History of Philosophy Quarterly
Volume 40, Number 4, October 2023

ATTACHMENT IN THE WAKE OF IMPERMANENCE

A Comparison of Hume and Buddhism on the Practical Implications of having "No-Self"

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Abstract

How should our metaphysical commitments influence how we think of ourselves in the practical world? Hume and Buddhism share common ground in denying that there exists a metaphysically real self yet offer very different practical recommendations about how this metaphysical view ought to inform our practical identities. This paper explores the contrast between the two views. It examines the benefits and costs of embracing, and attaching to, a practical conception of the self in the absence of a metaphysical self and provides a qualified defense of the Humean approach by way of considering the joys of attachment.

Keywords: Hume, Buddhism, attachment, the self.

If neither ourselves nor others have an enduring self, to what extent should this impact how we interact with others? Historically, questions of personal identity were motivated by concerns about the afterlife, with much less attention paid to the practical implications of having (or not having) an enduring self for our lives here and now. While this oversight is relatively unproblematic for those that believe there is an enduring self, it is more problematic for those who do not. Hume famously holds that any investigation into an enduring sense of self will come up short: there is no one constant and invariable impression that gives rise to an enduring sense of self (T 1.4.6.1). Hume's argument is compelling, which may be part of what makes it so frustrating that, after making it, he simply moves on.

His subsequent treatment of the passions and of morality proceed largely without returning to the topic,[1] which suggests he didn't think there were practical implications of not having an enduring sense of self.

This position stands in sharp contrast with Buddhist thought. Like Hume, Buddhism denies the existence of an enduring sense of self. Unlike Hume, Buddhism highlights and discusses at length the practical implications of its metaphysical analysis, holding that our lack of an enduring self has significant implications for how we ought to interact with others. Specifically, Buddhism warns against attaching to others. Since no person is permanent, attaching ourselves to them invites suffering. If this is correct, then Hume makes a mistake in not taking seriously the practical implications of his denial of an enduring sense of self.

This paper defends the Humean position against this threat. It will show that the disconnect between Hume's discussion of personal identity and his discussion of the passions and morality fits within his larger ambition of prioritizing the passions, and argue that Hume's approach provides the preferable solution to the problem of living without an enduring sense of self. We should attach ourselves to others, even if neither we nor they have an enduring self. For creatures like us, the joys of attachment simply outweigh the costs.

The first two sections consider Hume's and Buddhism's divergent understandings of the relationship between metaphysics and morality, showing that while the core tenets of Buddhism—the Four Noble Truths—build directly from its no-self doctrine, Hume's skepticism leaves him silent on what the lack of an enduring self entails for our interactions in common life. The third section then examines Hume's surprising move in Book II of the *Treatise*, where he claims that pride produces the idea of the self (T 2.1.5.6).[2] The arguments Hume makes here show the inevitability of developing a practical conception of the self and highlight the important role attachments play in informing our practical identities. Having established the contrasts between Hume's endorsement of attachment and Buddhism's rejection of attachment, the final sections demonstrate the plausibility and limit of Hume's view. We ought to allow our attachments to others infiltrate our practical identities, but we ought to do so cautiously, for it is indeed a gamble whether doing so opens us up to suffering.

1. The Humean Path: Skepticism about Reason, not Passion.

Within the *Treatise,* Hume's treatment of the self comes in two stages. The first occurs in the context of his skeptical treatment of metaphysics. Here, he argues that a search for the self turns up only a series of

impressions, none of which has the durability or permanence from which to support a diachronic idea of personal identity:

> For from which impression could this idea [of *self*] be derived? This question 'tis impossible to answer without a manifest contradiction and absurdity; and yet 'tis a question, which must necessarily be answer'd, if we wou'd have the idea of self pass for clear and intelligible. It must be some one impression, that gives rise to every real idea. But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos'd to have a reference. If any impression gives rise to the idea of the self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives; since self is suppos'd to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable (T 1.4.6.1)

In denying the existence of a self that endures through time, Hume rejects that there exists anything capable of sustaining notions of personal identity.[3] While another philosopher might have taken this conclusion to invite substantive reflection on how we are to make sense of our experiences of ourselves and others, Hume does not. And, in fact, in Part II of the *Treatise*, he goes on to discuss how our passions provide us with an idea of the self, an idea that ends up playing an important role in informing the practical identities requisite to common life.

Hume's treatment of the self illustrates the unique fashion in which he views the relationship between his skeptical conclusions and his practical philosophy. We have no idea of the self, and ought to be skeptical that the self exists on a metaphysical level. But we do develop some idea of the self, and should embrace it, especially insofar as it is important to our interactions with others.

