Hume's General Point of View:
A Two-Stage Approach

Nir Ben-Moshe (nir@illinois.edu)

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

<u>Abstract</u>: I offer a novel *two-stage* reconstruction of Hume's general-point-of-view account, modeled in part on his qualified-judges account in 'Of the Standard of Taste.' In particular, I argue that the general point of view needs to be jointly constructed by spectators who have sympathized with (at least some of) the agents in (at least some of) the actor's circles of influence. The upshot of the account is two-fold. First, Hume's later thought developed in such a way that it can rectify the problems inherent in his *Treatise* account of the general point of view. Second, the proposed account provides the grounds for an adequate and well-motivated modest ideal observer theory of the standard of virtue.

1. Introduction

For those who embrace a naturalistic picture of the world and are skeptical about the prospects of meta-ethical realism, an answer to the question of what accounts for the correctness of moral judgment has proven to be elusive. Assuming one wishes to avoid subjectivism and relativism, one could opt for the position that it is the responses of agents *who are under suitable conditions* that constitute what is morally right. Of course, the conditions in question cannot be defined in terms of these agents getting the right results, on pain of circularity. However, these conditions are required to guarantee that the agents' responses are in fact reliable and one strategy is to *idealize* them via the postulation of an ideal observer whose reactions determine whether an ethical judgment is true or false. How ideal should the observer be in order to perform this task? Roderick Firth (1952, 333) famously argued that the observer should be, amongst other things, omnipercipient and omniscient with respect to the non-ethical facts, and that 'any plausible description of an ideal observer will be a partial description of God.' The problem with Firth's suggestion is that it over-idealizes the observer and detaches him from our human sensibilities. It thus becomes unclear what epistemic access we have to the reactions of such an observer, or why his decisions should bind us or motivate us. However, the roots of ideal observer theory were different: sentimentalists in the 18th century, especially David Hume and Adam Smith, used the idea of spectators' responses under suitable conditions to articulate a standard of correctness for moral judgments which, while transcending individual points of view, does not transcend the point of view of human beings. In particular, being under the relevant conditions makes the objects of spectators' sentiments of approval and disapproval—which arise from sympathy with the actor or those affected by his actions—*merit* that approval or disapproval. Nevertheless, Hume's general-point-of-view account in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (hereafter '*Treatise*')—

which makes use of sympathy with the agents with whom the actor regularly interacts—has been repeatedly criticized in the literature, raising the worry that it cannot provide the grounds for an adequate account of moral judgment, or, per Hume, 'the standard of virtue.'

My aim in this paper is to offer a novel *two-stage* reconstruction of Hume's general-point-of-view account, modeled in part on his qualified-judges account in 'Of the Standard of Taste' (hereafter 'Standard of Taste'). In particular, I will argue that the general point of view needs to be jointly constructed by spectators who have sympathized with (at least some of) the agents in (at least some of) the actor's circles of influence. In other words, sympathy with agents in the actor's various circles, which is the first stage in the process, provides a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for attaining the standard of virtue. The full specification of the conditions under which judgments of virtue ought to be made includes an *idealization*—in the form of full and unbiased knowledge of the effects of the actor's character traits on the interests and pleasures of the agents in all of her circles of influence—which spectators try to approximate, in the second stage of the process, through conversation and shared reasoning. My proposed account has both a scholarly and a contemporary upshot. First, while Hume himself did not argue for the two-stage approach in the *Treatise*, I demonstrate that his later thought developed in such a way that it can rectify the problems inherent in his *Treatise* account. Second, this reconstruction of the general point of view offers an adequate modest ideal observer theory of the standard of virtue in the following sense: the account specifies the hypothetical conditions that guarantee the reliability of an agent's (or agents') responses in constituting the normative standard in question, and, if an actual agent or an actual community of agents do not sufficiently approximate those conditions, their responses are not reliable as setting this standard. However, in the account that I will provide, the hypothetical conditions can themselves be constructed from

the interactions of actual agents. In other words, the standard of virtue is constituted under

hypothetical conditions that, while actual agents have yet to attain them, can be constructed from

those agents' shared experiences. The proposed account can also explain why the idealization in

question is well-motivated and not objectionably ad-hoc.

