation, when we accept the Title Principle, we do so because it describes the sorts of reasoning that we endorse when we consider the matter with our practical interests and aims in mind.

This way of reading Hume gains an important source of support from the sorts of considerations that Hume explicitly appeals to in his defense of the Title Principle at the close of Book 1. For example, Hume's defense of this principle often focuses on the immediate pleasure he receives from reasoning in the manner the Title Principle describes. For instance, he notes that inclinations to reason about matters of more philosophical sort,

“spring up naturally in my present disposition; and shou'd I endeavour to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I feel I shoud be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy.” (T 1.4.7.12)

And it is very natural to think that the fact that reasoning of a certain sort would bring one pleasure must be a practical consideration in favor of reasoning in this way.

Similarly, when Hume compares his account of how we ought to reason with an account of how we ought to form beliefs that relies on religion and “superstition”, he notes that mistakes in philosophy are “merely ridiculous”, whereas similar mistakes in religion are often extremely “dangerous” (T 1.4.7.13). Here Hume is plainly thinking of the (for him) recent history of European religious wars. And while we today - in the wake of our experience of very dangerous “mistakes in philosophy” - might dispute the empirical point he is making, it once again seems that he is appealing here to a practical mode of evaluation of in comparing these two ways of forming beliefs.

There are, then, some powerful *prima facie* reasons for reading Hume in this way. And this general line of interpretation only gains strength when we ask ourselves how we might flesh out the general idea that Hume is, at the end of Book 1, engaged in some form of practical evaluation. For given what Hume says latter on in the *Treatise* about the nature

of moral evaluation, it seems plausible that if Hume is engaging in the practical evaluation of our faculties at the close of Book 1, this evaluation should be understood to be a special case of the sort of moral evaluation that he outlines in 3.3 of the *Treatise*.¹²

If this is right, then a coherent picture of what motivates Hume at the close of Book 1 quickly emerges. For Hume, moral evaluation is first and foremost a matter of the evaluation of character traits as virtuous or vicious. And a character trait will count as a virtue, according to Hume's account, just in case it secures a positive passionate response from the "the moral sense", when considered from what Hume calls the "common point of view". This, in turn, can occur for a number of reasons - by far the most important of which are the following:

1. The trait is immediately agreeable to its possessor.
2. It is immediately agreeable to others in the narrow circle of its possessor.
3. It is useful to its possessor.
4. It is useful to others in the same narrow circle.¹³

Thus, if Hume is engaging in the moral evaluation of different forms of reasoning at the close of Book 1, we should expect him to make use of these four kinds of considerations in doing so. And strikingly, this is exactly what Hume appears to do.¹⁴ As we have seen above, he clearly appeals to the manner in which reasoning in certain ways can be an immediate source of pleasure for the reasoner. And, as noted above, he also appeals to the "dangerous" consequences that certain forms of reasoning can have for others. Moreover, it is not difficult to locate the other two sorts of consideration in his discussion. For example, he stresses the fact that "no one will hearken to" him when he is in the grips of his skeptical melancholy - a plain reference to the immediately disagreeable nature of this state for others. (T 1.4.7.1) And he also discusses the "uselessness" of such a state of mind - at least insofar as this relates to his ability to solve problems of a theoretical sort.

Thus, Hume's discussion of how one should respond to skeptical arguments appeals to examples of all of the four varieties of consideration one would expect him to emphasize if he were in fact evaluating the different possible responses to skepticism from a moral

¹²For a detailed argument for this reading of Hume, see Michael Ridge's "Epistemology Moralized".

¹³See, e.g., T 3.3.1.28-31.

¹⁴Compare Ridge's discussion of these issues.

point of view. And, moreover, thinking of Hume's account of how one ought to reason in this manner lends a pleasing unity to his account how we ought to reason and his account of how we ought to act or be more generally. For if this reading is correct, then the distinction between "good" and "bad" forms of reasoning is just a particular instance of the general moral distinction between virtuous and vicious character traits. Thus, on this interpretation, at the close of Book 1 Hume is making tacit use of a virtue-theoretical account of how one ought to reason - one that is simply a particular application of his general account of the moral virtues.

On this interpretation, then, the Title Principle simply describes how a morally-virtuous person forms beliefs. As should be obvious, there is a great deal that I find attractive about this way of reading Hume. In reflecting on the merits of various forms of reasoning, Hume does seem to be engaging in a form of reflection that is quite similar to the sort of reflection he will later describe in his discussion of the moral sense. In particular, it seems that his evaluation of his faculties at the close of Book 1 is closely tied to the manner in which his *passions* respond to the skeptical "discoveries" that he has made earlier on in Book 1. Thus, much as in the case of moral evaluation, the sort of evaluation Hume is engaged in here in some way involves considering which forms of reasoning elicit a positive response from (at least some of) his passions upon reflection. And much as in the moral case, Hume appears to be considering this question from a perspective that abstracts away from *some* of the potentially distorting effects of personal bias and the like - i.e. from something like the "common point of view".

In this way, there is a clear structural parallel between the sort of evaluation Hume is engaged in at the close of Book 1 and the form of moral evaluation he describes in Book 3 of the *Treatise*. And, given this structural parallel, it is not at all surprising that Hume appeals to the four varieties of consideration noted above: namely, features of some pattern of reasoning that garner an immediate positive response from our passions (and the passions of those around us) and considerations that indirectly garner a positive response from our passions (and the passions of others) through their consequences.