This kind of move understandably generates significant debate about the nature of Hume's skepticism. Fueling the debate are Hume's own remarks about skepticism. In both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, he treats skeptical views with caution, highlighting the dangers of engaging too far in skeptical reflections, and suggesting remedies for it. For example, he writes that "carelessness and in-attention" are a remedy in that they lead us to forget about our skeptical conclusions and go on acting as if they never happened (T 1.4.2.57) and that moral skepticism can be overcome by "mere weariness" (EPM 1.2). That the proposed "remedies" consistently point to falling back on our natures indicate that Hume doesn't think it is in our nature to be skeptics. Reason takes us to a skeptical position, but our natures consistently take us back. And we should let them.[4]

Hume's epistemological analysis reveals there is no metaphysical self. But his analysis of the passions reveals there is a practical conception

of oneself: an idea of the self that is produced through the subject's passions, which delivers the durability needed to ground her practical identity. Given Hume's cautious attitude towards skepticism, and his positive attitude to the ease with which his mind leads him to forget that skepticism, it's clear that Hume believes his readers ought to do the same. While we should engage seriously with the limits of what reason can deliver, we also ought not to forget that we are ruled and fueled by our passions, which drive us to believe that which we might not rationally accept. Reason doesn't tell us to believe that "fire warms, or water refreshes," but we are inclined to believe this regardless (T 1.4.7.11). Belief arises only when "reason is lively, and mixes with some propensity" (T 1.4.7.11). We should assent to belief, but cautiously so, maintaining awareness of the ways that passion, and not solely reason, drives us to believe.

This reading dissolves the apparent tension between Hume's rejection of the metaphysical self and his belief in a practical self. That reason cannot discover an enduring self is one thing. But human beings have a propensity to believe in a practical self, as evidenced by the experience of pride, which Hume identifies as a fundamental passion. Pride produces an idea of the self and invokes an idea of the self as its object.[5] This isn't the kind of self that can establish diachronic personal identity, but it is the kind of self we invoke in practice, through our interactions. While believing in the practical self may not be incompatible with believing there is no metaphysical self, Hume's suggestion is clear: when it comes to our relations to others, we will (and should) embrace the practical self and let our skepticism about the metaphysical self fall out of focus.

2. The Buddhist Path: Metaphysics Reign.

Hume's skepticism about reason and urge to embrace the directions to which our passions lead us stand in contrast to Buddhist philosophy.[6] The parallel between Hume's denial of a metaphysical self and the Buddhist doctrine of no-self (anātman) has been well established.[7] Yet it's important to appreciate the depths of the Buddhist doctrine, which finds its basis not in skepticism, but rather within a very clearly developed metaphysical theory of dependent arising. The reason why we lack discrete metaphysical selves is that human beings, along with every other phenomenon, are interconnected on a metaphysical level, held together through various causal relationships.[8] Each of us lacks a discrete sense of self because each of us is connected to others.

The Four Noble Truths present the basis for Buddhism's practical philosophy. Thought to be the first words spoken by the Buddha upon his enlightenment, the Four Noble Truths present metaphysical views

alongside practical recommendations. Their very structure illustrates the Buddhist commitment to developing practical solutions informed by metaphysical views.

The Four Noble Truths
Suffering is a Condition of Life.
Suffering has a Cause.
Suffering can be Alleviated.
The Eight-Fold Path shows us the way.

Garfield explains that the "suffering" appealed to within these truths arises from the "discordances between the nature of reality and our experiences of it."[9] Primary to this discordance (or mismatch) is the tension between the reality that we have no-self and our tendency to think and act as if we do: "We crave permanence where there is none, most prominently our own permanence, and the permanence of that which gives us pleasure. We regard ourselves and others as existing intrinsically when in fact they have only a dependent, conventional existence."[10] The upshot is that we suffer.

The analysis of suffering provides us with a clear insight into its causes, which are a "primal confusion" about the nature of reality, in conjunction with the psychological structures of our minds and the cycles of attraction and aversion they give rise to. The human susceptibility to desire begets a cycle of craving that stands in tension with metaphysical ("ultimate") reality. We crave things for ourselves, prioritize our desires and aversions, yet this cycle makes us ever so liable to experience suffering. It makes us think and act as if we are discrete, independent beings, thereby exacerbating the basic mismatch between ultimate reality and our experience of it ("conventional" reality).

Because the causes of suffering lie within our psychological tendencies, we can alleviate suffering by changing those tendencies. Bommarito describes this goal as one of "realigning our way of relating to the world" through "philosophy and practice."[11] Philosophy helps us understand ultimate reality, and practice allows us to "change our mental habits and ways of seeing the world."[12] The most important mental habit to break? Our tendency to desire in a way that attaches us to phenomena. Eliminating primal confusion breaks this tendency.[13]

Buddhism attributes an essential role to secure possession and awareness of accurate metaphysical views, which provides us with the tools we need to avoid suffering, as well as to safeguard ourselves from the temptation of egoism. Belief in an enduring self drives us to value it,

and to prioritize it in our interactions. Shedding this belief allows us to see the importance of impartiality in our interactions with others and motivates us to adopt attitudes of care and kindness towards all.

