Critiquing Hume's Sentimentalism Against Moral Relativism

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Abstract

In this paper, I critique Hume's sentimentalist theory and propose an expansion of his common point of view in order to escape some of the dangers of meta-ethical relativism. My goal is to revise Hume's universalism while remaining true to his sentimentalism. In Section 1, I introduce Hume's theory of sentimentalism and sympathy and the variability problem that arises when our sentiments vary but our moral judgments do not. I explain how Hume invokes the common point of view to resolve this issue. In Section 2, I critique Hume's response to moral relativism in "A Dialogue," and argue that he cannot appeal to moral universalism to escape the threats of relativism in his moral theory. Lastly, in Section 3, I introduce a theory of the expanded point of view to provide a more robust response to threats of moral relativism.

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Introduction

In this paper, I critique Hume's sentimentalist theory and propose an expansion of his common point of view in order to escape some of the dangers of meta-ethical relativism. My goal is to revise Hume's universalism while remaining true to his sentimentalism.

Sentimentalism is the theory that our moral judgments are connected to our feelings in some sense, whether they are our source of moral beliefs and attitudes or define moral facts. Hume's particular strain of sentimentalism posits that sentiment plays a key role in moral judgment formation, moral motivation, and the explanation of moral judgments. For the purpose of this paper, I assume his sentimentalism to accurately reflect our moral judgment making process. In recent years, experiments in moral and social psychology, most notably Jonathan Haidt's[1] work on moral foundations, have proven that Humean sentimentalism can withstand the test of time and science. It continues to be an accurate and helpful interpretation of our moral lives.

However, if sentiment decides moral judgment, then how do we resolve conflicts of feeling between multiple parties? This is the question that drives my investigation. Hume does not endorse objective moral facts nor an ideal observer, so moral disagreement under his sentimentalism must be solved by psychology, or it will not be solved at all - an unsettling thought, considering we have moral disagreements all the time, ranging from correct manners at the dinner table to religious doctrines. If we cannot justify one particular side over the other, some of the things we take for granted – human rights, freedom, or general decency – may be in jeopardy if there is a person or group that does not feel in alignment with them or motivated by them.

Hume's answer to this problem is to deny that there is moral disagreement between humans, or at least deep moral disagreement. In "A Dialogue," he argues that all humans hold the

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[1] See Haidt's book, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, which describes his work on moral foundations.

same four moral foundations and that all moral judgments can be explained and decided by these foundations. Any seeming disagreement is due to confusion of facts, not discrepancy in sentiment. All humans take up a common point of view that acts as a standard of judgment and judges in line with the moral foundations.

I argue that Hume's thesis of universalism is false. I focus on the discrepancy in the views about scopes of moral standing, or who is afforded moral standing, between individuals and groups, to make this point. This is not the only way in which universalism can be shown dubious, but I found it to be the most pointed and identifiable difference between persons. To put it simply, some people do not care about the same groups of beings that other people about. Abdul gives queer individuals moral standing while Jeanine does not. Jeanine gives unborn fetuses moral standing while Jake does not. Jake gives horses moral standing while Hannah does not. This is a common occurrence, arising in moral conversations within and across cultures. Appealing to a common point of view or basic moral foundations will not escape the problem, because these individuals are not taking up a common viewpoint, nor are they appealing to the same basic moral foundations.

Hume's sentimentalism seems to be heading for descriptive and meta-ethical relativism. People disagree in their basic moral beliefs, and there is no objective point of view from which to justify one side or the other. Irresolvable conflict seems inescapable. As much as Jake tries to justify his position over Hannah's, if she is not motivated by his reasons, she will be equally justified to remain in her own viewpoint.

I propose my theory of an expanded point of view in an attempt to 1) more accurately reflect how we make moral judgments and 2) avoid some of the dangers of meta-ethical relativism

while 3) staying true to Hume's sentimentalism, which is often driven by sociability and conformity.

My goal in this paper is to revise Hume's universalism and respond to relativistic threats while staying true to sentimentalism. In Section 1, I introduce Hume's theory of sentimentalism and sympathy and the variability problem that arises when our sentiments vary but our moral judgments do not. I explain how Hume invokes the common point of view to resolve this issue. In Section 2, I critique Hume's response to moral relativism in "A Dialogue," and argue that he cannot appeal to moral universalism to escape the threats of relativism in his moral theory. Lastly, in Section 3, I introduce a theory of the expanded point of view to provide a more robust response to threats of moral relativism.

Section 1

1.1 Reason or Sentiment

Are moral judgments grounded in reason or sentiment? That is, are they formed as a process of our rational capacities, or are they a product of what we feel? This is the dilemma that faced modern moral philosophers. Rationalists such as Samuel Clarke contend that moral judgments are grounded in reason; they are relations of things immediately grasped by our rational intuition, as simple and clear as mathematics (Clarke 295). On the contrary, sentimentalists such as Francis Hutcheson argue that moral judgments are formed by our emotions, known to us via our "moral sense," a process much like that of seeing color or hearing a voice (Hutcheson 507-508).

David Hume inherits the reason-sentiment dilemma from moral philosophers before him and, like them, is greatly interested in solving it. At the very beginning of his second *Enquiry,* he writes: "There has been a controversy started of late, much better worth examination, concerning

the general foundation of Morals; whether they be derived from Reason, or from Sentiment" (M 170). His earlier *Treatise* shows that Hume sides with sentiment.

Hume has several arguments in favor of his stance, some against reason and some for sentiment. He first attacks reason. If judgments about virtue and vice are formed by reason, he argues, then they come from the relations of ideas, as Clarke believed, or matters of fact. He begins by considering the relations of ideas: "Reason or science is nothing but the comparing of ideas, and the discovery of their relations; and if the same relations have different characters, it must evidently follow that those characters are not discovered merely by reason" (T 466). In other words, if it is possible to give an example in which two things have the same relationship with each other but different moral characters, then moral judgments are not formed by looking at the relations of ideas. Hume provides the example of parricide in trees versus humans. If a tree produced from an acorn of another tree grows high and kills its parent tree, we do not say that the tree is immoral. Yet, if a son kills his father, we regard such an act, in most cases, as immoral. Hume thus concludes, against Clarke, that moral judgments are not formed by looking at the relations of ideas (T 466).

Next, Hume considers the second fork of reason: matters of fact. For this argument, he asks the reader to consult her own experience of moral judgment. If morality consisted in matters of fact, then we would be able to point to the fact that makes something a virtue or vice; for example, in the claim, "A son killed his father." Yet, we cannot do this. Instead, what labels an act or trait wrong is the feeling we have when we think about it: "The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You can never find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast,

and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action" (T 468). Therefore, Hume does not believe moral judgments are decided by matters of fact.[2]

Hume also introduces a positive argument in favor of sentimentalism, the argument from motivation. Here he notes that reason cannot motivate. This is because there are two modes of understanding: demonstrative reasoning and experience. Hume concludes that demonstrative reasoning, like math, does not motivate – it is only used as a means to an end (T 413). Experience is also used as a means to an end. Experience gives us knowledge about what things have caused pleasure or pain in the past, but it does not motivate us to do or avoid such things. Instead, it is a tool that requires motivation in the form of desire or passion to be used (T 414). Therefore, since neither form of reasoning is motivational, Hume famously concludes that reason is slave to the passions (T 414). It is a tool in satisfying our desires, but it does not decide what our desires are.[3] Hume then asserts, on the contrary, that morality is motivational.[4] Since reasoning and facts are not motivational, but morality is, he concludes that sentiment must play an important role in moral judgment.

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[2] This leaves a question about the status of the sentiment we feel and if it can be considered a matter of fact. As a matter of fact, when I see someone being cruel to a child, I feel upset. If you ask me why I know their cruelty is a vice, I point to the feeling I have. The question is whether the vice is in the feeling that I have or the proclamation that I have this feeling. If the former, it seems Hume does not consider sentiments as matters of fact, but expressions lacking truth value. This is why some philosophers regard him as a noncognitivist. If the latter, it seems the claim of the sentiment's existence is a matter of fact and has a truth value. On this interpretation, whether something is a vice is true or false depending on if you have a corresponding feeling of disapprobation. For the purpose of this paper, I cannot examine this distinction, but the outcome would not change the basis of my argument.

[3] There is some speculation about the role of reason in Hume's sentimentalism. Reason may play a larger role in Hume's theory than he admits. This is especially true as regarding the common point of view, discussed later in this section, which Hume claims "correct[s] our sentiments" (T 582). Some (including Hume) would argue that what we think is reason is actually just calmer passions that correct our more conscious and violent ones. Others argue that these "calm passions" are reason. I am of the belief that our reason does need to be directed by general desire or passion.

[4] Hume echoes this sentiment in the *Enquiry:* "Extinguish all the warm feelings and prepossessions in favor of virtue, and all disgust or aversion to vice: render men totally indifferent towards these distinctions; and morality is no longer a practical study, nor has any tendency to regulate our lives and actions" (M 172).

We may draw on our own experience to try to prove Hume wrong. Certainly, even when our desires are strongest to eat another slice of chocolate cake, it seems as if our reason stops us from acting because we will get sick if we do so. Therefore, reasoning motivates us against doing what our desire is. However, Hume believes this argument mistakes an impression for an idea. In Hume's theory, passions are original existences and cannot be opposed by reason, which involves ideas (T 415).[5] What we believe to be reason stopping passion is actually a calm passion stopping a violent one: "This feeling or sentiment is commonly so soft and gentle, that we are apt to confound it with an idea" (T 470). After all, when we reflect on why our reasoning "stops us" from eating more cake, we will realize that it is drawing on past experience that more cake made us sick and in pain. We desire not to be in pain more than we desire the satisfaction of one more slice of cake. In reality, what we believed to be reason opposing passion is two passions opposing one another.[6] Motivation caused by passions is important to understanding a key concept in Hume's moral theory – sympathy, which explains why we feel motivated by the wellbeing of others around us.

1.2 Sympathy: The Shared Sentiment

Sentiment can explain my motivation not to eat another piece of cake because I know it will make me sick and in pain, and I don't want to be in pain, but how can it explain my motivation to stop my mom from eating another piece of cake? I know it will cause her pain, but it will not cause me pain, so why do I care? Enter sympathy, an invaluable and indispensable part of Hume's diagnosis of our moral lives.

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[5] I will discuss Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas in the following section.
[6] Notice what happens when despite everything we do reach for the next piece of cake. We reason that it will make us feel awful, but that conclusion is not enough to motivate us to stop.

To understand how sympathy works, we must first review Hume's basic epistemology. For Hume, perceptions can be divided into two kinds, impressions and ideas. He characterizes impressions as "those perceptions which enter with most force and violence," which come from information gathered by our five senses (T 1). Likewise, ideas are "the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning" (T 1). Ideas are unlike impressions in that they do not feel as vivid as impressions. Instead, they are fainter copies of impressions, and arise from them.