Furthermore, the Practical Reading also seems to acquire additional support from Hume's discussion of various intellectual virtues in *Treatise* 3.3.4. There Hume, following ancient moralists such as Aristotle and Cicero, argues that the narrowly moral virtues, such as justice or benevolence, should be treated as of the same general class as the natural talents and abilities, including both physical abilities and those of an intellectual sort. In particular, in the first six paragraphs of this section, Hume makes reference to intellectual

abilities (or disabilities) such as “sense and knowledge”, “want of understanding”, “good sense and judgment”, “a moderate share ... of parts and understanding”, “good sense and genius”, “superiority of reason”, “a quick or a slow apprehension”, and so forth. All of these are naturally read as intellectual virtues or vices of some sort. And Hume’s point in this section appears to be that we should give the same sort of treatment to these intellectual virtues and vices that we give of the moral virtues and vices, narrowly construed.¹⁵

If this is correct, it obviously provides a strong source of support for the version of the Practical Reading that we are considering. But despite this, and despite the advantages noted above, there are also good reasons to wonder whether the best way to understand the sort of evaluation Hume is engaged in at this stage of the *Treatise* is to view it as a species of practical evaluation as the Practical Reading supposes is the case.^{16 17}

There are two main reasons for my hesitancy about this question. First, as noted above, while this reading of Hume allows him to find a practical justification for reasoning in the manner he endorses, it does not allow him to claim any sort of theoretical or epistemic justification for reasoning in this way. Thus, on this reading, Hume remains a theoretical or epistemic skeptic - something that seems to me to sit poorly with the *manner* in which he endorses the empirical method. Throughout Book 1 of the *Treatise* and beyond, Hume specifies a variety of rules and principles for good reasoning - including the Title Principle noted above. And in endorsing these principles, he does not indicate that he means to endorse them merely from a practical point of view. Quite on the contrary, while Hume does qualify his endorsement of these principles in various ways, he never indicates that this endorsement is not meant to be an endorsement of them on broadly epistemic grounds. That is, while Hume is a mitigated skeptic, his *mitigated* skepticism seems to relate to the *epistemic* status of the patterns of reasoning he endorses and not to their moral status. As he says, when considering the nature of causal inference in the *Enquiry*, those who argue that his researches have no practical purpose:

“ mistake the purport of my question. As an agent, I am quite satisfied in the point; but as a philosopher, who has some share of curiosity, I will not say scepticism, I want to

¹⁵A point that Hume importantly echoes in his later discussion of these questions.

¹⁶It is often suggested that a purely moral reading of Hume’s claims at the close of Book 1 invites the charge of circularity against him. But this is a complicated issue, so I want to postpone discussion of it for the moment. For more discussion of this issue, see Ridge’s “Epistemology Moralized” and footnotes 18 and 33 below.

¹⁷In addition to the exegetical reasons I will discuss here, the Practical Reading of Hume seems to me unattractive on purely philosophical grounds. But discussion of this issue would take us too far afield.

learn the foundation of this inference.” (ECHU, 4.21)

Second, this way of reading Hume makes it difficult to explain the discontinuities between his evaluation of our faculties at the close of Book 1 and his discussion of the moral sense in Book 3. In particular, while both his evaluation of the different possible responses to skepticism and his conception of the moral sense involve the structural similarities noted above, these evaluations focus on quite *different* passionate responses. In considering how he should respond to skepticism, Hume generally focuses on a quite narrow range of passions - namely, the more “intellectual” passions of (i) curiosity or “the love of truth” and (ii) ambition.¹⁸ On the other hand, in his discussion of the moral virtues, these two passions play a very minor role in comparison with the other ways in which our character traits may be associated with (much more powerful and direct forms of) pleasure and pain. Thus, there is an apparent discontinuity between the sort of passionate evaluation embodied by Hume’s discussion at the close of Book 1 and the sort described in his discussion of the moral sense.¹⁹

These discontinuities are only confirmed by careful consideration of the one place in

¹⁸The crucial passage here is the following:

“At the time, therefore, that I am tir’d with amusement and company, and have indulg’d a reverie in my chamber, or in a solitary walk by a river-side, I feel my mind all collected within itself, and am naturally inclin’d 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. I cannot forbear having a *curiosity* to be acquainted with the principles of moral good and evil, the nature and foundation of government, and the cause of those several passions and inclinations, which actuate and govern me. I am uneasy to think I approve of one object, and disapprove of another; call one thing beautiful, and another deform’d; decide concerning truth and falshood, reason and folly, without knowing upon what principles I proceed. I am concern’d for *the condition of the learned world*, which lies under such deplorable *ignorance* in all these particulars. I feel an *ambition* to arise in me of contributing to the *instruction* of mankind, and of *acquiring a name by my inventions and discoveries*. These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition; and shou’d I endeavour to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I feel I shou’d be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy.” (T, 1.4.7.12, my emphasis)

Similarly, when Hume recommends a “sceptical solution” to his difficulties in the *Enquiry*, he writes that a “sceptical” approach to philosophy “mortifies” every passion *but* “the love of truth; and that passion never is, nor can be carried to too high a degree.” (ECHU 5.1)

¹⁹Moreover, although the forms of reasoning that the Title Principle recommends generally are in line with the way a morally virtuous person would reason, given Hume’s account of moral virtue, this is not always the case. For surely there are cases in which a pattern of reasoning is lively in whatever sense is relevant to the Title Principle, and yet would also have foreseeable practical consequences that would lead the moral sense to withhold its approval from reasoning in this way?

which Hume seems to deviate from them - namely, the above mentioned discussion of the “dangers” associated with religion and superstition as opposed to philosophy. For while Hume does discuss this issue, he explicitly characterizes it as a consideration that he is citing only because, even without his feelings of curiosity and ambition, he would find himself drawn into speculation as a result of “weakness”. (T 1.4.7.13) Thus, it appears that it is the passions of curiosity and ambition that are the focus of his primary reflections here, and that the dangerousness of religion and superstition is only cited as a supplement to his main line of thought. Of course, in citing these considerations, Hume is engaging in a practical evaluation of different possible forms of reasoning. But much like his discussion of the “interested obligation” to be virtuous in the moral case, his argument here that we all have an “interested obligation” to prefer philosophy to “superstition” is most naturally understood as a supplement to his initial argument that reasoning in accordance with the Title Principle is preferable because of the manner in which it secures our reflective approval of our sense of curiosity and ambition.