Within this framework, the formation of any attachments begets a partiality that will lead us to prioritize ourselves and those closest to us, furthering and ensuring our condition of suffering. Awareness and prioritization of metaphysical knowledge allows one to break this cycle, and the Eight-Fold Path shows us how to embrace this knowledge and develop the habits of mind that bring into concordance our conventional reality with the ultimate reality of the world.[14] The Eight-Fold Path encourages the development of an ethical outlook that is informed by awareness of ultimate reality and the nature of human suffering, and that reflects a non-egoistic, impartial concern for the suffering of all.[15]

Buddhism thus responds to the lack of a metaphysical self by advocating awareness of it, and by stressing the importance of cultivating habits of mind that bring one's experiences of the world closer to ultimate reality. Hume's skepticism about the power of reason, and embracement of the passions as authoritative, prevents him from making this kind of response in the wake of his failure to establish personal identity. Instead, Hume takes a novel and surprising response to the challenges of having to live, engage, and exist, in a world where one lacks metaphysical durability. He argues pride produces the idea of the self.

3. Pride produces A Practical Conception of the Self

Call a practical conception of the self the way in which we think of ourselves in our ordinary lives, or in "common life," as Hume might say. To get around in the world, we've got to form some way of thinking about ourselves. To live in this world, we need to make choices. To make choices, we need preferences. We need to think, somehow, of our selves. To live in this world, we also need to refer to one another, to hold each other responsible, and to be able to form expectations of ourselves and others. Regardless of our metaphysical commitments, we need to develop practical identities to function within the social environments in which we exist.

For better or worse, we *need* to form practical conceptions of ourselves. The practical identities we form intimately relate to and inform our agency. Agents plan, deliberate, and choose to act on the basis of these plans and deliberations. To be agents, we need to invoke a picture of the self that serves as the basis for our deliberations. We need to reflect on a practical conception of our self. Without a practical self underwriting our deliberations, it is difficult to see how our actions aren't just random behaviors, the product of instincts and desires that generate behavior

without antecedent reflection and/or endorsement. The practical self thus both underwrites our sense of agency and shapes our agency, for how we act depends on how we think of our self.

Forming a practical conception of the self is inevitable and indispensable to common life. Its inevitability explains, partly, why Hume moves away from his skeptical conclusions regarding the metaphysical self and talks so easily of the self in his moral psychology and moral philosophy. While inevitable, though, the practical sense of self must arise within some context of durability or permanence.

Buddhism acknowledges the indispensability of practical identities and believes we can develop a conventional sense of self grounded in our metaphysical understanding of the causal relations that hold between sentient beings.[16] Understanding that our practical identities derive from our dependent origination, rather than from a discrete sense of self, helps us to avoid the (ungrounded) egocentric tendencies that lead us to think we exist independently of others and matter more.

Hume doesn't think such durability can be discovered on the metaphysical level, but he does believe a sense of durability develops through the relations we form in common life, and that these relations provide us with a platform to think of themselves. While lacking metaphysical durability, these relations provide a sense of durability that supports practical identities.

Both views thus acknowledge the inevitably and indispensability of the practical sense of self and draw on our relations to others to ground it, yet their respective understandings of how the relations ground the practical self differ. Buddhism invokes metaphysical beliefs regarding our dependent origination to ground a conventional self that exists in concordance with ultimate reality, therein enabling us to avoid the mismatch that drives suffering. This grounding isn't possible for Hume. What Hume does instead is appeal to the relations we develop in common life, which, he argues, serve as the vehicle through which we develop a durable sense of the qualities and characteristics that define ourselves and that we go on to invoke in our actions and decisions.

Hume maintains that to develop these practical identities, we need to feel and embrace our psychological interdependence and the psychological connections we have to others. These notions drive Hume's core analysis of human nature and he explains them through appeal to sympathy.

Sympathy lies at the basis of this interdependence. Sympathy—by which Hume means a psychological mechanism that communicates the sentiments of others—makes us psychologically vulnerable to and so

dependent upon our relations to others. According to Hume, this vulnerability drives and shapes the development of our practical conception of the self. We need to think of ourselves, but our psychological dependence is such that the way we do this is through sympathy.

With this foundation serving as the background, Hume argues that pride produces the idea of the self.[17] His basic idea is this: certain things to which we are related make us feel good. We develop *pride* in these things, however, only when others around us affirm the relation and the pleasure we take in them. A professor feels pride in her teaching only when others affirm, or "second," the pleasure she takes in it. If she is a bad teacher, she'll not be able to develop pride, even if she thinks otherwise, because others will not affirm the pleasure she takes in it. But if she's a good teacher, others will share in her pleasure and she'll develop pride in her teaching abilities. And because pride always makes the subject think of her self, she'll start to think of herself as a good teacher. Through developing pride, she develops a practical identity—in this instance, an identity of being a good teacher.

This is how pride produces an idea of the self. And according to Hume, this is pride's primary feature. Pride, he writes, is "a certain disposition fitted to produce a peculiar impression or emotion, which we call *pride*: To this emotion she has assigned a certain idea, *viz.* that of *self*, which it never fails to produce" (T. 2.1.5.6). He doesn't say much about the content of this new idea of the self, noting only that pride "makes us think of our own qualities and circumstances" (T. 2.1.5.6).