By using the language of impressions and ideas, we can come to see why we care about the pains and pleasures of others. Hume describes sympathy as arising from an impression of what we see occur in another person. For example, I see my mom wince in pain. This causes me to form an idea of her pain in my mind. At the same time, I have a strong impression of myself: "'Tis evident, that the idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us, and that our consciousness gives us so lively a conception of our own person" (T 317). The idea of my mom's pain and the impression of myself[7] combine to form an impression in myself of pain. I now feel pain, which is motivating and causes me to transfer the negative affective reaction (my pain) to the perceived cause of the original impression. I then create a judgment of disapproval against whatever caused the original impression (seeing my mom eat too much cake). In the future, the association of pain to eating too much cake will both motivate me not to do so and disapprove of others doing so as well, since I believe it to cause them pain. Therefore, I form a negative judgment against it based on my sentiment.

Sympathy is stronger the more we perceive ourselves as related or connected to the being in question. This is because our ideas are connected by three types of association: resemblance,

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[7] Hume's language of "impression of ourselves" in T 317 may contradict what he says earlier in T 251-2 where he denies that there is an impression of the self from which our idea of ourselves derives. Instead, he claims, we are a bundle of perceptions in constant change. How, then, can we have an "impression of ourselves [that] is always intimately present with us" (T 317)?

contiguity in space and time, and cause and effect. The more we associate ourselves with another by one of these three categories, usually the first two, the stronger our idea of the impression in the other will be and thus the impression in ourselves: "The stronger the relation is between ourselves and any object, the more easily does the imagination make the transition, and convey to the related idea the vivacity of conception, with which we always form the idea of our own person" (T 318).

Sympathy plays several important roles in Hume's theory. For one, it explains why we care about the welfare of others for their own sake, and not just as a means to our own end. It also, as Hume points out, explains why we see similarities of moral thought within countries and cultures: "To this principle we ought to ascribe the great uniformity we may observe in the humours and turn of thinking of those of the same nation" (T 316). This is because sympathy does not only operate at the base level of pain and pleasure. It also increases agreement between people on social matters. For example, if I see that my best friend cares strongly about the environment, and I regard myself as similar to my best friend in terms of values and personhood, I will begin to care strongly about the environment as well. Without sympathy, I would judge that my friend cares about the environment, but I would not be motivated to care about it as well. Sympathy spurs my caring, acting as a bridge between my friend and my response. This idea will come to play an important role in Section 3, where I argue that our sympathy in conversation may expand and alter our moral point of view. Lastly, as Geoffrey Sayre-McCord notes, sympathy also operates on a global and universal level, directing our moral judgments to be uniform across place and time: "Only a sentiment that is commonly shared, comprehensive in scope, and more or less unified in its deliverances…can explain both why we expect others to concur in our judgments and why we judge not simply those around us but people in distant lands and ages" (Sayre-McCord 205). Since

the assumption is that all people have this same capacity for sympathy, it explains how the moral judgments made by our sentiments can extend beyond ourselves and our time, and how its presence increases moral agreement across place and time.

1.3 The Variability Problem

Hume's moral theory as I have explained it rests heavily on the presence of sentiments in ourselves. If another being is in pain, sympathy causes us to feel pain as well. However, although sympathy can begin to explain the similarities we see in moral judgments across places, it stops short of doing the explanatory work it must do to properly reflect our moral lives. This is because of the Variability Problem for Hume's sentimentalism. On Hume's theory, if our sentiments vary, then it seems that our moral judgments vary as well. For example, if someone does not feel so strongly about rainforests being destroyed, then it seems their moral disapproval of this event will not be very strong.

Our sentiments do in fact vary. As Hume himself notes, sympathy varies depending on the relationship we have with the person in question. Although the positive or negative "charge" of our sentiments often does not vary, the degree does. For example, while we may have sympathy for all things pleasurable, the intensity of our sympathy varies correspondingly to the distance from the pleasure. Certainly, we can realize the truth of this by reflecting on our own moral lives. We feel more strongly when our friends and family are excited or downcast than when we read about strangers on the internet in the same situation. This applies to both distances in social relation, physical location, and the type of engagement (whether written or visual) that we have with the individual. Therefore, this objection continues, since our sentiments and sympathy vary, our moral

judgments must vary as well.[8] Note that at this point, the variability problem is attacking the descriptive and empirical claim that on the whole, our moral judgments as individuals do not vary. If moral judgments are created by sympathy and sympathy varies from person to person, then we should have differing moral judgments about the same action or character trait depending upon the distance of the individual from ourselves. Yet, this is not usually the case. For example, if I see my classmate being respectful to our professor and I read a book about a student in 17th century China being respectful to their professor, I will judge both of these people as equally morally good. At the same time, I will *feel* more pride and sympathy from seeing my classmate be respectful. There is a consistency in our individual moral judgments that would not be there if they were decided strictly on our personal sentiments, because there is variability in our sentiment that does not translate to our moral judgments.

The same logic applies to judgments between people and groups. Obviously, two people or cultural groups may feel differently about the same event and may even disagree in their moral judgment, but Hume believes that they hold the same basic moral beliefs. Both will judge all things pleasurable as morally good, regardless of their distance from themselves. Therefore, while our sentiments do vary in kind and strength, Hume denies our moral judgments vary, creating a challenge for his account. He must explain how we come to make consistent moral judgments within ourselves and between people and groups even though our sentiments vary while retaining the thesis of sentimentalism. The common point of view is his response to this challenge.

1.4 The Common Point of View as a Solution to the Variability Problem

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[8] Hume notes that the variability objection is the same for any sentimentalist theory, not just one that rests on sympathy: "If the variation of the sentiment, without a variation of the esteem, be an objection, it must have equal force against every other [sentimentalist] system, as against that of sympathy" (T 581).

Hume introduces the common point of view in Section III of the *Treatise* to respond to the variability problem that arises as a result of his sentimentalism. He argues that judgments of virtues are not decided by how we as individuals feel about a situation, for that would cause our judgments to be variable and contradictory. He explains this in an example where he imagines that although one's sympathy for a loyal maid is stronger than their sympathy for the loyalty of ancient figure Brutus, it would be a mistake to say that the maid deserves more praise (T 582). By adopting a common point of view, we can come to a consensus with those who do not know Brutus nor the maid on their respective admirability. Moral judgments are thus formed by reflecting on how one would feel when looking at a situation from the common point of view, or that of those closest to the agent: "We…confine our view to that narrow circle, in which any person moves, in order to form a judgment of his moral character" (T 602). By doing so, our moral judgments come into alignment with one another: "The only point of view, in which our sentiments concur with those of others, is when we consider the tendency of any passion to the advantage or harm of those, who have an immediate connection or intercourse with the person possessed of it" (T 602). This is the standard with which our moral judgments are weighed in order to avoid the variability problem.

The need to take the common point of view arises in both distant and close cases. In distant cases, it is needed so we do not undersell the seriousness of a person's cruelty or admirability because we are not strongly affected by sympathy for them and their peers. This is evident in Hume's example of Brutus and one's own maid. In close cases, it is needed so we do not blame a person simply because they act in the general interest but against our own. For example, if my teacher, with whom I am close friends, gives me a poor grade on a test, I cannot charge her with disloyalty. She must give me a bad grade in order to be fair to the other students. From the

perspective of another student, I am able to judge her as loyal but fair. In what follows, I will lay the groundwork for unpacking Hume's common point of view.

1.5 Understanding the Common Point of View via the Standard of Taste

To understand Hume's common point of view, we can turn to his standard of taste, which serves a similar role in his aesthetic theory, as described in "On the Standard of Taste". Just as men differ in sympathy, Hume takes it to be a fact that men differ in aesthetic taste. In general, we praise beauty and blame ugliness, but the meaning of these words varies between individuals and societies, just as what counts as a virtue varies across cultures. Therefore, Hume introduces a standard of taste that can resolve these aesthetic disagreements.

Hume argues that across time and place, there are works of art that continue to cause enhanced pleasure in a wide variety of people. These works reflect the ability of certain qualities to please humans based on our nature: "Some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric [of human nature], are calculated to please, and others to displease" (ST 12). A true critic is one who can discern qualities of works of art without prejudice or bias, maintaining the "natural position" that reflects the universal principles of taste in human nature. Such a critic has improved their sensitivity to such qualities from practice and comparison. The views of a critic who does so become the standard of taste.[9]

In our moral lives, Hume believes there are four moral foundations universal in human nature: we praise traits that are pleasurable and useful to ourselves and others as virtues. The common point of view identifies these virtues without our individual bias and sympathy getting in

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[9] This account is also both descriptive and normative in the same way as I discuss the common point of view to be later in this section. Things that the critic identifies as beautiful do not just count as beautiful for the critic, but for everyone that interacts with them, even if one does not recognize their beauty.

the way. If someone's moral judgment does not adhere to these foundations, this does not change the standard and moral foundations decided by the common point of view. It is the same regarding aesthetics. Not everyone's aesthetic value will adhere to these general rules – in fact, very few will – but they are widespread enough across time and place to make them the standard.

1.6 Ideal Observer Theory and the Common Point of View

These descriptions of the common point of view are helpful, but they still leave many questions and much open to interpretation. Roderick Firth understands the common point of view as that of an ideal observer and attributes an ideal observer theory to Hume. Firth describes an ideal observer as omniscient, disinterested, impartial, able to know and perceive all the relevant facts of a case, and able to put themselves in everyone's perspective fully and universally (Firth 333-344). They are impartial in that any difference in their judgments is due to a significant difference between cases. What is right, then, is what an ideal observer judges as right. The advantage of this theory is that it gives us a standard from which to judge agents and actions across time and place.

Although the ideal observer theory sounds very similar to Hume's true critic aesthetic theory and perhaps common point of view, Sayre-McCord disagrees with Firth in interpreting Hume's common point of view as ideal.[10] For one, the ideal observer is in an unattainable position for any human. Although we still attempt to create a moral standard, less biased than our sympathy, when we adopt the common point of view by "[controlling] for ignorance, [adjusting] for the

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[10] A recent article by Ben-Moshe, "Hume's General Point of View: A Two Part Approach," takes Hume's general point of view in the *Treatise* to be a modest ideal observer theory. Ben-Moshe develops a two-part reconstruction of Hume's general point of view to overcome the normative issues apparent in Hume's version. I do not comment on this article because of its recent publication, but I believe my later critique of the common point of view regarding the scope of moral standing still holds on this reconstruction.

distortions of perspective, and [leaving] to one side self-interest," this does not make our perspective ideal: "His standard supposes neither an impossible omniscience nor an angelic equi-sympathetic engagement with all of humanity" (Sayre-McCord 203). After all, the common point of view needs to be an accessible perspective for it to have practical use regulating and correcting our sympathy. Likewise, Rachel Cohon describes the common point of view as "not a detached perspective, but the vantage point of the person being evaluated and the particular individuals with whom he has direct dealings. It gives us not a wide panorama, but an intimate glimpse" (Cohon 840).