This sits awkwardly with the Practical Reading of what Hume is up to here. For, of course, if Hume were engaged in the practical evaluation of different possible responses to skepticism at this point, the dangers associated with the different possible responses would be the first thing he would want to consider!²⁰ So while practical considerations are not absent from Hume’s discussion here, they do not seem to dominate it in the manner

²⁰Against this point, and following Ridge’s discussion of these issues, we might insist that Hume de-emphasizes the dangerous consequences of certain forms of reasoning here because appealing to them in the context of his debate with the proponent of religion would be question-begging. For one might insist that it is only true that philosophy is less “dangerous” in its consequences than religion if we limit ourselves to the consequences of philosophy and religion in the present life. After all, for the religious believer at least, any set of beliefs other than the true religion will have devastating consequences in the life to follow.

Unfortunately, this does not seem to be what is motivating Hume in the text at this juncture. And this seems to me quite significant, since it seems to me doubtful whether Hume would be worried about “begging the question” against the proponent of religion in this sense. But even if he was concerned with this, it seems to me that same concerns would arise with respect to *any* moral or practical evaluation of different forms of reasoning. After all, suppose we - following Ridge - focus only on the immediate pleasure and pain that our beliefs bring us - i.e. the first of the considerations that is relevant to the evaluations of the moral sense. Even in this case, it seems that the proponent of religion is in a position to insist that his set of beliefs will be the source of a greater degree of immediate pleasure than the beliefs of the philosopher, when we take into account both our current existence on earth and our life to come. After all, he may insist that one of the great pleasures of heaven is the immediate pleasure our faith in God gives us in the life to come. So, even this aspect of the practical evaluation of different methods of forming beliefs seems to be open to the objection that it begs the question against the proponent of traditional religion.

the Practical Reading would suggest. Thus, once again, we find an apparent disanalogy between the considerations that loom large in his discussion at the close of Book 1 and the considerations that would loom large in a moral evaluation of different forms of reasoning, given Hume's account of moral evaluation.²¹

3 Epistemic Virtue and the Intellectual Passions

In order to respond to these worries, we must find a way to understand the Title Principle - not as based on the practical evaluation of different forms of reasoning - but instead as based on some sort of properly epistemic evaluation of them. And yet we must do so in a manner that does justice both to the clear structural parallels between Hume's account of moral virtue and his discussion of how we ought to reason and to Hume's later insistence that the intellectual virtues and the narrowly moral virtues should be treated in the same general way. The key to accomplishing all this lies in the observation that Hume's conception of "moral evaluation" is extremely broad. In particular, there are certain contexts in which the sort of moral evaluation Hume describes in the last Book of the *Treatise* is primarily - if not entirely - focused on the evaluation of character traits from an epistemic, as opposed to a practical, point of view. Once we recognize this, we can agree with the Practical Reading that Hume's account of the intellectual virtues shares a common foundation with his discussion of what is virtuous in a narrowly moral sense, while also insisting that the positive evaluation he gives of his intellectual virtues at the close of Book 1 is primarily an epistemic one.

To understand how this is possible, we need to re-consider the sort of evaluation of our intellectual faculties that Hume is engaged in during 1.4.7. In doing so, we should contain to affirm what is correct about the Practical Reading - namely, that in these passages Hume is engaged in the evaluation of patterns of reasoning as virtuous or vicious in his

²¹Similarly, in the first *Enquiry*, although Hume does complain that no "durable good" can ever come of excessive skepticism, he makes it immediately clear that his first concern about such skepticism is that it will never produce any "constant and durable" *conviction or belief*. (ECHU, 12.23) The practical consequences of this, which he goes on to mention, seem to be of secondary importance to this primary weakness of excessive skepticism. And, as we see in a moment, *this* first negative evaluation of skepticism (as producing no stable and durable conviction) is closely connected to the distinctive form of epistemic evaluation involved at the close of Book 1 of the *Treatise*. So although the Title Principle *per se* does not play a role in Hume's discussion in the *Enquiry*, the considerations I will discuss next lie at the center of his response to skepticism there, just as true in the *Treatise*.

very broad sense of these terms. But at the same time, we need to reconsider what this implies - taking time to focus on the possibility that in the context of 1.4.7 this evaluation is primarily epistemic as opposed to practical in character. By doing so, I claim, we can locate a notion of epistemic virtue at work within Hume's discussion of these issues.