What seems to happen is that pride provides a mechanism for identifying the qualities and characteristics that go on to be most important to the subject in her deliberative process. She thinks of herself as having durable qualities and characteristics, which she can draw on to individuate herself and to engage in common life. Plausibly, the qualities and circumstances related to the idea of a subject's practical self comprise her character, which Hume describes as consisting in durable qualities that we connect with the subject, such that "we can never think of him without reflecting on these qualities" (T 2.2.3.4).[18] This reading coheres as well with the limitations Hume places on the types of qualities that can cause pride: among others, causes of pride must be related to a subject for a durable and constant period of time (T. 2.1.6.4). It would, Hume argues, be "ridiculous to infer an excellency in ourselves from an object, which is of so much shorter duration, and attends us during so small a part of our existence" (T. 2.1.6.4).[19]

If pride functions to identify those qualities that are constitutive of one's character and to deliver durability to one's possession of them, then what must happen in the production of the idea of the practical self is

that the subject forms an idea of herself as having a practical identity, that is, *as being the bearer of qualities that she prides herself in*. This practical conception of the self is a durable one, even in the absence of a metaphysical self. Its durability derives both from the relation that holds between the subject and the qualities in question *and* the approval of others, for Hume insists the seconding of others is essential to the development of pride. The typical causes of pride "have little influence when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others" (T. 2.1.11.1). The "seconding" of others strengthens the perceived relation such that they become part of the subject's practical identity.

Given the nature of this seconding process, it follows that the qualities and characteristics that others approve of, will become the qualities and characteristic a subject takes pride in. As these qualities and characteristics inform the subject's practical conception of the self, the Humean practical self is a deeply social self.[20] For recognize what happens during this seconding process: Consideration of our relation to certain things and people leads us to feel pleasure. When those around us second that pleasure, this makes us feel more pleasure, in the form of pride. Pride so develops on the basis of the pleasant feelings we derive from our relations, which are seconded by others.

Thus, while both Hume and Buddhist thought identify relations as providing the sense of durability requisite to developing a practical self, Hume believes the durability derives from a process driven by pleasant emotions that are affirmed and strengthened through a subject's sympathetic interactions with other people. Pulling out of the Humean terminology for a moment, it is important to recognize the pleasant emotions arising from the relations we develop in common life present as forms of *attachment*. We aren't just related to other things and people; we are related to some things and people in ways that feel good. When others sympathize with the pleasure these relations bring, pride develops, along with our practical conception of the self. Were we to try to consider our relations to other things and people from a disinterested perspective, devoid of emotion, we would not feel pride, nor, if Hume is correct, would we come to form an idea of our self that can operate in a practical context and underwrite our agency.

Hume's practical conception of the self thus develops through a subject's *attachment* to her relations. This delivers Hume's understanding of human interdependency an emotional robustness absent from the Buddhist analysis of interdependency, which understands interconnectedness in terms of causally connected relations and takes interconnectedness to entail an ideal of detached awareness of the conventional nature of one's self and of all phenomena. This difference

explains the deeply rooted impartiality found within Buddhist ethics, which is largely absent from Hume.

While developing positive attitudes such as compassion are fundamental to Buddhist ethics, it is essential that these attitudes both extend impartially and apply impartially. Impartiality requires that we extend kindness, compassion, and generosity, to all sentient creatures. For the Buddhist, impartiality also requires that we apply these positive attitudes without attaching to those to whom we extend them. To put it another way, "impartiality" describes both the objects of our attitudes (that is, all sentient creatures) and the ways in which we perceive those objects. We need to treat others with kindness, compassion, and generosity, but we need to do so from an impartial perspective, void of emotional attachment to the objects of our actions.

Garfield's analysis of the role of perception in Buddhist ethics illustrates well the nature of this impartiality. He sharply differentiates Buddhist ethics from Western understandings of ethics. He argues that the concepts central to Western ethics—action, duty, virtue—flow from and contribute to an egocentric way of seeing the world, which is the very perspective Buddhist ethics aims to help us eliminate. Rather than focus on these concepts, Buddhism advocates developing an ethical perspective that reorients how we see and feel towards others. Garfield describes this in terms of seeing "a de-centered world in which one's own perspective is but one among many and one's own experiences but some among many."[21] Within this outlook a subject sees other people as sentient creatures who suffer and sees her actions as arising from "a dependently originated, conditioned continuum of causally interdependent psychophysical processes."[22]

While this perspective is affectively laden, it calls for a re-orientation of one's attitudes towards pleasure and pain. Pleasure and pain signal attractions and aversions, cravings and desires, all of which stem from seeing things from the perspective of a discrete self and so perpetuate egocentricity. The perspective Buddhism advocates calls for subjects to re-orient their affective perspective so that they see and respond quickly to suffering. Buddhism encourages us to strive towards feeling positive emotions without self-grasping. This means, for example, recognizing that "happiness and accomplishments are good per se, not because they are good for me," and so learning to take "immediate joy" in the happiness and accomplishments of others, which we see as our own, for we are all connected.[23]

The nuances of the Buddhist ethical perspective are complex, but the impartiality driving them is clear. Metaphysical awareness is awareness of our inter-connectedness and lack of self, and of the condition

of suffering ever-present for sentient creatures. Ethical awareness is awareness of these same things, embedded in cognitive and affective frameworks that lead subjects to see and feel impartially.