Further, although this "correction" of sympathy creates a useful human moral standard, Hume does not claim that the standard tracks an objective or absolute truth, as Firth's ideal observer theory intends to do. While the judgments made by an ideal observer describe what is right and wrong, these judgments are unable to be made by humans. Instead, the common point of view is a diagnosis of the actual process that humans use when making moral judgments – whether or not the judgments are objectively true.

Another key difference between Hume's common point of view and the ideal observer theory is their perspectives, as Sayre-McCord points out. The ideal observer simultaneously occupies the perspectives of everyone in the world when making a moral judgment. Instead, the common point of view aims to consider only the perspectives of the people closest to the individual in question: "While an Ideal Observer, being fully informed, and equi-sympathetic, responds to all the actual effects on all, a person taking up the general point of view leaves out of account both those who bear no connection to the person and the actual (as opposed to usual) effects on those who do bear a connection" (Sayre-McCord 212). Thus, since the ideal observer theory does not

align with some of the key descriptions of the common point of view and Hume's psychological project, Hume should not be considered an ideal observer theorist.

1.7 Interpreting and Critiquing the Common Point of View

With this accessibility and intimacy in mind, we can identify four interpretations of the common point of view from Hume's explication of the concept.[11] The first interpretation is that to take the common point of view is to imagine ourselves, retaining our psychology and cultural values, as an individual close to the person in question. Hume seems to have conflicting outlooks on this interpretation in the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*. While in the *Treatise* he entertains such a notion, stating in the example of Brutus and the maid, "We know, that were we to approach equally near to that renowned patriot, he would command a much higher degree of affection and admiration" (T 582), in the *Enquiry*, he rejects that such a view reflects our moral judgment making: "It is but a weak subterfuge, when pressed by these facts and arguments, to say, that we transport ourselves, by the force of imagination, into distant ages and countries, and consider the advantage, which we should have reaped from these characters, had we been contemporaries, and had any commerce with the persons" (M 217). His reason for rejecting this view is that it requires a real passion to arise from an imaginary interest. Instead, it seems, those taking the common point of view must care about the actual individual involved in an interaction, not how we would feel if we were the individual.

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[11] Hume's explication of the common point of view differs slightly between the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*. In the *Treatise*, he equates the common point of view very closely with an agent's narrow circle. He does not highlight this in the *Enquiry*, where he centers individuals as moral judges who create a point of view to be used for general purposes and social conversation. For the purpose of this paper, I do not distinguish them because I do not believe that either interpretation can overcome the problems of meta-ethical relativism and different moral scopes that I pose in Sections 2 and 3.

The other possible problem with this interpretation is that it neglects cultural differences in value that may exist between ourselves and the actual individual in the position. Therefore, if we were put in their position while retaining our original psychology, then we may have a different emotional reaction than they would. I expand on this idea when considering the second and third interpretations.

The second interpretation is that to take the common point of view is to take up the point of view(s) of those close to the person in question, as if experiencing the individual through their eyes and mind. This interpretation retains the values and cultural context of the individual and their peers, even if we vehemently disagree with them. For example, if we consider a monarch being rude to a servant in a context where the servant does not take the monarch as being rude and expects him to act in such a manner, then the common point of view asks us not to disapprove of the monarch, since those with whom he has commerce do not experience his rudeness. Thus, although we personally disagree with the monarch's actions, we can come to interpret what he is doing as proper for him. By "being rude," the monarch, in his society, is exhibiting proper social relations between monarch and servant, and we can agree that following proper social relations is redeemable, even if they take a different form than our own. The problem with this interpretation is that it seems not to entirely reflect our moral judgment making. In at least some of the cases, we will retain our own cultural perspective and judge the monarch as rude, regardless of the psychology of those around him.[12]

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[12] Even if we come to fully understand the socio-cultural standards of this society to not disapprove, it seems that the level of knowledge needed may be too demanding and inaccessible for Hume's theory. After all, Hume is attempting to explain how we as humans make moral judgments; certainly we do not all have the proper level of knowledge to make fully informed anthropological and historical cultural claims.

The third interpretation suggests that to take the common point of view is to sympathize with those close to the person in question, not taking their perspective but feeling in alignment with it. This interpretation is frequently suggested by Hume across both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*: "Being thus loosened from our first [selfish] station, we cannot afterwards fix ourselves so commodiously by any means as by a sympathy with those, who have any commerce with the person we considered" (T 583), "When the natural tendency of his passions leads him to be serviceable and useful within his sphere, we approve of his character, and love his person, by a sympathy with the sentiments of those, who have a more particular connection with him" (T 602), "In every judgment of beauty, the feelings of the person affected enter into consideration, and communicate to the spectator similar touches of pain or pleasure" (M 224). One problem with this interpretation is that its emphasis on sympathy seemingly contradicts the reasons why invoking the common point of view is necessary for Hume in the first place. If sympathizing with those distant from oneself leads to stable moral judgments, then it eliminates the need for a "common point of view" to correct judgments made by sympathy. Conversely, if sympathizing with those distant from oneself does not lead to stable moral judgments, this approach will run into the same variability problem mentioned earlier, where our sympathy with those connected to an agent varies depending on our distance from them, thus also varying our moral judgments.

It is worth noting that on the second and third interpretations, the common point of view operates as a mechanism of cultural tolerance. By adopting the perspective of or sympathizing with those close to an individual, we come to understand the individual and their actions in the context of the culture in which they are operating. Thus, the common point of view is not a simple perspectival switch. Moral judgments are not made by considering how I would feel if I were in the same situation as person X, but instead by considering how I would feel if I were person X and

had their thoughts and desires.[13] At the same time, Kate Abramson suggests we cannot always do this because 1) some people interact with individuals outside their cultures, and 2) some people, even if not rejected by those in their culture, as in my monarch and servant example, display virtues (or vices) about which we want to make a more universal claim: "If we must *always* limit our purview to the effects the traits have within cultures, then there will be no case in which we can say that the value afforded a trait within a certain culture is mistaken, if that value tracks the typical effects of that trait within that culture" (Abramson 176). Sometimes, we intend that our moral judgments *do* contradict the feelings of those in the culture in question. In the monarch and servant example, we may want to make the claim that the monarch *is* rude and in the wrong, regardless of the social norms of his time and the way the servant feels.

A fourth and final interpretation is that to take the common point of view is to consider an individual by examining how he affects those who interact with him. This interpretation is a less directly sentimental and imaginative one, as it asks us to neither feel in accordance with those in commerce with an individual, nor imagine how we would feel in their place. Instead, it takes an observational approach, simply considering how persons interacting with an individual might be positively or negatively affected by them. There are some passages in Hume to suggest such an account: "'Tis therefore from the influence of characters and qualities, upon those who have an intercourse with any person, that we blame or praise him" (T 582), "In judging of characters, the only interest or pleasure, which appears the same to every spectator, is that of the person himself, whose character is examined; or that of persons, who have a connection with him" (T 590), "[Our approbation of distant virtues] must be the interest of those, who are served by the character or

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[13] This is important for my later discussion of descriptive relativism, for if we can use the common point of view to come to understand that different and perhaps contradictory practices can satisfy the same moral foundation, then Hume's thesis against descriptive relativism and moral judgment variability stands.

action approved of; and these we may conclude, however remote, are not totally indifferent to us" (M 218). This interpretation, like the others, also runs up against some issues, the first being that it is not transparently sentimental. This is necessary to overcome the variability problem of sympathy and sentiment but leaves us to wonder whether Hume's moral theory can still be considered strictly sentimentalist. It also lacks the cultural tolerance present in the previous interpretations. We are calculating an individual's effects on those around him from an external perspective, rather than considering the perspective and feelings of those involved, perhaps leading us to impose a sort of cultural imperialism on another group, especially if we see a violation where it is not felt.

Lastly, since all these interpretations require the perspectives of multiple people, it seems difficult to make a general judgment if the people that are in an individual's "narrow circle" have differing if not sometimes contradictory feelings about that person. Imagine the man who is a wonderful and devoted father but a cheating husband. Although Hume does not confront this issue directly, Cohon suggests that towards this person we may have mixed and variable feelings, or an amalgamation of all the feelings felt by their narrow circle (Cohon 845). Secondly, if we only consider the effect one has on their "narrow circle," we must wonder about the virtue of charity, since it often benefits those further from an individual's narrow circle. It seems that when we praise charity, we either consider the benefactors of charity as part of an individual's close circle, even if they are not, or we consider the effects a person has on those outside their circle. By now it is clear that interpreting Hume's common point of view is problematic: there is a tension between what he says, his commitment to sentimentalism, and the problem of variability and cultural difference. One last function is more controversial: normative justification of our moral judgments.

1.8 Normative Justification of the Common Point of View

There is not only a descriptive need for the common point of view, as it more accurately explains our moral judgment making, but a normative one as well. Hume is not simply describing how we come to make moral judgments, he is also endorsing it as more useful than if we maintained our own perspective. The common point of view avoids contradictions we would have in our moral judgments if we made judgments entirely upon the degree of our sympathy. We take it up "in order…to prevent those continual *contradictions*, and arrive at a more *stable* judgment of things, we fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view; and always, in our thoughts place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation" (T 581). The common point of view is the superior point of view regarding social matters. Hume imagines the common point of view to operate much like the correction of our five senses. After all, when we see a mountain in the distance, we don't expect to be able to step over it. It is far from our current position, but it still has objective qualities such as "unable to step over" that must be recognized even when it doesn't seem or feel that way: "The same object, at a double distance, really throws on the eye a picture of but half the bulk; yet we imagine that it appears of the same size in both situations; because we know, that, on our approach to it, its image would expand on the eye, and that the difference consists not in the object itself, but in our position with regard to it" (M 227). This is practically useful for our plans regarding the mountain and the conversations we have with others, some very close to the mountain, about its qualities. Cohon explains Hume's addition of the common point of view: "Hume introduces the common point of view in order to account for the fact that our moral judgments tend to remain constant, to converge with those of other people, and not to vary as idiosyncratically as one might expect given that they are manifestations of our individual feelings" (Cohon 828). Thus, all of our moral judgments are made from the common point of view.

To consider someone morally good or bad assumes that they are morally good or bad regardless of the relationship one has to the individual in question.