In considering these questions, it will be helpful to begin by considering what it is exactly that the Title Principle recommends to us. According to this principle we ought to reason in some way just in case this reasoning is "lively" and mixes with "some propensity". But what sort of "propensity" is it that is at issue here? In Book 1 of the *Treatise* Hume uses the terms "propensity" and "inclination" to refer to a wide variety of dispositions or tendencies of the mind.²² But as the prior sentence makes clear, what is at issue in the Title Principle are propensities to form beliefs that arise "from an inclination, which we feel to be employing ourselves after that manner". And as Hume immediately goes on to explain, when he "naturally inclined" in this way, this is because he "cannot forbear having a curiosity" about certain matters - a curiosity that is, in part, the product of his related sense of intellectual ambition. Thus, it is these passions that are the primary source of the inclination Hume is referring to here. In other words, as Hume makes clear later on, it is these passions - and curiosity in particular - that represent "the first source of all our enquiries". (T 2.3.10.1)

In this way, the propensity that the Title Principle makes reference to is a propensity that is grounded primarily in our passions of curiosity and ambition. It is possible for these passions to play this role because when some piece of reasoning engages a Humean passion, this enlivens the ideas that result from the reasoning in question.²³ Thus, when we are curious about some matter, we feel a propensity to reason about this matter *and* arrive at conclusions that are much more vivacious than they would otherwise be.²⁴

Thus, what the Title Principle recommends to us is that we engage in reasoning only insofar as we have a propensity to engage in this reasoning - a propensity which is generally grounded in these two passions. Or, better, it should be read as recommending that we engage in reasoning only insofar as it will *satisfy* the passions that ground the relevant propensity. For, as Hume's own reasoning in 1.4.1 makes clear, it is possible for curiosity

²²See, for example: "that propensity, which custom produces, to pass from an object to the idea of its usual attendant" (T 1.3.14.21) and "we have a propensity to feign the continued existence of all sensible objects; and as this propensity arises from some lively impressions of the memory" (T 1.4.2.42). Thanks to XXX for pressing me to be clearer about this issue.

²³For the enlivening role of passions see, e.g., T 1.3.13.10.

²⁴Compare Hume's discussion of probable reasoning in 1.3.8.

to prompt us to engage in trains of reasoning that produce a state of mind that is far *less satisfying* to our curiosity than our previous state of mind was. Thus, like any passion, the passions of curiosity and ambition can dispose us to behave in ways that would not gain the approval of these passions upon reflection. And, of course, when this is the case, we are well advised - according to Hume at least - to disregard the passions in question.

On this reading then, the Title Principle recommends to us that we engage in reasoning only insofar as it will satisfy our curiosity and our intellectual ambition. And it will only satisfy the latter insofar as it satisfies the curiosity of those in our “narrow circle”. So, the Title Principle, in effect, recommends that we engage in reasoning just in case this reasoning satisfies our own curiosity and the curiosity of those that we regard as members of our “epistemic community”.²⁵ In other words, the Title Principle will approve of some pattern of reasoning just in case this pattern of reasoning satisfies at least one of the following four criteria:

1. It immediately satisfies the curiosity of the reasoner.
2. It immediately satisfies the curiosity of others in the reasoner’s “narrow circle”.
3. It indirectly satisfies the curiosity of the reasoner.
4. It indirectly satisfies the curiosity of others in the reasoner’s “narrow circle”.

As such, the recommendations made by the Title Principle will not be the same for every individual. For individuals, such as Hume, who are possessed of a strong natural sense of curiosity, the Title Principle will recommend the attempt to satisfy this curiosity via active philosophical engagement with the issues that are their concern. In fact, it will often be the case that these individual’s sense of curiosity is best satisfied by the consideration of certain skeptical arguments at least up to a point, which is an important element of Hume’s endorsement of mitigated skepticism. But it will not demand the same

²⁵Much as is true in the moral case, determining who is part of an individual’s “epistemic community” will not always be a simple matter. For the community that is relevant here will be determined, above all else, by the individual’s willingness to take the beliefs of other individuals seriously in forming his or her own beliefs. Or, in other words, it will be determined by the limits of the individual’s sense of epistemic sympathy. Thus, the bounds of someone’s epistemic community will often be sensitive to their own judgments concerning which individuals are worthy of intellectual respect and engagement - although, at the same time, it will be difficult for anyone to be completely unresponsive to the beliefs of those they are close to, given the mechanism of Humean sympathy.

of individuals who lack such an inclination. Rather, in this case, the Title Principle will recommend a less philosophical and reflective attitude towards the questions of life.²⁶ In effect, then, the Title Principle recommends that our reasoning be guided by our own sense of curiosity, whatever form this takes.

Thus, while the Title Principle holds equally for individuals of both these sorts, its recommendations will be quite different for members of these different groups.²⁷ This may seem to raise a worry about whether the Title Principle in fact generates the results Hume seems to think it does. After all, won't some individuals feel compelled by their sense of curiosity to investigate precisely those questions that lead one down a path towards the paradoxes Hume uncovers in the earlier sections of 1.4. In fact, isn't this exactly what was true of Hume's earlier self? And, moreover, doesn't, say, religious "superstition" provide the theist with a way of satisfying his curiosity about the world that is at least as psychologically effective at fixing belief as Hume's own philosophy? If so, won't the Title Principle endorse both abstract "metaphysical" reasoning of the problematic sort *and* religious superstition with respect to certain individuals. And isn't this contrary to Hume's intended recommendation of his moderate form of philosophical investigation over these alternatives?