The Humean moral system places much less—if any—emphasis on impartiality, so construed. Indeed, the impartial perspective is one that would inhibit the development of pride as pride develops through feelings of pleasure dismissed by the impartial perspective. Hume does worry about partiality in the context of moral judgements. He recognizes that the operations of sympathy are "partial" insofar as we have a greater tendency to sympathize with those closest to us, which is problematic, especially when it comes to justice,[24] and maintains that developing extensive sympathy solves the problem of partiality.[25] But notice the sense of "partiality" that concerns Hume is different than the sense of partiality that concerns Buddhism.

Whereas Buddhism takes partiality to derive from misplaced attachment to oneself or others, Hume takes partiality to derive from the influence those who are in close proximity have on our sympathetic responses. Whereas Buddhism takes partiality to be problematic because it reinforces the egocentric perspective that makes one liable to suffering, Hume sees partiality as problematic because it creates social problems that interfere with common life. Whereas Buddhism responds to the problems of partiality by emphasizing the importance of developing an impartial perspective consistent with ultimate reality, Hume responds to the problems of partiality by advocating for the extension of sympathy.

Hume's discussion of this extension brings these differences to light. He argues that we ought to extend our sympathy to those beyond the narrow circle of those closest to us, and that we can do so by ensuring our sympathetic responses reflect a "common point of view" (T 3.3.1.30). While there is debate over whether the common (or general) point of view ought to be understood as impartial or not, this is the perspective that feeds a subject's moral judgments and not directly her interactions. We solve the social problems created by partial sympathy by correcting our sympathy so that when we issue moral approval or disapproval, we do so in a way that is consistent with others. But when we interact with others, we sympathize with the other's passions, whether we want to or not: so "close and intimate is the correspondence of human souls, that no sooner any person approaches me, than he diffuses on me all his opinions" (T 3.3.2.2). Interactions between human beings remain partial, in the sense that they are governed by sympathetic connections and must be so governed.

These sympathetic connections are the very ones that go on to shape and make possible a subject's practical sense of self, for it is pride that

produces the idea of the self, and pride develops through sympathetic interactions. Within the Humean framework, to deny them and try to maintain impartiality in interactions, is neither possible, nor advisable. It's not possible because human beings are driven by passions. Reason's grip on any person is short-lived. Passions rule our actions and our minds. This is why we believe in our practical identities, and why these identities infiltrate our actions. And it's not advisable to deny our sympathetic interactions, for without these partial interactions infused by sympathy, we would suffer significantly. We would be stifled emotionally. We wouldn't feel pride and wouldn't develop a practical sense of self. This suggests that Hume would recommend that all of us attach to others.

4. Enjoyment through Attachment

The previous section reveals the indispensability of attachment to Hume's analysis of the practical self and its development, which offers grounds for thinking that Hume would advocate attachment. Yet it is important to acknowledge that attachment comes with risks, especially attachment to something that lacks metaphysical durability. The cautionary perspective of Buddhism has merit. If something is not permanent, then it will go away. If we've emotionally invested ourselves in it, then its absence will generate painful feelings of suffering. Is the possibility of this suffering worth it? Surely, if it were not, we could take measures to avoid sympathetic interactions with others and could try to interact with others impartially. We could resist those initial feelings of pleasure that beget pride when seconded by others. We could resist developing practical identities built through attachment.

Hume doesn't think any of this is advisable, though. His reason can't be solely that he doesn't think it is possible, for surely, 'tis not a contradiction to suppose that we could resist the lures of attachment.[26] He doesn't think we should resist our tendency to attach because we'd be miserable if we did. Our psychological interdependence runs that deep.

While sympathy plays an essential role in communicating the affirmations of others that are essential to the development of pride, this is just one instance of the sentimental exchanges sympathy makes possible. Because of sympathy, Hume writes, the "minds of men are mirrors to one another, not only because they reflect each other's emotions, but also because those rays of passions, sentiments, and opinions may be often reverberated" (T 2.2.6.21). In fact, human beings, he argues, develop their emotions fully only when they are so reverberated: "[w]hatever other passions we may be actuated by; pride, ambition, avarice, curiosity, revenge or lust; the soul or animating principle of them all is sympathy" (T 2.2.5.15).[27]

According to Hume, sympathy also makes it the case that we cannot isolate ourself from others; no one can deny or reject the psychological vulnerability sympathy creates. The sentiments of others enter our minds and affect our sentiments in ways that are often beyond our control.

> A good-natured man finds himself in an instant of the same humor with his company; and even the proudest and most surly take a tincture from their countrymen and acquaintance. A cheerful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind; as an angry or sorrowful one throws a sudden damp upon me. Hatred, resentment, esteem, love, courage, mirth and melancholy; all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper and disposition. (T 2.1.11.2)

While Hume maintains there are ways in which we can harness and regulate sympathy, sympathy functions to ensure that all of us are affected by, and in tune with, those around us—just as a smile from another gives us a bump, a scowl from another brings us down. In these ways, because of sympathy, what we *feel* depends upon what others *feel*. Our interactions with others impact our feelings on a brute level.