Yet, Sayre-McCord and Cohon disagree about whether Hume believes the common point of view to have normative justification. Although both take Hume to be describing how our moral judgments come to be as they are, Sayre-McCord also reads him as endorsing the judgments reached by this process. We use the common point of view and we should, too, Hume believes. This is because it allows us to escape negative contradictions in our communication. In contrast, Cohon argues that although the common point of view describes what does happen in our moral judgment making, it does not mean that Hume believes it to be normatively prioritized: "In his discussion of the common point of view Hume is not giving an account of what it is for moral judgments to be warranted. He is only explaining the uniformity he observes in them" (Cohon 846). There are two ways to view this dilemma, each giving weight to the arguments made by Sayre-McCord and Cohon. On one hand, Hume does write that the common point of view is useful and perhaps necessary for communication with others: "The intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners" (T 602). As humans, we thrive in social groups by adopting and using the moral standard created by the common point of view, so there is good reason to continue doing so. On the other hand, he is not claiming that the common point of view tracks objective moral facts, nor does he provide any clues to what he believes objective moral facts to be. This is not his project. Therefore, he is not claiming that judgments made by the common point of view are somehow objectively justified or true, outside of the realm of human and societal communication. As we will see in Section 2, this delineation is an important one, for if there exists a group that does not gain practical benefit from the common point of view and does

not have reason to adopt it, there seems to be no way to prioritize judgments made by the common point of view. This divide between groups may lead to meta-ethical relativism, since there is no shared or objective point of view from which to judge their disagreement.

After examining the common point of view and its response to moral relativism in Section 2, I will offer my theory of the concept in Section 3 and argue that, when making moral judgments, we not only consider the perspectives of the parties involved in an event, but also the perspectives of those with whom we are in conversation. This lessens the dangers of the meta-ethical relativism present in our moral judgments that Section 2 will evidence.

Section 2

In this section I argue that Hume's account of the common point of view is unable to escape descriptive relativism and therefore, meta-ethical relativism. Hume attempts to overcome the issue of relativism in "A Dialogue", but I argue that there are several forms of moral diversity that the common point of view and his moral foundations cannot answer. Before I demonstrate this, it is beneficial to review the different types of moral relativism and the worries they raise to philosophers.

2.1 Types of Relativism

Descriptive relativism is the empirical thesis requiring anthropological evidence that different cultures have different moral beliefs. William Frankena notes that for descriptive relativism to be powerful, it must make the claim that different cultures differ in their *basic* ethical beliefs (Frankena 109). Therefore, to say that group A believes it is moral to do X and group B believes it is immoral to do X is not enough to satisfy descriptive relativism. It may be that both

of these groups share the underlying moral principle Z that explains their stance on X. In this case, their disagreement is about whether to interpret X as satisfying the moral principle Z, but either way, they share the same basic ethical belief. Instead, descriptive relativism requires that there be no shared ethical belief that can explain moral disagreement between cultures. As an example, let's say that Group A believes the moral principle Z, say, that one ought to respect those who came before you. Group B does not believe in the moral principle Z and instead thinks that those who are not contemporary and looking into the future should be treated as fools. However, even these differing "basic" moral principles may coincide. For example, perhaps both groups believe that we ought to respect those who are important to us, but their disagreement lies in who counts as important. It seems that for any seeming disagreement in moral principles, there can be another one that explains the difference. The question remains, however, if the abstracted "most basic" shared ethical belief is enough to say that the two groups are not morally different when in practice their actions are contradictory. This question will become especially important for Hume's argument against descriptive relativism, when he claims that all people share the same ethical foundations of utility and agreeableness.

Meta-ethical relativism posits that (1) there is no objective way to justify one group's basic moral beliefs and judgments against another's if (2) the differing basic ethical beliefs are held by equally rational groups (Frankena 109). Meta-ethical relativism typically follows from descriptive relativism. If group A and group B differ in their basic ethical beliefs and are both fully rational and know the same facts, then meta-ethical relativism follows, as there is no third point of view that one can take to decide and justify which group's basic ethical beliefs are right. (Frankena 110). However, Frankena believes that the second condition to establish meta-ethical relativism is on shaky ground. To fulfill this condition, one must find two groups that are fully rational and

have the same facts yet differ in their basic ethical beliefs, which is quite hard to prove. He rejects meta-ethical relativism because of this and maintains that ethical judgments will be shared by fully rational and informed individuals (Frankena 110). However, Hume cannot take such a stance because his ethical system grounds moral judgments in sentiment and does not appeal to rationality. He does not use reason as the standard for justifying moral judgments as Frankena does.

Although Hume does not use reason as the standard of justification, meta-ethical relativism can raise problems for sentimentalists. Hume's particular brand of sentimentalism grounds justification in human nature and feeling. If two sides have a deep disagreement in feeling about a particular character trait, person, or event, sentimentalism leaves no way to reconcile them. Whereas rationalists may appeal to reason as a standard of justification, sentimentalists cannot do so. Thus, if there exists deep and long-lasting division within human moral judgments and there is no universal standard of justification, then meta-ethical relativism poses a serious threat.

Lastly, normative relativism is the thesis that an action can be truly right in one group while at the same time being truly wrong in another group, even if the actions are not morally different (Frankena 109). That is, if group A and B have differing basic beliefs, not only can we not find an objective point of view from which to judge them (meta-ethical relativism), there is in fact no right answer. The conflicting beliefs of A and B are each true relative to A and B, even though they are apparently inconsistent. Frankena notes that unlike meta-ethical relativism following from descriptive relativism, normative relativism does not naturally follow from these two theses (Frankena 109). Even if meta-ethical relativism is true, it would be possible to hold that one side is true even though there is no way of finding out.

In philosophy, relativism is often considered to be a scary and dangerous position. Descriptive relativism is dangerous because it often leads to meta-ethical relativism. Meta-ethical relativism is dangerous because if we find two people or groups with conflicting basic ethical beliefs, then there seems to be no way to justify one viewpoint over the other. If there is no way to come to a consensus, this may lead to a clash of ideology that becomes violent, especially if the point of contention is over rights or a system of power. Normative relativism is perhaps the least scary of all because we cannot determine its truth. However, if it were able to be confirmed, it would do nothing to assuage the problems already present in descriptive and meta-ethical relativism.

2.2 Hume Against Descriptive Relativism

Hume rebuts descriptive relativism in his lesser-known essay "A Dialogue," which appears as an addendum to his second *Enquiry.* In this dialogue, Hume confronts Palamedes, a cultural relativist who claims that the difference between cultures is one of morality, as morality is nothing but the custom and fashion of a society. Descriptive relativism is true; different societies have different moral standards, according to Palamedes, and he leaves Hume with an onerous question: "How shall we pretend to fix a standard for judgments of this nature?" (M D.25).

Hume responds that different cultures may differ in their practices, but they share the same basic beliefs because they share the same four moral foundations. These foundations are 1) approval of traits useful to ourselves, 2) approval of traits useful to others, 3) approval of traits agreeable to ourselves, and 4) approval of traits agreeable to others: "All the differences, therefore, in morals, may be reduced to this one general foundation, and may be accounted for by the different views, which people take of these circumstances" (M D. 37). The difference lies not in the virtues

but in their interpretation and context. Further, any differences in interpretation can be corrected or better understood.

Henrik Bohlin applies three categories to Hume's discussion of moral disagreement in "A Dialogue": those which are 1) rationally decidable, 2) rationally compromisable, and 3) rationally uncompromisable (Bohlin 594). Each of these operate as Hume's answer to the threat of descriptive relativism.[14]

Rationally decidable disagreements are the result of faulty reasoning or mistakes (Bohlin 595). To illustrate, if group A believes that it is useful to be superstitious and group B believes that it is not useful to be superstitious, group B might show group A that their culture is more productive and happier than group A, and they have not encountered any bad luck from not heeding to superstition. Group A agrees that group B's practices are right; thus, the groups rationally decide upon the same answer and there is no difference of values.

Rationally compromisable disagreements are ones where both sides allow for the other's view without sharing it, or they acknowledge that there is no clear answer (Bohlin 596). Hume's example is the appropriate degree of kinship between two romantic partners. If they are too close, it goes against public utility, but what is too close? The Greeks allowed marriage between two siblings; Hume acknowledges this might be too extreme to be useful, but also notes that the line between utility and disutility is blurry (M D.29). Many times, it depends upon the entire structure of a society.

Lastly, rationally uncompromisable disagreements arise when neither side can accept the others' views when they go against their own standard (Bohlin 599). Hume's example of this arises

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[14] Note that Bohlin adopts and retains Frankena's three types of relativism when discussing Hume.

with the phenomenon of those who live "artificial lives," such as Diogenes and Pascal, whose practices as seen from the common point of view are neither useful nor agreeable (M D.53).

These are Hume's three possible responses to the threat of descriptive relativism. I shall now present various obstacles to their success.

2.2.1 Rationally Decidable Disagreements

Hume is a universalist in that he believes as humans we hold a shared set of moral beliefs, mostly due to a shared human sentiment – sympathy – as well as a shared common point of view that corrects for any discontinuities in our sympathy. He takes it as a matter of fact that as humans, we take up the common point of view when making moral judgments, and this point of view approves of character traits that meet one of these four foundations. This is Hume's main project in the *Enquiry* – to explain why we feel approbation or disapprobation towards certain things (M 1.10). He considers all of the traits that we praise and all of the traits that we blame to see what they have in common with one another and finds that they are all either useful or agreeable to ourselves or others.

Hume's main argument against descriptive relativism is his analysis that all cultural practices are grounded in the same four moral foundations: the approval of traits that are useful or agreeable to oneself and others. Any disagreement between cultures can be decided by showing that the practice or trait in question qualifies (or does not qualify) as one of these foundations.

However, I argue that this analysis does not exhaust the variation between our moral judgments. Specifically, it does not explain who or what counts as "others," i.e., the scope of moral standing. If we afford something moral standing, then we consider their wellbeing in our moral judgments for their own sake (Regan 18). Moral standing is important to our interpretation of the

common point of view, because if someone is not included in one's scope of moral standing, their viewpoint will not be considered. Further, it seems that the scope of moral standing is not universal, as a survey of history and culture will show us. Therefore, although Hume may be right in suggesting that our basic moral principles are the same and we value traits that are useful and agreeable, we differ in judgments about who these principles should consider, and to whom these traits are useful and agreeable.

We can see that Hume's scope of moral standing differs from our own, and thus his evaluation of certain virtues does as well. In "A Dialogue," Hume considers a list of traits whose usefulness may ebb and flow throughout time and culture: "Sometimes too, magnanimity, greatness of mind, disdain of slavery, inflexible rigour and integrity, may better suit the circumstances of one age than those of another" (M D.40). One of these traits is not like the others – disdain of slavery – for it depends upon the ownership and taking of rights from another person. When we consider a moral judgment, we should ask ourselves, "Who's left out?" Hume talks about slavery as though its value is decided entirely by the usefulness it displays for the person passing judgment on it. In other words, he is focusing on the wellbeing and experiences of the slaveholders, not the enslaved. He does not consider that for some societies – our current one – we condemn slavery because we also include the viewpoints of those who are enslaved when making a moral judgment. It seems, therefore, that the scope of moral standing – whose wellbeing and viewpoint matters – changes in different societies.