In fact, once we consider the results of Hume's inquiries into the psychology of belief formation neither of these results follows from the Title Principle - at least insofar as we apply it to psychologically normal individuals. For while one's sense of curiosity may push one to engage in the sorts of reasoning that generate the skeptical paradoxes that worry Hume, reflection on the nature of this reasoning and the limits of the human mind make it clear that, at least in its extreme forms, such reasoning can never lead to the satisfaction of one's curiosity. Similarly, while it may appear that religious superstition offers an effective means of satisfying our curiosity, at least for someone with Hume's own sense of curiosity, this is merely an appearance - one that will be dispelled once we consider the limits of

²⁶As Hume's discussion at the close of 1.4.7 makes clear: "If the reader finds himself in the same easy disposition, let him follow me in my future speculations. If not, let him follow his inclination, and wait the returns of application and good humour. The conduct of a man who studies philosophy in this careless manner, is more truly sceptical than that of one who, feeling in himself an inclination to it, is yet so overwhelmed with doubts and scruples, as totally to reject it." (T 1.4.7.15)

²⁷In other words, there is a substantial element of "subject-sensitivity" built into Hume's understanding of epistemic evaluation. Not surprisingly, much the same, I believe, is true of Hume's discussion of moral evaluation as well. (For a recent discussion of the potential subject sensitivity of knowledge attributions, see John Hawthorne. *Knowledge and Lotteries*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

our ability to arrive at a conception of God that is both stable and contentful enough to satisfy our curiosity about matters divine.²⁸ In particular, while (what Hume takes to be) the vague and somewhat self-contradictory common understanding of God may satisfy the curiosity of ordinary individuals, it will not satisfy the sense of curiosity possessed by those with more curious sentiments - sentiments that will lead these individuals to ask the uncomfortable questions that (according to Hume) reveal the tensions within the ordinary conception of the divine.²⁹ Moreover, even in the case of individuals with a fairly weak sense of curiosity, religious beliefs will only generate stable, curiosity-satisfying beliefs insofar as they do not come into obvious conflict with other religious beliefs or with non-religious beliefs about the world. Thus, an ordinary individual's curiosity will be more likely to be satisfied by religious beliefs insofar as they avoid wild or counter-intuitive claims about the world or God. Even in this case, then, an individual's sense of curiosity will not be best satisfied by the sorts of excesses of wild superstition that Hume wishes to condemn here.³⁰

Thus, according to Hume, upon reflection it becomes clear that neither of these means of generating beliefs is actually an effective means of satisfying one's curiosity - at least when compared with Hume's own suggestions. Moreover, as we will discuss further in moment, a method of forming beliefs will only gain the reflective approval of our sense of curiosity (that is, our "love of truth") insofar as it generally produces beliefs that we take to

²⁸In addition to this issue, there is the conflict that Hume sees between developing an epistemically satisfying conception of God and developing a conception of God that satisfies the passions of fear and hope that prompt us (in large part) to consider the nature of God. In this way, these further motivations for considering the nature of God make it particularly difficult to arrive at a conception thereof that will satisfy our sense of curiosity.

²⁹For an example of the manner in which such questions naturally arise, see of course Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. As the discussion there makes plain, while traditional religious beliefs may fail to satisfy one's curiosity in virtue of their inconsistencies, given how lacking it is in content, the more minimal conception of God favored by the deist hardly does much better.

Also compare Hume's comment in the Enquiry on these matters: "The religious philosophers, not satisfied with the tradition of your forefathers, and doctrine of your priests (in which I willingly acquiesce), indulge a rash curiosity, in trying how far they can establish religion upon the principles of reason; and they thereby excite, instead of satisfying, the doubts, which naturally arise from a diligent and scrupulous enquiry." (ECHU, 11.10).

³⁰Of course, these claims are in part empirical, and one might wonder whether there are not in fact individuals - or even groups thereof - who can satisfy their curiosity quite completely through a slavish devotion to the wildest pieces of religious superstition. But, so long as we are not dealing with individuals who are truly insane, there appears to be a limit to how successful such strategies may be - especially when we turn from considering individuals in isolation from one another to considering communities of them.

be true. Of course, it would be question-begging for Hume to appeal to this consideration while *debating* a defender of superstition, but surely it is one of the main reasons that such ways of forming beliefs do not gain the approval of his own sense of curiosity when he reflects upon the matter.³¹

These comments should also help to make clear why the Title Principle, when interpreted in this way, represents a normative - as opposed to merely descriptive - principle. For while the Title Principle's recommendations do depend upon one's own passionate makeup, it is perfectly possible to reason in a manner that does not conform to its recommendations. After all, as the example of Hume's own reasonings earlier on in 1.4 makes clear, it is perfectly possible to reason in a manner that will not be effective at satisfying one's curiosity. Thus, although the Title Principle is to some degree relativized to an individual's passionate make-up, it nonetheless articulates a genuine standard for reasoning that one can fail to meet.³²

Moreover, when broken down in this way, there is an obvious parallel between the recommendations made by the Title Principle and the factors that elicit the approval of the moral sense, on Hume's account. Just as the moral sense approves of some trait just in case it is directly or indirectly agreeable to the possessor and those in his narrow circle, the Title Principle approves of some way of reasoning just in case it directly or indirectly satisfies the curiosity of the reasoner and those in his epistemic community. So it is easy to see the Title Principle as describing a special case of the sort of virtue that discusses later on in the *Treatise*: namely, the sort of virtue that is relevant in cases in which the passions of curiosity and ambition largely determine our evaluation of a character trait.

If Hume is correct, it is precisely these passions that are most relevant to the evaluation of the sort of rather abstract reasoning he is concerned with at the close of Book 1 of the *Treatise* - or at least this is the case insofar as this reasoning does not become downright dangerous in some way. Thus, in this case, the evaluation of character traits as virtuous and vicious will focus, not on their *general* agreeableness - as is usually true - but instead

³¹As Hume says, although the ability of some piece of reasoning to please our curiosity depends heavily on the genius displayed by that reasoning and the importance of its conclusion, it also requires that there be "a degree of success in the attainment of the end" - that is, in "the discovery of that truth we examine". (T 2.3.10.7)

³²In this regard, the Title Principle is once again akin to the sort of moral virtue that Hume recommends - for Hume's understanding of moral virtue is also sensitive to what will be agreeable and useful to the individual under evaluation, although not in manner that robs this notion of virtue of all normative significance.

on their ability to satisfy our curiosity and that of those around us.