This psychological vulnerability is particularly clear in the case of pride, as has already been established.[28] But Hume extends this vulnerability and the interdependency it creates to the experience of *all* emotions. Because of sympathy and its easy communication of sentiments, even "men of the greatest judgment and understanding . . . find it very difficult to follow their own reason or inclination, in opposition to that of their friends and daily companions" (T 2.1.11.2). We depend upon the sympathetic feedback of others to realize our emotions.

In Hume's eyes, human psychological interdependence is such that the very emotions and sentiments we experience are the product of and depend on our sympathetically charged social interactions. He writes:

> We can form no wish, which has not a reference to society. A perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can suffer. Every pleasure languishes when enjoyed apart from company, and every pain becomes more cruel and intolerable. Whatever other passions we may be actuated by; pride, ambition, avarice, curiosity, revenge or lust; the soul or animating principle of them all is sympathy; nor would they have any force, were we to abstract entirely from the thoughts and sentiments of others. (T 2.2.5.15)

Without sympathetic interactions, our emotional lives would shrink, leaving us unable to feel pleasure, much less enjoyment. This, Hume argues, leads us to view social engagement as valuable in itself, which explains the "remarkable desire of company" (T 2.2.5.15) that drives us. We need and want to live on good terms with others, because living on

good terms with others is how we thrive: a "perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can suffer" (T 2.2.5.15) and the enjoyment of character, which comes from living on good terms with others, is "invaluable" (EPM 9.10).[29]

In attributing the greatest and most stable form of enjoyment to derive from being the kind of person who others approve of, Hume recommends attachment on the strongest possible terms. Attaching to others isn't just something we do, it's something we ought to do.

5. To Attach or not to Attach?

The differences between Hume and Buddhism over the role of attachment could not be clearer: that which Buddhism sees as a source of suffering, Hume sees as a source of durability and enjoyment. This drives Hume to focus on how we can best live within our social worlds and make the most of our relationships with others and the Buddhist to caution us to keep sight on the lack of reality attached to our conventional existence. Buddhism thus strives to protect us from our instincts to embrace sympathetic connections to others, and to become attached to the phenomena we find ourselves related to in common life.

Without challenging the metaphysical commitments driving Buddhism's practical recommendations, it is reasonable to note the challenge this advice implores us to take on (one which Hume was skeptical was even possible): *resisting our instincts to attach*. It is important to acknowledge what we give up by so doing; a point exacerbated by the fact that the Buddhist model is hard to emulate and requires years, even lifetime(s) of practice. At the same time, however, if its caution against attachment is correct, which also seems plausible, then Hume's recommendation to dive into social life seems mistaken and, perhaps, harmful. This begets the very real question: to attach or not to attach? This section argues that we should attach, for we ought to find enjoyment in our experiences, in the here and now, and the structures of our minds are such that we find enjoyment through sympathetically-charged interactions and developing attachments. Moreover, as will now be shown, Hume's theory has the resources to mitigate the psychological impact of impermanence.

Recall that the central concern within Buddhism is that forming attachments to others makes one liable to suffer. Each attachment a subject forms presents a distinct threat given the impermanent status of all things. Does Hume's analysis of attachment present this liability? While some degree of suffering may be unavoidable, elements of Hume's theory suggest the suffering we will encounter is less likely to present in the deep, almost existential, form the Buddhist envisions.

This is, first, because of the ways in which the practical self arises from *many* attachments. The Humean practical self, remember, arises in virtue of our primary interactions in common life and is informed by this network. This suggests particular attachments can come and go without threatening a subject's self-concept. The practical sense of self is fluid and can easily shift as needed. This doesn't mean that we won't experience painful feelings at the loss of an attachment, but it does suggest that the painful feelings will be transitory and won't serve to uproot completely and devastatingly how we think of ourselves.

This is, second, because, given human psychological interdependence, developing virtue becomes a source of pleasure, insofar as it is our surest route to securing the approval of others. Because how we think of ourselves essentially depends on how others think of us, we will be led to act in ways that are pleasing and useful to ourselves and to others. This, for Hume, is just what it means to be virtuous. His vision is that our psychological interdependency pushes us to strive to live on good terms with others, and to commit ourselves to virtue. Moreover, when we do this, we will experience the invaluable enjoyment of character.[30]

If Hume is right, we won't suffer from forming attachments to others; in fact, we will (and can) thrive in common life only when we do so. The ways in which we thrive just are the ways that support social living and the sympathetically-infused social interactions which come to define our practical identities While it is inevitable that the attachments we form (and depend upon) will evolve, and that some will fade away, their loss presents small occasions for painful feelings, brief pauses that will soon be filled with the sympathetic pleasures of others still around. Again, what drives us is not any one specific attachment, nor even set of attachments, but a basic desire to live on good terms with others. This basic desire is fulfilled by virtue and not threatened by the impermanence of any one thing.

Despite its clear dependence on social influences, the picture Hume paints of the shape practical identities take is, overwhelmingly, a positive one. He expects that social interactions will be such that we will learn to prioritize the importance of virtuous conduct over material possessions. He paints a picture of human beings as drawn to virtue and speculates we will experience and value the enjoyment of character, which arises when our consistent virtuous conduct is affirmed by others. This positive feedback, he believes, is the natural result we derive from the feedback of others, which will be positive in light of our own virtue.