The scope of moral standing that decides how we judge character traits even differs within a society. Consider the inclusion of non-human animals within the moral community. In Western cultures, many of us now sympathize with the experiences of dogs and cats, but we continue to inflict suffering on a multitude of other animals for our own convenience and utility, eating them

and using them for experimentation. Yet, within our society, some people find this an appalling disregard for non-human animals. I am one of these people – when I say, "Eating animals is wrong," I am considering the animals being eaten as part of the "others" for whom an action or trait is useful or agreeable. Conversely, when Joe Rogan says, "Eating animals is not wrong," Joe does not give the animals being eaten moral standing when making a moral judgment. Our moral disagreement cannot be reconciled by an appeal to the moral foundation of "traits useful or agreeable to oneself and others" because we disagree about who or what counts as "others". Hume has no further principle of human nature to resolve this disagreement; he has no way to explain the difference in who we give moral status that will decide and resolve our disagreement. At the bottom, Joe Rogan and I disagree about the scope of moral standing and thus take up different points of view when we make moral judgments.

The argument that most individuals take the same point of view and confer on the scope of moral standing will not work as a response to this descriptive relativism. The wide range of the scope of moral standing, or "who matters", throughout history, whether it includes only rich white men, or white men, or rich people, shows that this is not the case. There have always been discrepancies about whose wellbeing counts and whose does not.

Further, it may be the case that some people have the capacity to sympathize more broadly than others. Even the narrowest point of view does not include only oneself, which is what makes Hume's moral theory non-egoistic, but there is a limit to the amount of sympathy one feels. After all, there are few who would argue from the point of view of a shrimp. Sayre-McCord notes that, "the scope of morality will, on Hume's theory, remain bounded by the actual reach of our sympathetic responses. Exactly what that reach is, we might not be able to say, but that it falls short of engaging us equally in the welfare of all sentient beings is clear" (Sayre-McCord 224).

The common point of view only reaches as far as our furthest sympathy, even if it corrects and balances this sympathy. I agree there is a limit to the scope of anyone's sympathy, but the issue is that the limit of each person's sympathy differs. The application of our moral foundations is not uniform, and thus even if there is universal agreement about the moral principles, there will be diversity about who counts as having moral standing. Although moral disagreements may be decided by appeal to one of the four moral foundations, the beings to which they apply are diverse and leaves no point of agreement.

2.2.2 Rationally Compromisable Disagreements

Hume allows that if a certain practice is useful or agreeable for a society but not another because of the ways the societies are ordered, this is allowed, and no single and particular practice must be preferred overall. In this way, he can be read as adopting pluralism, which is the thesis that several different values can be correct, or in this case, that several different practices can satisfy a virtue (Abramson 180). His pluralism does not compromise his universalism about the moral foundations, as they remain intact. We value virtues that are useful, but what these virtues look like in practice may differ without contradiction.

One issue that arises if we adopt pluralism is that the same virtue may yield vastly different and contrasting practices. Hume uses the example of dueling in England and France as a pluralistic practice. He claims that in England, dueling is not good-mannered but in France, it is good-mannered. Both England and France value the virtue of being good-mannered because it is agreeable, but the structure of their society and the temperament of their people results in the same practice being approved in one country and disapproved in another. They hold the same basic ethical principles, yet these principles yield very different actions depending on the context (M

D.36). However, by taking up the common point of view, the English will come to see that dueling is virtuous in France and the French will come to see that it is not virtuous in England, so as to rationally compromise, as Bohlin puts it (Bohlin 597). However, I am skeptical that these "basic ethical principles" are strong enough to overcome descriptive relativism and its threatened path to meta-ethical relativism. After all, dueling is the complete opposite of not dueling, and both practices are morally significant to the cultures in which they occur. It seems that on this thesis, one may come to see that a myriad of actions regarded as wrong in our society can be understood in the context of another by the very ethical principles we hold. Psychologically, it would be difficult to come to a compromise about practices that are wildly different from our own culture. It is not essential to Hume's thesis that we rationally compromise about pluralistic differences, but he does use the ability to compromise as a marker that two groups hold the same moral foundations. If they are unable to do so, it may be that these moral foundations are not similar enough to count against descriptive relativism.

Further, Hume argues that the same virtue – good manners – can be satisfied by opposite practices – dueling and not dueling – in two different cultures. If a certain virtue is realized in contradicting ways, what is its content? In order to claim that dueling and not dueling, despite superficial differences, count as the same virtue – good manners – the trait of good manners will end up with very little content. This is not to say that dueling cannot be approved in one culture and disapproved in another; rather, it signals that the disagreement cannot be resolved by an appeal to the same virtue to satisfy the threat of descriptive relativism. At this point, it is not a disagreement in the application of the virtue of having good manners, but rather it is a disagreement of the meaning of "good-mannered".

2.2.3 Rationally Uncompromisable Disagreement

Palamedes levies one last problem for Hume's moral universalism, that of people who live "artificial lives". He cites historical figures Diogenes and Pascal as contrasting yet fitting examples, as neither valued the moral foundations Hume cites as common among men. Diogenes thought only of his own pleasures and his standard of action was "the mortality of the soul", while Pascal's religiosity aimed to make himself suffer in this life for the betterment of the next (M D. 55). Palamedes asks Hume, "Where then is the universal standard of morals, which you talk of? And what rule shall we establish for the many different, nay contrary sentiments of mankind?" (M D.56). Hume has no answer but to say that these men do not share the moral principles of the rest of mankind.

Hume's use of the word "artificial" is a curious one. His most well-known use of the word "artificial" arises from his distinction between natural and artificial virtues in the *Treatise*. Here the distinction arises between virtues that would be approved of without society, such as benevolence, which are natural, and virtues that require society to give them usefulness, such as justice, which are artificial (T 477). However, when Hume uses the word "artificial" in this sense, he is not using it in a derogatory way; he does not believe that justice is fake, nor does it go against our nature. In contrast, in the context of "artificial lives," it seems that Hume means to say that the lives of people like Diogenes and Pascal are against human nature. He notes that these men "depart from the maxims of common reason" (M D.57). Bohlin interprets this to mean that they no longer prefer traits that are useful or agreeable (Bohlin 599).

It may seem odd that Hume argues against descriptive relativism while at the same time flatly admits that people like Diogenes and Pascal live "artificial lives" and therefore take up a moral standard that deviates from common human sentiment. I can think of two possible

explanations, neither very satisfactory. The first is that Hume can claim that deviating individuals such as Diogenes and Pascal are still human and therefore have the capacity to have the same sentiments as the rest of us: "Hume recognizes that even some humans, although they possess a potential for sympathy and humanity, or did so at some time, have failed to cultivate, or have cultivated it in such ways as to eventually develop a preference for the painful over the pleasant, or the useless over the useful" just as Diogenes and Pascal did (Bohlin 601-2). Certainly, when they were children or young adults their moral standard conformed to the common point of view. It is true; Pascal did not become intensely religious until he had an experience at the age of 31 (Clarke). Therefore, since "nature has made [these sentiments] universal in the whole species" (M 1.9), these individuals cannot be used as evidence against humans having the same basic ethical principles: "What is universal among humans therefore cannot be the actual moral sentiments or emotional dispositions, but only the potential for them" (Bohlin 602). The problem with the capacity argument is that it may work for individuals such as Diogenes and Pascal, but if someone is brought up in a society with vastly differing sentiments or differ in their emotional make-up from most other humans, it is difficult to explain where this capacity lies.

The second option is that when Hume claims descriptive relativism to be false, he is talking about most but not all human individuals. Specifically, "A Dialogue" is about cultural relativism, so even the existence of individual anomalies such as Diogenes and Pascal do not prove that there are entire cultures with differing basic ethical beliefs. However, if there was a whole group of individuals with such standards, Hume would be required to admit descriptive relativism. He may be able to argue against their standards and overcome meta-ethical relativism if their practices were not socially sustainable, i.e., if an entire group of Diogeneses could not survive, but if they were socially sustainable, then their standard is not less justified than our own. Sayre-McCord

confronts this possibility by considering a society of monsters who have "inverted sentiments" whose standard does not harm those who adopt it: "Hume might then have no grounds for criticizing their adoption of the malicious standard – as long as its adoption by them, in their circumstances, does not have a tendency to hurt those 'who have any immediate connexion or intercourse' with them" (Sayre-McCord 227).

2.3 Hume and Meta-Ethical Relativism

Hume cannot escape threats of descriptive relativism. His claim that as a descriptive fact, our moral judgments are universal, cannot withstand evidence of great cultural and individual diversity. However, the fact that humans differ in the scope of their sympathy and moral standing does not automatically lead to the thesis of meta-ethical relativism. Recall Frankena's argument from descriptive relativism to meta-ethical relativism: 1) people differ in their basic ethical principles and 2) people who are fully rational and informed continue to differ in their basic ethical principles (Frankena 110). Meta-ethical relativism holds if these two conditions are met and there is no neutral or objective standard to adjudicate this disagreement.

Bohlin reads Hume as a meta-ethical relativist because of his treatment of those with "artificial lives". If these men or any of those with "artificial lives" do not adhere to or accept the moral standards developed by human sympathy and common reason, we need a further standard from which to judge their standard or resolve the discrepancy between our standard and theirs. Hume cannot prefer our feelings over theirs, and he cannot make the argument that we are rational and they are not, as he believes that moral judgments are grounded in emotion and not reason (Bohlin 603). The common point of view is a product of sentimentalism; it cannot justify itself over other standards by an appeal to reason. As Bohlin puts it, there is no "Archimedean point"

from which we can determine that our standard is universally justified (Bohlin 602). This is what commits Hume to meta-ethical relativism.

Bohlin's interpretation of Hume as a meta-ethical relativist is not troubling for anti-relativists as he accepts Hume's arguments against descriptive relativism.[15] The fact that sentimentalism commits one to meta-ethical relativism is not problematic if there is no diversity of sentiment (or corrected sentiment). Meta-ethical relativism logically follows from Hume's sentimentalist theory, but Hume does not have to confront the problem of conflicting moral standards because there are none. On Bohlin's interpretation of Hume, the facts of the world show us that human beings share the same moral foundations. As a psychological fact, every human has the same basic ethical beliefs. If there is conflict, it can be decided upon or compromised by an appeal to these shared foundations.

However, my arguments against Hume's answer to threats of cultural relativism show that his argument against descriptive relativism is not as strong as Bohlin believes. Thus, meta-ethical relativism now creates a problem for how Hume's moral theory can reconcile and prefer differing moral standards and perspectives. On our own moral standard, we may judge another person to be wrong, but neither moral standard can prevail from a third, objective point of view because there is no such point of view. However, since he is a sentimentalist, the threat for Hume is not a lack of rational justification, but rather the problem of unending conflict. In the next section, I shall

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[15] Bohlin also reads Hume as denying normative relativism. Hume does not confront the thesis of normative relativism because it is not part of his project of explaining the principles of morals, and frankly, it is not a relevant problem. I believe that Hume's strict empiricism would make him a skeptic about moral facts in the same way he is a skeptic about the existence of metaphysical causation. That is, there is nothing to affirm or deny moral facts. This makes no sense. The only account we are able to give about our moral beliefs is the account we have already seen, which grounds their existence in our psychology.

introduce the concept of the expanded point of view and demonstrate that it weakens, though does not destroy, the problems of meta-ethical relativism.