This is crucial here because once we turn from a focus on general agreeableness to a narrow focus on curiosity and intellectual ambition, the resulting notion of intellectual virtue is much closer to our contemporary understanding of an epistemic virtue than it is to our understanding of a practical or moral one. For instance, if we restrict our attention to these two passions, we will arrive at the following notion of epistemic virtue - which may be regarded as a particular form of virtue in Hume's very general sense of the term:

(EPISTEMIC) A intellectual trait is an *epistemic virtue* just in case it elicits the reflective approval of the passion of curiosity, and the related passion of intellectual ambition, on the "general survey" and from the "common point of view".³³

In conceiving of epistemic virtue in this manner, we are simply applying Hume's account of how we determine whether something is a virtue to the sort of passionate evaluation that is most relevant to his evaluation of different sorts of reasoning at the close of Book 1. Thus, given this way of conceiving of epistemic evaluation, it is no surprise that the sort of evaluation we find in Book 1 has the structural similarities to moral evaluation noted above. In particular, a pattern of reasoning will count as epistemically virtuous in this sense just in case it satisfies at least one of the four criteria noted above. For it is just those patterns of reasoning that directly or indirectly satisfy the curiosity of the reasoner and those in his epistemic community that will elicit our approval when we view the manner from Hume's "common point of view". Thus, the Title Principle - understand in the manner just described - can be seen to follow naturally from the sort of passionate reflection that Hume is engaged in at the close of Book 1 - reflection which focuses on the ability of some pattern of reasoning to gain our approval against the background of these twin "intellectual" passions.

Of course, as Hume's discussion of "danger" makes clear, practical considerations are not wholly absent from the sort of evaluation he is engaged in at the close of Book 1. But it is just as clear that the factors that dominate his discussion are the ones that are relevant

³³In order to arrive at a "moral" evaluation of someone's character, in Hume's broad sense of the term, we must modify our ordinary passionate responses in two ways. First, we must take a general survey of someone's character, allowing sympathy to determine our response to that character - thereby avoiding the biasing affects of self-interest. And, second, we must "correct" these responses via taking on the common point of view so as to produce general agreement about matters of virtue and vice. EPISTEMIC simply these two modifications to the passions of curiosity and intellectual ambition.

to EPISTEMIC. And in so far as Hume's positive evaluation of certain forms of reasoning as primarily based in the sort of approval laid out by EPISTEMIC, we can think of him as endorsing these patterns of reasoning on grounds that are epistemic - as opposed to merely practical - in character.³⁴ Of course, Hume does not himself separate these two sorts of factors from one another, but he could have easily done so, and if he did, the result would have been the conception of epistemic virtue laid out in EPISTEMIC - which, if I am right, is what dominates his discussion at the close of Book 1.³⁵

Hopefully, it is not too difficult to see how evaluations that are based in our sense of curiosity might be regarded as fundamentally epistemic in character. Curiosity for Hume is, after all, "the love of truth". Thus, as we mentioned above, a method of forming beliefs will only gain the reflective approval of this passion if this method tends to produce true beliefs. More precisely, just as in the moral case, once we modify our passion of curiosity by taking a "general survey" from the "common point of view", this passion will approve of ways of forming beliefs that *generally* satisfy one's sense of curiosity, whether or not they happen to produce true beliefs in the particular case in question.³⁶ Thus, the reflective approval of our sense of curiosity will only be triggered by ways of forming beliefs that are at least generally reliable, in just the manner we would expect to be true of an epistemic form of evaluation.³⁷

³⁴Of course, this means that there will be cases in which both practical and epistemic characteristics are relevant to whether a character trait counts as a virtue. My point here is simply that epistemic considerations are in fact relevant to this question and that it is these considerations that dominate the discussion we are considering.

³⁵For some general discussion of the role that curiosity plays in Hume's response to skepticism see Lorne Falkenstein's "Naturalism, Normativity, and Scepticism in Hume's Account of Belief," *Hume Studies* 23 (1997). Although, I applaud Falkenstein's focus on the importance of curiosity for these questions, I differ from him with regards to the nature of this importance. For Falkenstein, curiosity is important in this context because it is itself a moral virtue. As result, Falkenstein's account of these matters, if I am not mistaken, is best understood as an instance of the Practical Reading just discussed - while my aim in this section is to show that there is a notion of purely epistemic virtue implicit in the role that curiosity plays in this context for Hume.

³⁶Compare Hume's discussion of moral virtue at T 3.3.1.20: "To this we may reply, that where any object, in all its parts, is fitted to attain any agreeable end, it naturally gives us pleasure, and is esteem'd beautiful, even tho' some external circumstances be wanting to render it altogether effectual. 'Tis sufficient if every thing be compleat in the object itself. ... Where a character is, in every respect, fitted to be beneficial to society, the imagination passes easily from the cause to the effect, without considering that there are still some circumstances wanting to render the cause a compleat one. General rules create a species of probability, which sometimes influences the judgment, and always the imagination."

³⁷See again 2.3.10.7.