I proceed as follows. I first discuss Hume's general-point-of-view account, as it figures in

the *Treatise,* and the standard objections to it (section 2). I also discuss Hume's constructivist

reasoning in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (hereafter '*Enquiry*'), since it

suggests important ideas, which, I argue, should be incorporated into the second stage of my

proposed account (section 3). I then offer a two-stage interpretation of Hume's qualified-judges

account in the 'Standard of Taste,' which serves as a partial model for my reconstruction of the

general point of view (section 4). Finally, I present a two-stage account of the general point of

view and discuss its implications for ideal observer theory (section 5).[1]

2. The *Treatise* Account: The General Point of View

The Hume of the *Treatise* believed that sympathy is the source of our moral sentiments in the

following way:[2] a sentiment of approval arises from a feeling of pleasure that is felt when we

sympathize with the pleasure felt by the actor and/or those with whom she interacts insofar as a

certain character trait of the actor is useful and/or agreeable to the actor herself and/or those with

whom she interacts (and vice versa for a sentiment of disapproval) (T 3.3.1.15, SBN 580;

T.3.3.1.28-30, SBN 590-591; T 3.3.5.1, SBN 614).[3] To be virtuous, in turn, is 'nothing but to *feel*

a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of character […] which makes us praise

or condemn' (T 3.1.2.3-4, SBN 471-472).[4] While at first glance this might appear to be a

subjectivist account of moral judgment, according to which the responses of *any* agent constitute

what is morally right, this is not the end of Hume's account.[5] In particular, Hume develops his account of sympathy and approbation into an account of moral judgment by noting that one could raise two objections to the idea that moral sentiments, and hence moral judgments, arise from sympathy.[6] First, while sympathy varies as a function of the *proximity* between spectator and actor, approbation and disapprobation, when figuring in moral judgment, are thought to be independent of the effects of proximity: we sympathize more readily with acquaintances than with strangers, but give the same approbation to the same qualities when these are manifested by either acquaintances or strangers. Thus, if 'sympathy varies without a variation in our esteem,' then 'our esteem […] proceeds not from sympathy' (T 3.3.1.14, SBN 581). Second, we esteem 'virtue in rags': we tend to approve of virtuous character even when its beneficial results are *not* realized, as a result of misfortunes outside of the person's control. In contrast, we tend to sympathize only with the *actual* effects of a person's character. Therefore, if we made decisions regarding virtue based only on the input we have from sympathy, we would not be able to identify virtuous traits that are present in the actor but not realized (T 3.3.1.19, SBN 584).

In his reply to both objections, Hume introduces the 'general point of view.' Thus, in answer to the first objection, the variability-of-sympathy objection, Hume suggests that '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': this is a method for 'correcting our sentiments,' via which we attain a conception of the character of the person in question in abstraction both from the proximity of that person to us and from our own interests (T 3.3.1.15-17, SBN 581-583; see also T 3.3.3.2, SBN 602-603). In answer to the second objection, the virtue-in-rags objection, Hume argues that '*general rules* create a species of probability, which sometimes influences the judgment, and always the imagination' (T 3.3.1.20, SBN 585). More specifically, when we adopt

the general point of view, our imagination passes from the cause (character) to the effect (action) even if the effect is not realized. We do so by relying on general rules, which specify the *regular* effects of the character traits in question, rather than on the *actual* effects that happened to be realized. The general point of view is thus supposed to minimize irrelevant influences on our responses, such as proximity to the actor and our own personal interests as well as certain interruptions to the effects of the actor's virtuous character. By doing so, this point of view leads to the attainment of '*extensive sympathy*,' namely, the type of unbiased sympathy 'on which our sentiments of virtue depend' (T 3.3.1.23, SBN 586). But what does the adoption of the general point of view entail? Hume argues that in taking up the general point of view, we judge the actor's character traits by confining ourselves to and sympathizing with the people with whom she regularly interacts; that is, 'those who have an intercourse with any person,' 'those, who have any commerce with the person we consider,' '[the] persons, who have a connexion with him,' 'that narrow circle, in which any person moves' (T 3.3.1.17, SBN 582; T 3.3.1.18, SBN 583; T 3.3.1.30, SBN 591; T 3.3.3.2, SBN 602, respectively). When we sympathize with the agents with whom the actor regularly interacts (an actor's 'circle of influence,' as I shall call it), we can judge whether or not the actor's character traits are virtuous by assessing whether or not those traits enhance the interests and/or pleasures of those agents with whom she interacts (T 3.3.1.30, SBN 591; T 3.3.3.2, SBN 602-603).