If things work out as Hume envisions, we attach to and flourish on the feedback of those who themselves are apt to approve of virtuous conduct. This is an important step in how we come to define themselves

and suggests that we will be less liable to suffer in virtue of our attachments. The attachments we make inform who we are and how we think of ourselves, but the way they do so prompts us to focus on virtuous conduct and to prioritize good conduct over and above all things. We won't be devastated by the impermanence of any one thing, for what we value is positive interactions more generally.

But what if Hume is wrong about the trajectory this process takes? It is possible to accept Hume's analysis of the social and psychological process that leads us to develop a practical conception of ourselves, while questioning whether this process will take the course Hume envisions. Much, it seems, depends upon who surrounds us and what they approve of. Hume's ideal works when those around us approve of virtue and commit to sustaining positive social interactions. When so surrounded, our practical self will develop in positive ways that offer some immunity against the suffering its impermanence makes liable. But what if those around us care more about material possessions than about virtue? What if we attach to those more impressed by beautiful houses than virtue? On Hume's own account, beautiful houses and other material possessions are also possible causes of pride. If the social feedback a person receives regarding his possessions leads him to define himself in terms of his possessions, then he becomes more vulnerable to their impermanent status and liable to experience the kind of suffering Buddhism warns about.

Hume's ideal thus follows only when we are related to and build attachments to *people who will approve of our virtuous qualities.* If we relate to and build attachments to *people who value material possessions*, we'll still develop practical identities, but our identities will be defined by our possessions, built through preferences for more possessions. In other words, we may attach ourselves in precisely the ways that Buddhism cautions against.

Hume seems aware of this possibility, at least by the end of the second *Enquiry* where he addresses the sensible knave (EPM 9.25). The knave values his toys and gewgaws over his character, and he makes no mistake in his reasoning. He simply evolved the wrong way and learned to care about the wrong things. But it seems this could happen to anyone. If how one conceives of oneself depends upon the feedback one receives from others, then knaves beget knaves and virtuous people beget virtuous people. Hume gambles on more people responding to virtue than to toys and gewgaws, but it's a gamble.

Yet, even recognizing the gamble implicit in Hume's analysis, it seems a gamble worth taking. If the choice is between no attachments and attachments, there's reason to attach, even if doing so runs the risk

of attaching to the wrong people or things. This is because, as Hume stresses all along, we are psychologically vulnerable to those around us. We have sympathy which connects us to others. We have emotions that we struggle to realize fully in the absence of others. We find pleasure and enjoyment through social interactions. All these factors point towards attaching to others. To deny them seems a disservice to oneself. It prevents one from enjoying life, *this* life, which occurs within a social context.

Conclusion

This paper explored how people develop a practical conception of the self in the absence of a metaphysical self. It has shown the pivotal role of attachments to the formation of the practical self within the Humean framework. Hume's approach, while a gamble, makes practical sense of our everyday lives, and the ways in which we are psychologically vulnerable to others. There are joys to attachment. As long as we are lucky enough to surround ourselves with those who push in positive directions rather than material ones, we benefit by doing so.

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NOTES

1. Hume does revisit the question of personal identity in the Appendix to the *Treatise*, written two years after the *Treatise's* initial publication. Here, he points to the "contradictions, and absurdities, which seem to attend every explication, that human reason can give of the material world," and points to his discussion of personal identity as being engaged in such a "labyrinth." While there is debate over how to understand his Appendix remarks in conjunction with his discussion of personal identity in Book 1 of the *Treatise,* that Hume feels the need to revisit critically the topic upon completing the entire *Treatise* further evidences the confined nature of his Book 1 discussion of personal identity.

2. References to the *Treatise* refer to Hume, D. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000, marked as T with references to book, part, section, and paragraph numbers. References to the Second *Enquiry* refer to Hume, D. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles*

of Morals. Edited by T Beauchamp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, marked as EPM with references to section and paragraph numbers.

3. Ainslie (2001) suggests that Hume's audience here are philosophers. Book 1, he argues, explains a belief in personal identity that arises in philosophical projects but not ordinary life: "Hume's treatment of personal identity addresses a problem that arises only for philosophers who are investigating their minds reflectively" (p. 565).

4. Hume himself sees his writings as depending upon our ability to overcome skepticism: with respect to skepticism about the external world, he takes it for granted that whatever the reader's current state and position, "an hour hence, he will be persuaded there is both an external and internal world" and that "this supposition" governs his subsequent treatment of ancient and modern systems (T 1.4.2.57).

5. I discuss the role of these two ideas of the self within the production of pride in Besser-Jones (2010).

6. Garfield (2018) disagrees. He asserts that "Hume agrees [with Buddhism] that metaphysics grounds ethics" (p. 134). As evidence, he refers to Hume's discussion of justice. Here Hume acknowledges the limits of natural sympathy and need for its correction via moral education and the imagination. While Garfield does not detail exactly where he sees Hume's metaphysics grounding his ethics, his discussion suggests that Hume's metaphysics factors into this correction of sympathy. I disagree and return to this topic at the end of Section 3.