Evidence for the claim that curiosity plays a central role in determining Hume’s understanding of how we ought to reason is provided by Hume’s decision to conclude his discussion of the passions in Book 2 with a discussion of this passion - which is the “the first source of all our enquiries”. (T 2.3.10.1) And this discussion contains much that is important to our discussion of curiosity and epistemic virtue here. In particular, while Hume does describe curiosity as “the love of truth”, this passion does not love all truths - or hate all falsehoods - equally. For, as Hume says about those truths that are based in relations of ideas: “Tis certain, that the former species of truth, is not desir’d merely as truth, and that ‘tis not the justness of our conclusions, which alone gives the pleasure.” (T 2.3.10.2) Rather, as Hume goes on to detail, at least two additional qualities are generally required in order for a truth to engage our sense of curiosity: First, there must be some “genius and capacity, which is employ’d in its [the truth’s] invention and discovery.” (T 2.3.10.3) And, second, the “truth we discover must also be of some importance.” (T 2.3.10.4)³⁸

Now it may seem that the presence of the second of these considerations undermines the idea that curiosity-based evaluations may be thought of as epistemic - as opposed to practical - in character. But while our practical interests do play a role in determining what excites our curiosity, this role is decidedly secondary. What is fundamental here are two factors: First, the pleasure we take in the inventive activity of the mind. And, second, the fact that just as “the vivacity of the idea gives pleasure, so its certainty prevents uneasiness, by fixing one particular idea in the mind, and keeping it from wavering in the choice of its objects.” (T 2.3.10.12) It is these two qualities of the mind that, in the first instance, determine what excites our curiosity.³⁹ Our practical interests come into play only insofar as they are relevant to the “force” with which an idea “strikes on us” - for where an idea does not interest us, it will lack this force - and so its fixity or variation will be unable to excite any great pleasure or pain, even with respect to our sense of curiosity. Thus when Hume complains in the first *Enquiry* that excessive skepticism produces no stable

³⁸David Owen takes these passages to indicate Hume’s belief that curiosity *alone* has little motivational force, but they seem to me to be better understood as components of Hume’s characterization of what curiosity *is*. See the discussion of these issues in Owen’s *Hume’s Reason*.

The observation that our sense of curiosity is not equally excited by all truths is commonplace in the recent literature on this subject. For example, see Ernest Sosa’s discussion of these issues in his “For the Love of Truth?” in Depaul and Zagzebski, eds., *Intellectual Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³⁹Thus, according to Hume, while curiosity is interested in the truth, this interest is the product of these more basic psychological tendencies. Compare again the comparison between philosophy, hunting, and gaming at T 2.3.10.7-11.

or durable conviction, he is once again attacking skepticism for its failure to satisfy our passion of curiosity, just as in the *Treatise*.⁴⁰

To be sure, this indicates a location in which there may be a sort of what has come to be called “pragmatic encroachment” upon our epistemic evaluations. That is, it represents a respect in which our epistemic evaluations are sensitive to practical factors or concerns beyond those that are sometimes taken to be proper to epistemology. But this need not be any objection to this account, since there are many cases in which our epistemic evaluation appear to be sensitive to exactly these sorts of factors.⁴¹ And in any case, the spirit of Hume’s discussion of these issues is contrary to any attempt to draw a hard and fast line between factors of an epistemic and a practical sort. After all, as we have just noted, our sense of curiosity is based in a love of truth, but not a mere love of truth as such. Rather, our sense of curiosity delights in ways of reasoning that are generally reliable *and* that are likely to have the following consequences:

1. They produce relatively stable ideas, which are sufficiently lively to end inquiry.⁴²
2. They produce such ideas in areas that are of interest to us or they produce such ideas via inventive trains of thought that indicate a certain “genius”.⁴³
3. And, building on the point made above about ambition, they produce a general agreement concerning such ideas, at least within our “narrow circle”.⁴⁴

⁴⁰See, in particular, ECHU 12.23.

⁴¹See, for instance, Mark McGarth and Jeremy Fantl, “On Pragmatic Encroachment in Epistemology,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 75, 3: 558-589 (2007).

⁴²As is implied by the passage noted above at T 2.3.10.12. For the idea that moderately lively ideas are a source of pleasure, see T 1.3.5.2.

For this reason, I agree with Louis Loeb that the stability of our beliefs plays an important role in Hume’s normative epistemology. But unlike Loeb, I believe that the role that stability plays here is derived from the role that curiosity plays in epistemic evaluation. For Loeb’s important discussion of these issues, see his *Stability and Justification in Hume’s Treatise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴³As is implied by the discussion at 2.3.10.3-4.

Thus, by this standard, there will be little epistemic virtue in a tendency to discover banal or obvious truths about matters of no interest to us. (A conclusion which should not be confused with the distinct claim that beliefs about such matters are never supported by evidence or never count as knowledge.) Personally, I do not find this a counter-intuitive claim, but these are controversial issues.

⁴⁴Each of these elements of what satisfies the passion of curiosity is operative in the crucial sections of 1.4.7. The second and third are obviously closely related to Hume’s sense of when it is appropriate for him to engage in philosophy in the “careless” fashion he recommends. And the first is closely connected with

Thus, while we might gloss curiosity as the “love of truth”, and while it surely is concerned with whether some way of reasoning produces true beliefs, its love of truth is not direct or unmediated.⁴⁵ Rather, our sense of curiosity loves truth because of certain more basic properties of the human mind - namely, that we take pleasure from stable and fixed beliefs and pain in violent oscillations in our beliefs. It is this, ultimately, that excites our feelings in the theoretical domain.⁴⁶

In any case, for the reasons noted above, it is relatively easy to see why curiosity’s approval of a pattern of reasoning might be taken to involve a positive *epistemic* evaluation. The connection between ambition and epistemic evaluation, on the other hand, is admittedly less plain. But there is such a connection - for Hume at least - all the same. Ambition is relevant here - as Annette Baier has stressed - because Hume conceives of inquiry as a fundamentally social phenomenon.⁴⁷ Thus, what matters from the perspec-

Hume’s disapproval of any tendency to engage in the pattern of reasoning that, in 1.4.1., lead him to a state that is free of any stable and vivacious ideas of any sort.