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Section 3

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3.1 Hume's Claim of Moral Universalism

Although Hume is not naïve enough to think that there is no moral diversity within groups of humans, in the previous section I have shown how he attempts to explain it away in "A Dialogue" by claiming this diversity arises from four distinct moral principles that all humans hold and account for our moral approval or disapproval of certain character traits. These distinct moral principles are the approval of virtues that are useful and agreeable to oneself and others. Our list of moral virtues and vices is explained by these categories. All human moral judgments can be explained by one or more of these traits, Hume argues, therefore, descriptive relativism does not hold because underneath surface disagreements there is commonality (M D.37).

I argued in Section 2 that Hume's identification of these four basic moral principles does not serve to explain the moral diversity we see throughout cultures. For one, it does not account for differences that can arise on the interpretation of "others," i.e., who is granted moral standing. For example, Group A may believe that it is possible to be cruel[16] to animals while Group B does not believe that it is possible to be cruel to animals because their interests do not factor into moral judgments. Although it can be said that both groups are using the same moral principle, disapproval of cruelty to others, they have varying interpretations of when this principle applies. Hume has no further basic principle to explain this difference.

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[16] When I use the term "cruel," I mean cruelty that is morally significant, and not "cruel" that signifies harshness or severeness that is not morally significant, such as a cruel winter.

Other difficulties arise from applying the moral principles to diverse cultural norms, including the content of virtues and vices if contradictory practices satisfy the same virtue, but for the purpose of this paper, I will focus solely on the variability of who is given moral standing and thus who is considered "others" by the four moral principles. I shall examine an example of individuals who differ in their criteria of moral standing and use an expanded version of Hume's common point of view to alleviate their differences.

3.2 Moral Standing

Before continuing, it is beneficial to revisit the concept of moral standing. For a being or object to have moral standing is for its interests to "matter intrinsically, to at least some degree, in the moral assessment of actions and events" (Jaworska 460). That is, our moral scrutiny includes that being for its own sake. For example, to say that my cat has moral standing is to say that when determining how to act morally, one must consider her pain and pleasure (if taking a utilitarian approach) or her right to life, freedom, etc. (if taking a rights-based approach). This is not just because I will be upset if she is hurt. Even if no one has ever been emotionally attached to my cat, her interests still matter morally if she has moral standing.

Depending on the ethical approach one takes, the moral standing of a being or object will change. Some theorists believe that the interests of all beings matter equally. Jeremy Bentham subscribes to the egalitarian condition, that everyone's interests should count for one, and no one should be weighted higher or lower than others (Bentham 144). Others argue that moral standing comes in degrees depending on a being's capacities. Full moral standing grants a being full rights and consideration of interests, no matter the utilitarian value of violating their rights (Jaworska 460). So, these theorists would grant moral consideration to beings with less than full moral

standing, but if their interests conflict with a being with full moral standing, the interests of the individual with full moral standing are preferred.

It is already evident that philosophers and non-philosophers alike disagree about the extent and degree of the moral standing of various beings. In other words, their views about the scopes of moral standing differ.[17] From now on, I will refer to this disagreement about scopes as "different scopes". In the following example, I will outline a case in which individuals disagree about the moral standing of a being or object and thus have different scopes. Following the example, I will attempt to give a Humean solution to their discrepancy and subsequent moral dialogue.

Case Study 1: The Cruelty of Horse Racing

Hannah and her friend Jake attend the Kentucky Derby. They watch the smaller races all day, with the culmination being the big Kentucky Derby race. By the end of the day, Jake is appalled. "This entire industry is cruel," he says to Hannah. "They breed the horses, make them race at a young age, whip them, overtrain them, and some of them break their legs and die on the racetrack. If they're not successful at a young age, they get sent to slaughter. All for our entertainment and gambling addiction. Imagine if we did this with humans? There would be uproar."

Hannah isn't so sure. "I don't think it's that cruel. Yeah, if we were doing this with people, there would be a problem. But I mean, they're just horses, and lots of people enjoy watching it."

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[17] Note that when I refer to individuals having "different scopes," I am referring to the descriptive categories of beings to whom they give moral standing, and not to their differences in criteria of who is granted moral standing. For example, in my example, when I say that Hannah and Jake have different scopes, I mean to say that Jake gives horses moral standing and Hannah does not. I am not saying, for example, that Jake believes all sentient beings should have moral standing while Hannah's criteria are narrower. Although this may be the case, in this paper, I am not interested in why scopes differ, but rather that they do.

In this case, Hannah and Jake are referring to the same vice: cruelty. As per Hume's theory, they both believe that cruelty to others is wrong. However, they disagree about who counts. For both, racing humans in the way that horses are raced would be cruel. However, for Jake, racing is also cruel to horses because they have moral standing high enough to deem racing them cruel. He believes that the treatment of horses in the racing industry is cruel, regardless of its entertainment value to people. At the same time, Jake may have a limit to the moral standing of horses – if he had to choose to breed and race a horse or a human, he may choose to breed the horse, deeming it "less cruel." There are two ways to think of Hannah's stance on the moral standing of horses: 1) She affords them some standing, but it is not as high as the standing Jake affords. For example, if she saw a horse owner beat his horse and starve it, she would deem it cruel, but horse racing doesn't reach the bar of counting it cruel for horses. 2) She affords horses no standing. She doesn't think it is possible to be cruel to horses in any form because they don't have moral standing.

Overall, Hannah and Jake agree that cruelty is a vice that is harmful to others but disagree about if cruelty can apply to horses in the racing industry. They have different scopes of moral standing. This is a disagreement that on the surface, Hume's moral principles cannot seem to explain away. Each appeal to the same vice, cruelty, made a vice by the same moral foundation, traits disagreeable to others, yet they continue to disagree about the scope of moral "others".

3.2.1 Rationally Decidable Conflicts of Moral Standing

It is tempting to try and provide solutions about conflicts about scope by suggesting that they are rationally decidable, as Bohlin argues many disagreements about virtues are. For example, in the case of Hannah and Jake, one might argue that Hannah and Jake both afford the same moral

standing to horses – they agree that cruelty to horses is wrong – but they disagree about horse racing being cruel to horses[18]. This may be because one or both has a lack of knowledge about the effects of horseracing on horses, or because they misunderstand horses themselves.[19] New information or correction of false beliefs erase the disagreement. Once Hannah and Jake properly understand the intricacies of horseracing, they will reach a consensus.

It is also tempting to appeal to the consistency of an individual's moral judgments. For example, Hannah may be persuaded to give horses higher moral standing if Jake points out that she is against greyhound racing, and there is no morally significant difference between horses and greyhounds, nor between the greyhound racing and horse racing industries. On the other hand, Jake may be persuaded to lessen his stance against horse racing if it is pointed out that he eats beef, which is an arguably crueler industry for cows, which are extremely similar to horses. In each of these cases, Hannah and Jake are asked to be consistent in their moral judgments and affording of moral standing. Once each side becomes more consistent, it is clear that it is not their categories of who is afforded moral standing that differs, but their application of these categories. It is another "rationally decidable" disagreement, one that does not threaten the uniformity of the common point of view and moral principles.

While this may be the case in some differences of scope, other conflicts of scope are irreducibly non-rationally decidable. In some cases, when two individuals disagree about a group's moral standing, they do so at the very core, and not because they lack full knowledge or are inconsistent. In the case of Hannah and Jake, Hannah may believe that it is impossible to be cruel

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[18] This assumes the first interpretation of Hannah's position on the moral standing of horses – that it is possible to be cruel to them, but horse racing does not count.

[19] It is possible that the misunderstanding of the nature of horses, animals, or other beings stems from a lack of interests in both their nature and wellbeing, suggesting that the refusal to understand more or remain dogmatic in one's views is linked to the moral standing (or lack of thereof) that an individual grants a misunderstood population.

to horses, because they have no moral standing,[20] while Jake believes that it is possible to be cruel to horses, because they have moral standing. Therefore, it is necessary to alter Hume's common point of view in order to account for these differences and attempt to reconcile them. I believe we can do so by expanding the common point of view to include the viewpoints of those with whom we are in conversation and further, those with whom we disagree.

3.3 Hume's Common Point of View Expanded: Two Ways

If a Humean account of moral sentimentalism is to avoid the most dangerous forms of moral relativism, it must attempt to reconcile the different scopes of individuals. I argue that there is a moral point of view, expanded from the common point of view, that we take when assessing our moral judgments compared to other people's moral judgments that may bridge the divide between people like Hannah and Jake.

3.3.1 First Expansion

The expanded point of view I am proposing is much like Hume's common point of view, but it does not limit its point of view to an agent and those in close connection with an agent, because some people may be unable or unwilling to extend their imagination to certain beings in an agent's narrow circle.[21] Therefore, person A may fail to consider group X that is in close connection with the agent in question because they afford them limited or no moral standing. If

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[20] This assumes the second interpretation of Hannah's position on the moral standing of horse – that it is impossible to be cruel to them.

[21] In some cases, it may be impossible for everyone, even those who afford moral standing to a certain group, to extend their imagination to include the viewpoints of these beings. For example, many vegetarians and vegans do not eat shrimp and other crustaceans because they afford them moral standing. However, it is also unlikely that they can properly take up a shrimp's point of view because they are too different from ourselves. I will take up this issue later on, when I discuss abstract principles.

person B does extend their imagination to group X, they grant them moral standing and thus consider their point of view or welfare. In this case, person A and B are taking up different, not common, points of view. Instead, the expanded point of view is a broader understanding that encompasses both the viewpoints of an agent and those closest to them as well as the viewpoints of others that observe an agent and action. Thus, A's expanded point of view considers B and their concern for group X, and B's expanded point of view considers A and their lack of concern for group X, creating a more comprehensive point of view from which to make moral judgments and (often) come to a consensus.

For example, in the case of Hannah and Jake, Hannah does not consider the horse owners and breeders as cruel, because she does not think they can be cruel to the horses. She does not think that the category of cruelty applies to the treatment of horses. Therefore, the horses' interests, rights, and viewpoints are not being weighed in her judgment. Yet, Hannah is in conversation with Jake, who takes the interests of the horses as morally significant. After their conversation, Hannah now considers Jake's point of view when making her moral judgment. Her initial judgment is that horse racing is not cruel, but Jake thinks it is cruel. Although she does not afford horses the same moral standing as Jake, she understands what Jake means when he says that horse racing is cruel to the horses. Now, when Hannah makes a moral judgment, she is considering the viewpoint of the parties involved (whom she grants moral standing), and others that are making moral judgments about the being or action in question (Jake's point of view).