7. For examples, see Gopnik (2009); Giles (1993).

8. Garfield (2014) argues that these causal relations are best understood in terms of regularities and points to the Nãrgãrjuna tradition which explicitly denies that there are necessary causal relationships (p. 25–26). Garfield suggests that we posit regularities, through language and conventions. Nonetheless, "the formula of dependent origination enshrines the regularities we posit as the sole structures of reality" (p. 26)

9. Welchman (2015, 33).

10. Welchman.

11. Bommarito (2020, 7).

12. Bommarito.

13. Garfield (2014, 89).

14. The Eight-Fold Path, referenced within the fourth noble truth, puts forward right understanding, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration as the path leading the way to enlightenment.

15. As Garfield notes, Buddhism doesn't present a set of normative prescriptions. Rather, it comprises: "a set of areas of concern, domains of life on which to reflect, respects in which one can improve one's own life (as well as those of others), and, in sum, a way of moving cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively

from a state in which one is bound by and causative of suffering to one in which one is immune from suffering and in which one's thought, speech, and action tend to alleviate it" (Garfield 2014, 283).

16. There exists significant variation between the schools of Buddhism regarding the precise nature of the conventional self and the degree to which it is informed by the theory of dependent-arising.

17. See Besser-Jones (2010) for more technical discussion of Hume's theory of pride.

18. See also T. 3.3.1.4: actions are signs of character insofar as they depend upon "durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character."

19. On this point, see Ainslie, who argues that pride (and the other indirect passions) functions to solidify the relation between any individual and her qualities: "it is by feeling an indirect passion toward someone that we think of her as more than accidently related to some quality, such as her country, her riches, her family, or even, her character traits" (1999, 471).

20. At one point, Hume does seem to question whether the seconding of others, which previously he has deemed essential (T 2.1.11.1), is really necessary. In his discussion of greatness of mind, Hume writes: "A man of sense and merit is pleased with himself, independent of all foreign considerations: But a fool must always find some person, that is more foolish, in order to keep himself in good humour with his own parts and understanding" (T 3.3.2.7). This passage comes in the context of Hume's discussion of "over-weaning conceit" in which he discusses the circumstances under which pride activates comparison and so generates hatred from others, rather than activating sympathy and so generating pleasure from others. Hume's point seems to be that those with an ill-founded pride, who take themselves to be "posses'd of all the good qualities" but is in fact of "inferior merit" (T 3.3.2.6), need to make comparisons with others in order to support their vanity (T 3.3.2.7), whereas those who have a well-grounded pride, such as the man of sense and merit, do not have any need for such comparisons. They do not need such "foreign considerations" because they already feel pleasure from their pride-worthy qualities, a pleasure that is *already* accompanied by the approval of others.

21. Garfield (2014), 291.

22. Garfield, 286.

23. Garfield, (2009)..

24. This, especially in combination with our limited generosity (T 3.3.1.23), creates a social conflict Hume takes the conventions of justice to resolve. As I've mentioned, I think it is this move that drives Garfield's assertion that metaphysics drives Hume's moral philosophy. Hume believes we correct natural sympathy through recognizing its misdirection. According to Garfield (Garfield 2018, 134), natural sympathy leads us to treat ourselves and those closest to us as if we possess distinct and enduring metaphysically selves and through the imagination we correct for this and develop impartiality grounded in aware-

ness that we lack such metaphysical selves. Garfield's interpretation places heavy weight in the role of the imagination in this process. It is, he argues, the "imaginative reconception of others," parallel to that we find in the Madhyamaka tradition, that allows us to extend our sympathy. While I agree that the imagination is involved in extending sympathy, I don't find in Hume evidence that this imaginative work invokes his metaphysical views, and worry that Garfield's analysis stands in tension with Hume's discussion of the process in T 3.3.1, which appeals to the practical difference that arises when we operate from "peculiar point of views" as the explanation for why we "fix on some steady and general point of view" (T 3.3.1.15), and notes the tendency of the imagination to be "more affected by what is particular, than by what is general" (T 3.3.1.13).

25. Developing extensive sympathy also leads us to morally approve of the rules of justice and come to see justice as a virtue.

26. I would note, though, that contemporary empirical research tends to support Hume's view on the relation between passion and reason, suggesting that we may not be able do these things. For example, see Haidt (2001).

27. He says much less about how opposing reactions diminish our experience of the passions. He notes that in cases of conflict between a subject's passion and another's, the principle of comparison can reverse the expected direction of sympathy but does not expound on its greater impact on our self-conception.

28. While sympathy infuses all our passions with interdependence, pride stands out as being one of the passions Hume takes to be most dependent upon and affected by sympathy. Pride, Hume writes, has both a primary cause, which is the object we take pride in, and a secondary cause, which is the opinions of others. Both causes are essential to the production of pride: "Our reputation, our character, our name are considerations of vast weight and importance; and even the other causes of pride; virtue; beauty and riches; have little influence, when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others" (T 2.1.11.1).

29. In earlier work, I argue that the desire to live on good terms with others generates a particular kind of pride-in-virtue, the desire for which generates a powerful motive to virtue (Besser-Jones 2010).

30. T 3.1.2.2; T 3.3.5.5; EPM 9.18; EPM 9.25.

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