⁴⁵The nature of curiosity and its relationship to issues of “epistemic value” is beginning to attract a considerable degree of attention in the epistemology literature. For an account of the nature of curiosity different than the one I attribute to Hume, see Dennis Whitcomb’s “Curiosity Was Framed”, forthcoming in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. See also the essay by Sosa mentioned above, Gilbert Harman’s *Change in View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), and Alvin Goldman’s *Knowledge in a Social World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴⁶This fact about curiosity is particularly crucial with respect to the question of whether the account I am attributing to Hume is viciously circular or question-begging in some way. For example, as discussed above, one of the goals of Hume’s discussion in 1.4.7 is to recommend a moderate level of trust in our faculties over the modes of belief formation he associates with “religion” and “superstition”. But if curiosity really were just the “love” of the truth as such - then it would be difficult to see how any appeal to curiosity might give Hume a basis for preferring his recommended method of belief formation to this alternative. After all, the proponent of religious enthusiasm will insist that it is his method - and not Hume’s - that provides one with reliable access to the truth. So it is difficult to see how the love of truth for its own sake might give one a non-question-begging position from which to adjudicate this dispute. (For this charge against a curiosity-based reading of Hume see section 5 of Ridge’s “Epistemology Moralized”.)

Whether this would overly trouble Hume is an interesting question. But, in any case, this is not the situation Hume actually finds himself in on my account. For as we have just been discussing, curiosity is not merely the love of truth as such - rather, it is (in part) the love of stable, shared beliefs about matters of interest to us which are the product of invention and genius. And, even bracketing the question of the truth of his conclusions about (say) God, Hume is in a position to offer a non-question-begging (albeit controversial) argument for the claim that his method delivers these sorts of beliefs more effectively than does the method of his opponents.

⁴⁷Baier was also one of the first Hume interpreters to give curiosity the attention it deserves in this context, although her own “reflective endorsement” account of Hume’s epistemology is quite different from

tive of the “common point of view” is not simply whether a mode of inquiry is able to satisfy our own curiosity. Rather, its ability to satisfy the curiosity of others in our narrow circle is also equally relevant here. In fact, a concern for ambition is automatic here, given how sympathy affects moral evaluation for Hume. For everyone, according to Hume, is concerned, not just with satisfying their own curiosity, but also the curiosity of those in their narrow circle. In this way, Hume’s references to ambition at the close of Book 1 are best understood as the natural product of a concern for the passion of curiosity within the context of the role that sympathy plays in the Humean mind.⁴⁸

Thus, it is possible to understand our sense of curiosity (and our related sense of intellectual ambition) as providing us with a vantagepoint from which to make an epistemic - as opposed to a practical - evaluation of our faculties. But while this vantage-point is recognizably epistemic, it is also a fundamentally passionate one. In particular, as we have stressed above, this vantage-point is really just the result of the application of Hume’s general account of virtue and vice to the special case of intellectual traits of character. Unlike his rationalist opponents, Hume has no interest in endorsing the view that epistemology is based on a wholly intellectual concern for the truth. Rather, for Hume, epistemology - like morals - is rooted in our passionate nature, and in particular in the manner in which our reasoning may be a source of pleasure and pain for us and those around us. Thus, as Annette Baier has stressed, Hume’s epistemology is both social and passionate. In fact, it is passionate in two related, but distinct senses. First, as our discussion of the Title Principle indicates, Hume’s epistemology generally treats as virtuous individuals whose reasoning is *guided by* the intellectual passions of curiosity and ambition and the propensities for reasoning that these passions produce. And second, this positive evaluation is itself *based upon* the reflective approval of these same intellectual passions.

But while Hume’s epistemology is passionate in these two senses, this does not mean that epistemology collapses into a merely practical evaluation of our beliefs. Rather, as I have argued above, the account that Hume develops is one that, while rooted in our

the account I am proposing here. For Baier’s discussion of these aspects of Hume’s philosophy, see her *A Progress of Sentiments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁴⁸Compare Hume’s characterization of his (initial) failure to satisfy his ambitions in 1.4.7:

“I have expos’d myself to the enmity of all metaphysicians, logicians, mathematicians, and even theologians; and can I wonder at the insults I must suffer? I have declar’d my disapprobation of their systems; and can I be surpriz’d, if they shou’d express a hatred of mine and of my person?” (T, 1.4.7.2)

As this characterization makes clear, the sort of ambition at issue here is a matter of a desire for success within the *epistemic community* of which Hume is a member.

passions, is nonetheless epistemic in character. This account is of much more than merely historical interest. For while there has been a wave of interest in virtue epistemology within recent years, relatively little of this work has taken the form of the sort of an account of epistemic virtue I have been drawing out of Hume's discussion of these issues. In particular, there has, to my knowledge, been very little consideration of the sentimentalist idea that our understanding of epistemic virtues might be rooted in the approval of our intellectual passions in the manner this account suggests. And yet this idea, especially for those of us attracted to a sentimentalist account of moral virtue, should have considerable appeal. For not only does it offer a naturalistically unproblematic explanation of the origins of our epistemic evaluations, in the connection between epistemic virtue and the satisfaction of our intellectual passions that it draws, it offers a natural explanation of just why it is that we find epistemic virtue valuable. Thus, once again, we find that Hume still has much to teach us today, especially when we are willing to read him in novel and unexpected ways.