Likewise, Jake does the same thing after having a conversation with Hannah. Although he initially considered the horses' interests when he proclaimed that horse racing is cruel, he now considers that Hannah and many others see no problem with the practice. They do not consider the horses' interests when deciding whether a practice is morally permissible or problematic. Perhaps

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he is overextending moral standing and caring too much. Secondly, Hannah may consider the well-being of horse owners and jockeys more than Jake when determining if horse racing is cruel and should be stopped. His conversation with Hannah inspires Jake to now consider their point of view more intimately than he did before when he was thinking about the cruelty to horses as an isolated practice. Judgments about horse racing that he makes in the future will reflect both his initial feeling against it and his feelings after considering the viewpoints of other people's moral judgments. Although Jake may remain firm in his moral judgment that cruelty to horses in the racing industry is more morally significant than the harm changing the industry will cause to its beneficiaries, he may at least understand their point of view more and not regard them as morally heinous.

Note that the expanded point of view, although it considers the viewpoint of one's interlocutor, does not unify viewpoints, as Hume might imagine the common point of view to do. However, unification is not the goal. Instead, it recognizes the differences in scope and admits that others have a different viewpoint about a situation, complexifying one's outlook when making a moral judgment. Enlarging one's viewpoint to include the person with which one is in dialogue allows for a more contextualized and multi-dimensional viewpoint from which to judge an action. Although it may not resolve disagreements in scope, it operates as a mechanism for resolving differences and expanding understanding and tolerance.

3.3.1.1 Motivation

Why should Hannah and Jake attempt to understand the other's point of view? If Hannah and Jake each feel a certain way about horseracing, it does not seem necessary for them to come to some consensus or understanding. Perhaps enjoyment of horseracing is like having a favorite

ice cream flavor – there is no need to agree. Why is having different scopes unlike having different

tastes?

To begin, it is worth noting that oftentimes even having different tastes motivates us to

expand our point of view to consider another side. For example, if Hannah's favorite ice cream

flavor is pistachio and Jake's favorite flavor is mint chocolate chip, each side may agree to try the

other's favorite flavor with an open mind. They may think, why not? It's just ice cream flavors,

and maybe they've been missing out whilst dogmatically stuck on one flavor. However, in this

case, there's no motivation for them to come to a consensus. If, after trying the other's respective

flavor, each individual remains steadfast in their position, they have no reason to reconsider. After

all, it's just ice cream flavors.[22]

Instead, the difference between ice cream flavors and the cruelty of horseracing lies in the

motivation one has to consider and come to a consensus with the other side. Hume is right – it

seems that when we have moral disagreements (although he doesn't believe they are deep

disagreements), we attempt to come to some understanding or acceptance of the other side because

they are about issues we take to be important.[23] They are about practices we think should be

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[22] Other tastes seem to lie in a middle ground between completely preference and clearly moral, often when they serve as a proxy to indicate a certain trait, such as sophistication or class. For example, someone's preference for Bach over One Direction may indicate something about their refined taste in music. Someone's decision to dress nicely instead of wearing sweats may indicate their work ethic. A specific example that comes to mind for me is Pennsylvania's battle between the convenient stores/gas stations Sheetz and Wawa. What seems like a personal preference about one's favorite gas station acts as a proxy to indicate regional loyalties and class backgrounds, bridging the divide between taste and morality.

[23] We may also attempt to understand the other side because we disagree about an issue that those we are close to take to be important, even if we ourselves do not. Sometimes there is a mutual consensus about what is important. For example, in the US, pro-life and pro-choice are equally adamant about the importance of the legality and ethics of access to abortion. Other times, only one side cares. In this example, Jake believes one's stance on horseracing is quite morally important whereas Hannah does not include horseracing as an ethical issue and considers it because Jake does. At the same time, even though Hannah does not take horseracing to be morally significant, she now cares because Jake has implied that she should stop watching it.

changed or remain the same. Therefore, there is a social consensus about what matters. Hypothetically, this means that if we started treating one's favorite ice cream flavor as a morally important issue, then it too would be included in the expanded point of view. Taking up the expanded moral point of view encourages one not only to change their viewpoint on the qualities of a particular person or event but to also change their future behavior in alignment with it. By saying that horse racing is cruel, Jake attempts to encourage Hannah to not support horse racing in the future. The conversation is socially important in a way that ice cream flavors are not. Below I will outline two motivations we have to take up the expanded point of view in the case of different scopes that are not present when we have different tastes.

Moral Interlocutor

The first motivation we have to take up the expanded point of view and consider another's moral judgment when making our own is that we consider that individual as our peer, contemporary, or social equal. Hannah and Jake are friends. As friends, each feels affection for the other and is eager to retain their esteem. They respect each other and see each other as holding similar interests and values. Thus, when they disagree about something, each of them is motivated to understand the other's point of view and correct, alter, or revise their original moral judgment.

Hume's sentimentalism provides valuable insight into the social psychology of our moral lives, as sympathy prompts us to expand our point of view. While she is with Jake, Hannah sees him cringe at the horse race. Watching his reaction causes her to look at the race with "new eyes," so to speak. Simultaneously, Jake observes Hannah's indifference and perhaps excitement over the race. Although he may have at first looked around at the equally excited unfamiliar attendees with incredulity, Hannah's reaction may cause him to reevaluate because he sees himself as similar

to Hannah and he respects Hannah and wants to understand her moral position. Because they share friendship, they also come to sympathize with the other's moral stance. This is why Hume credits sympathy as the "principle we ought to ascribe the great uniformity we may observe in the humours and turn of thinking of those of the same nation…A cheerful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind; as an angry or sorrowful one throws a sudden damp upon me" (T 316).

This is a familiar experience to many of us and can extend beyond our acquaintances to include the viewpoints of strangers. We desire the approval of those around us and look for their good opinion. For example, we may alter our opinion of someone in a YouTube video after reading the comments made by strangers. Even though we do not know these people, their point of view is included in our point of view when making a judgment. The viewpoints of strangers are regarded even more highly if they are in a position of power or expertise – we are probably more likely to consider the point of view of a scientist quoted in the *New York Times* than a random Reddit poster. However, there is a limit to this expansion. For example, suppose you are an internet troll or otherwise post degrading comments on the internet. If your friends found out that you did so, you may feel embarrassed or ashamed of yourself. Yet, as it is, you feel little remorse over bashing strangers and receiving negative feedback from them. This is not to say that the viewpoints of strangers are not included in the expanded point of view, only that they are not included as frequently or intensely.

Social Pressure and Sympathy

There is also a layer of social pressure that causes us to take up the expanded point of view and consider the moral judgments of our interlocutors. For example, when Jake says, "Horse racing

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is cruel," Hannah understands that he is including her, a complicit entertainee, in this claim. Therefore, she understands that she is doing something that he does not agree with that *applies* to her. This is unlike the personal opinion, "Mint chocolate chip is the best ice cream flavor," because again, Hannah and Jake take cruelty to be a socially malignant trait about which it is important to agree and properly identify. Therefore, if one of them deemed one's favorite ice cream flavor to signify a socially malignant trait and the other accepted this assessment, then divergent judgments about ice cream flavors would turn into a moral disagreement.[24] Further, one's stance on cruelty seems to identify something about themselves and their traits. Therefore, when Jake says, "Horse racing is cruel," Hannah understands that he applies this statement to her as well. She knows that he believes that she is doing something wrong by watching it and enjoying it. She wants Jake's good opinion, so their disagreement about the moral standing of horses and thus moral judgment causes Hannah to want to understand and learn more about why Jake believes this.

Changing one's opinion as a result of social pressure can range anywhere from lying to a willingness to entertain another side to genuine belief change. However, despite one's internal stance, social pressure highlights our desire to want to be agreeable to those around us. Even if Hannah lies about her stance on horse racing because she doesn't think it is a morally significant issue and is no different than ice cream flavors, she recognizes that it is morally significant to Jake.

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[24] There is a further question about the difference between liking or preferring something and acting on it. For example, imagine that chocolate ice cream had questionable production practices – not too hard to imagine, considering the ethical issues surrounding the chocolate industry – and consuming it was considered morally bad. However, it seems unlikely that we would also say that someone who liked chocolate ice cream but did not eat it because of said practices was immoral. Enjoying chocolate would not say anything about one's character traits but eating chocolate possibly would. This distinction applies across some, but not all, moral issues. For example, to enjoy horse racing but abstain from watching it on the basis of its cruelty seems redeemable. On the other hand, the distinction between liking yet not acting does not apply as readily in the case of pedophilia. We often ascribe bad character traits to someone who has only the inclination of pedophilia but does not act upon it. The distinction between when practices are okay to like but not act on and practices that are never okay to prefer also arises from social consensus. There may come a day where enjoying horse racing will be seen as reflecting questionable character traits, as we may now think of someone who would enjoy watching gladiators in ancient Rome.

Her desire to be agreeable with her friend motivates her to at least outwardly change or reconsider her stance. The same goes for Jake. Even if he continues to believe that horse racing is a heinous industry and everyone involved is horrible, he may lighten his public stance to Hannah because he does not want to lose his friendship with her. Thus, our tendency to be sociable and agreeable causes us to continue a dialogue, even if the two sides do not have the same point of view nor change their original opinion.

3.3.2 Second Expansion

The expanded point of view also corrects our initial personal judgment (or bolsters it if they are in alignment) by appealing to historical and cultural similarities that point out socially beneficial qualities in humans and actions. This is what Hume would call the appeal to "abstract notions". It does not fall into the categories already mentioned, i.e., imagining the viewpoints of those close to an agent and one's interlocutor because there is not a particular viewpoint one takes. Instead, it enlarges to incorporate historical and cultural patterns.

Hume argues that our moral judgments align with our abstract principles, and not our personal sentiments: "The passions do not always follow our corrections; but these corrections serve sufficiently to regulate our abstract notions, and are alone regarded, when we pronounce in general concerning the degrees of vice and virtue" (T 585). However, he does not explain what these abstract notions are or how they are founded. I argue that our abstract notions are principles we hold concerning certain traits and behaviors that have proved historically useful or disadvantageous, despite our personal feelings about the individual(s) in question.

For example, earlier I suggested that some vegans and vegetarians refuse to eat shrimp on moral grounds, even though it is unlikely that they are able to take up the viewpoint of the shrimp

themselves, as they are so different from ourselves. The question then becomes, how and why do they include shrimp in their moral scope if they cannot take up the shrimp's point of view? Hume's abstract principles serve to explain this issue. Shrimp fill certain criteria that vegans and vegetarians have about moral standing. Including shrimp in their scopes of moral standing is an extension of principle about certain criteria rather than taking the point of view of shrimp.

The abstract principle expansion also accounts for historical moments in which moral standing change was socially beneficial. In the past, women were not afforded the same rights that they are now. Expanding their moral standing and rights was a social process that is still occurring today. Most now would agree that this historic expansion of rights was socially beneficial for both women and men. Thus, we can look back to historical instances of scope expansion when considering further scope expansion in our own time. Cohon argues that we are motivated to take up the common point of view in order to make our moral judgments uniform because moral judgments hint at objective qualities in agents, objects, and actions; they are "causal judgment[s] about what impact the trait or person being judged is likely to have on his near associates, typically a judgment about the power of the trait in question to cause pride or love, humility or hatred" (Cohon 840). We need the stability of judgments in order to engage in productive and useful conversation with our peers, so there is an underlying social utility at work in moral consensus. Scope has been contested and expanded in the past. Coming to a consensus about moral standing, usually by expanding it, has resulted in a more productive and useful society.

There may be worry that appeal to abstract principles about the benefits of scope expansion loses Hume's sentimentalist thesis because it appeals to historical examples of productive scope expansion rather than personal feelings. Hume notes that our strongest passions may not follow our corrections based on abstract principles. For example, we may expand our scope based on an

abstract principle without really feeling strongly for the group in question. There are two answers to this problem, the first being that although our strongest passions may contradict our moral judgment based on the abstract principle, we still have calmer passions that align with the abstract principle (Cohon 836). We are motivated by the objective useful qualities that the abstract principle picks out.

The second answer is that there is still sympathy at work behind the abstract principles. The historical social consensus would not align with scope expansion if there was no sympathy for those who are now being included in the scope. Although certain individuals may not feel any sympathy, the majority must feel something. Sympathy and sentiment remain fundamental causes of moral scope expansion without being present in every particular person.

3.4 Assuaging Meta-Ethical Relativism

Finally, let's return to the problem that has driven this entire investigation: Can a Humean sentimentalist theory of moral judgment avoid meta-ethical relativism? At the end of Section 2, it seemed that the truth of descriptive relativism, specifically evidenced by differences in the categories of moral standing among individuals and groups, would surely lead to meta-ethical relativism. However, by expanding Hume's common point of view to include the viewpoints of our moral interlocutors, descriptive and meta-ethical relativism become less inevitable, and when it does occur, less pernicious.

Taking up the expanded point of view in the face of disagreement about scope may eliminate moral difference and thus render descriptive relativism false. One side may be persuaded by the other to alter their scope, unifying their point of view with others. This is what Hume imagined the common point of view to be doing. However, in many cases, the expanded point of

view does not completely eradicate cultural difference or divergent views and so falsify descriptive relativism, and therefore leaves meta-ethical relativism as an open and real possibility.

To review, meta-ethical relativism posits that (1) there is no objective way to justify one group's basic moral beliefs and judgments against another's if (2) the differing basic ethical beliefs are held by equally rational groups (Frankena 109). It is worth considering why meta-ethical relativism is commonly viewed as dangerous in philosophical circles. The danger of meta-ethical relativism is evident when one considers what would happen if there was no rational or dialogic way to resolve disagreements about power, discrimination, or laws. If there is a group or individual that believes they are superior to everyone else, to the extent that they believe disenfranchisement, oppression, torture, and murder of others are justified, meta-ethical relativism tells us that their opinion is no less justified for them to believe than our own opinion against these oppressions is justified for us. They feel as strongly about their position as we do our own – a scary thought, considering that if all groups who disagreed about moral standing remained firmly planted in their own viewpoint, there would be irreducible disagreement and unavoidable social division. These groups would need to stay far away from each other to avoid a violent clash.

For example, consider a man who identifies as a Neo-Nazi. He is genuinely antisemitic, homophobic, racist, and ableist. He believes in the eradication of minority groups from America and plans to act upon his beliefs. He does not include them in his scope. If meta-ethical relativism is true, what can we say to this man? The problem with meta-ethical relativism is that it leaves no decisive response to give – we differ in our basic ethical beliefs and there is no way to justify one set of beliefs over the other. On Hume's sentimentalism, we cannot appeal to objective moral principles or an ideal observer to say that his views are wrong.

This example is much more charged than the horse racing example, and it is that much scarier if meta-ethical relativism is true. Let's consider this case in light of the expanded version of Hume's common point of view that I have proposed in this section. Here I argued that even though we differ about views of scope (in this case, whether to include Jews, queers, people of color, etc.), we can take up the other's point of view and arrive at a consensus or agree to see the other side. In this case, it is possible for the Neo-Nazi and the non-Neo-Nazi to look at the situation from the other person's point of view. If we succeed in doing so, we may be able to come to a moral consensus or compromise and thus avoid descriptive relativism as well as meta-ethical relativism.

What if this is not successful? I assume most would balk at the idea of agreeing to see the other side of or compromise with a Neo-Nazi. From this standpoint, attempting to come to a compromise with a Neo-Nazi seems more harmful than accepting descriptive and meta-ethical relativism and staying far away. The Neo-Nazi, most likely, has equally little reason to see our side of things. Unlike Jake and Hannah, we are not close friends and do not feel much social pressure to conform to each other's moral viewpoints, since our moral viewpoints are so decidedly opposed. Therefore, we continue to fundamentally disagree about the extent to which one should consider various groups in their moral judgment making processes.

In this case, until one side or the other inspires one of us to change our position, we will continue to disagree in our moral judgments. This descriptive relativism implies meta-ethical relativism because Hume's theory has no ideal, rational, or objective point of view to resolve conflicts between our differing stances. Moral judgments are a psychological and social phenomenon, decidable by social factors and sentiments only. I may continue to tell the Neo-Nazi that he is wrong while he tells me that I am wrong, but until we develop a common ground, neither

side will normatively prevail over the other, unless there is evidence that expanding our points of view will more accurately pick out objective or historically useful qualities.

Should we just leave it at this? Let the Neo-Nazi get on with his bigotry and hate, because we have no objective, third point of view from which to change his mind? This is where the second expansion can step in to help. Although we may have no cause to take up the Neo-Nazi's point of view, nor he ours, we can still appeal to a principle against his views. Generally, history works in the direction of expanding scope to include all people, and destructive events such as war or genocide happen when people are excluded. Although this individual or perhaps group of individuals thinks differently, their views do not reflect the abstract principles generally accepted by our society about what is socially good and useful. These abstract principles may not convince the Neo-Nazi to change his beliefs and viewpoints, but they save us from lacking a decisive response against his views. We still say the Nazi is wrong and appeal to history as evidence. Practically, in cases such as this, when the party involved has such extreme moral viewpoints from the general public, the best answer may just be to stay far away and defend oneself when necessary (literally and metaphorically), since it seems unlikely that we will change their beliefs. Even Hume would most likely throw his hands up, charging people like this with "artificial lives," those whose values are so skewed from the general public that it seems hopeless to change their mind.

Luckily, the expanded common point of view assuages the worries of meta-ethical relativism to a considerable extent, as these extreme cases are uncommon. People are thick, not thin. We are not just our stance on one controversial issue, so if we engage in conversation about other topics, sympathy provides a path to forge a connection and continue engagement. Even if two people differ in their original point of view and also when they take up Hume's common point of view, if they have an established connection and the motivation to consider and ability to

understand the other's position, there is a common understanding that can lead to a justified acceptance of the other's position. Thus, even when meta-ethical relativism does occur, it is less strong and less harmful. There remains an underlying motivation to understand and partially accept the contrasting position. Therefore, I believe the expanded point of view escapes the harms of meta-ethical relativism in most cases. There may continue to be disagreement between basic ethical beliefs relating to scope and no objective way to justify one set of basic beliefs over another, leading to unresolved disagreements, but the expanded point of view provides an impetus for further conversation. After all, our social lives continue, avoiding the most vehement clashes of ideology – to the point of complete evasion – and the moral landscape evolves and changes. This is due to our ability to take up the viewpoints of those distant from ourselves, understand and take up the dissenting viewpoint that is in conversation with ourselves, and remain steadfast to abstract principles that track socially useful traits, even while contradicting our original sentiments. Moral conversation is not about finding the objectively right answer, but instead about forward-looking, socially beneficial changes in behavior and continued conversation.

Lastly, there is always the possibility that the divergent moral beliefs that make descriptive relativism true today will not be present tomorrow. As cultures converse and individuals discuss, ideas pass and the motivation to take another's point of view alters. At some point, two people or cultures with no motivation to consider the other's side may come to benefit from taking up the expanded common point of view. When this happens, the descriptive relativism that exists between the two sides will lessen or disappear, and at that point, we no longer need to worry about meta-ethical relativism.

Conclusion

My goal in this paper was to determine how Hume's theory of sentimentalism could respond to threats of moral relativism, specifically descriptive and meta-ethical relativism. Hume's sentimentalism does not appeal to objective moral facts, thus grounding the normative justification of moral judgments – if there is any – in human psychology. This presents a problem when the sentiments of individuals or groups of humans differ regarding moral judgments.

Hume's response to this problem was to affirm that any difference in moral judgments between individuals or culture was only skin deep and asserted in "A Dialogue" that all people hold the same four moral foundations as a result of taking up a common point of view. Therefore, since all people have the same basic moral beliefs, there is no descriptive relativism and in turn there is no need to worry about meta-ethical relativism.

In Section 2, I challenged Hume's response to moral relativism by arguing that his four moral foundations and common point of view did not accurately reflect the moral judgment making process of humans. Specifically, it did not account for differences in which groups are afforded moral standing, or moral scopes. The four moral foundations cannot reconcile differences in scope. I argued that this was a difference in the basic moral beliefs of people and thus must be addressed.

In Section 3, I attempted to alleviate the dangers of meta-ethical relativism while remaining true to Hume's sentimentalist theory. Meta-ethical relativism is viewed as dangerous because it cannot appeal to an objective point of view, or objective moral scope to resolve differences in the moral points of view of different people. If there is no common point of view, then moral differences may collapse into violent conflict and unresolvable rifts between people. There is no way for us to justify a denunciation of hateful and violent rhetoric and action if those perpetrating

it do not feel that it is wrong. They are equally justified in their position as we are in ours. Not only is this frustrating, but it can also be highly pernicious.

My theory of the expanded point of view enlarges Hume's conception of the common point of view to include the viewpoints of those with which we are in moral conversation as well as abstract moral principles that reflect useful qualities throughout history. This expansion 1) more accurately reflects our own moral lives, 2) considers the viewpoints of those with different scopes than our own, and 3) escapes the most dangerous effects of meta-ethical relativism.

Although my theory alleviates some of the pressure of meta-ethical relativism, it does not eradicate it. If two groups or people feel no need to understand or relate to each other, the expanded point of view will not be successful, and another theory may be needed to justify one side or the other. However, Hume's universalist sentimentalism is optimistic and suggests that our desires to be accepted and liked will motivate us to seek compromise through moral discussion. I expect that Hume's theory continues to reflect human psychology and sociability and the expanded point of view can couple with his sentimentalism to offer a more robust and accurate picture of moral disagreement and relativism.

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