Hume's conclusion is that 'tho' such interests and pleasures touch us more faintly than our own, yet being more constant and universal, they counter-ballance the latter even in practice, and are alone admitted in speculation as the standard of virtue and morality. They alone produce that particular feeling or sentiment, on which moral distinctions depend' (T 3.3.1.30, SBN 591). Therefore, spectators who adopt the general point of view set the standard of virtue by focusing

on the effects of the actor's character on the interests and pleasures of the agents with whom she regularly interacts, rather than by focusing on their own interests and pleasures.[7] Thus, rather than being a subjectivist account of moral judgment, Hume's *Treatise* account aspires to provide a very modest ideal observer theory: the responses of spectators who are under suitable conditions—in the form of adopting the general point of view by sympathizing with the agents with whom the actor regularly interacts—constitute the standard of virtue.[8] These conditions have an epistemic dimension and a psychological one. The epistemic dimension is the attainment of the non-normative facts required to make the normative judgement in question, namely, knowledge of the effects of the actor's character traits on the interests and/or pleasures of the people with whom she regularly interacts. The psychological dimension is the attainment of an impartial standpoint, for 'reason requires such an impartial conduct' (T 3.3.1.18, SBN 583). In particular, sympathy with the agents in question has an 'authority over our reason' and a 'command [over] our judgment and opinion,' as it constitutes an emotional reaction that is less 'lively' than reactions pertaining to our own interests and is thus 'conformable to our calm and general principles' (T.3.3.1.18, SBN 583-584). Such 'calm judgments concerning the characters of men' minimize the variations inherent in unrestrained sympathy (T 3.3.3.2, SBN 603).

However, it becomes apparent that the account of the general point of view, as presented thus far, fails on both the epistemic and psychological dimensions. Indeed, the secondary literature on Hume is replete with descriptions of the problems inherent to this account. First, there is no guarantee that the actor's circle of influence will allow the spectator to attain the relevant non-normative facts. This might be the case because of the actor himself: the actor might reveal different character traits to different people, so that certain character traits are not revealed to the people in a given circle of influence (Cohon 1997, 844; Baier 1991, 212-213).

This might also be the case because of the people who constitute a circle of influence: the actor's character traits can have different effects on different members of the circle (Cohon 1997, 844), and/or the members of the circle can be biased individuals (Taylor 2002, 53). Second, there is no guarantee that sympathizing with the agents in the circle in question will provide the spectator with the sought-after impartiality. In particular, basing our moral evaluation on sympathy with agents with whom the actor interacts does not eliminate the variability of sympathy, since our sympathetic reactions will vary as a function of our distance from those agents (as it varies when we sympathize with the actor directly) (Darwall 1994, fn. 37). Thus, different spectators will make different judgments about the same case, given their relative knowledge of the effects of the actor's character traits on different agents as well as their relative distance from these agents. Hume, for his part, thought that adopting the general point of view—by sympathizing with the agents with whom the actor regularly interacts—will tend to bring about concurrence in moral sentiments, and hence in moral judgments, among spectators. This is so because the objects of moral assessment—namely, the effects of an actor's character traits on the interests and pleasures of the relevant agents—are supposed to appear the same to all spectators who adopt the general point of view:

> [E]very particular person's pleasure and interest being different, 'tis impossible men cou'd ever agree in their sentiments and judgments, unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all of them. Now, 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 examin'd; or that of persons, who have a connexion with him. [T.3.3.1.30, SBN 591][9]

Or, as Hume notes later, '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 any immediate connexion or intercourse with the person possess'd of it' (T.3.3.3.2, SBN

602-603). However, given the criticisms of both the epistemic and the psychological dimensions of the theory, there is no reason to assume that such concurrence in sentiments will be attained.

Here there seem to be two options, both of which have been discussed in the secondary literature. First, following Rachel Cohon (1997, 846-850), one could argue that in presenting the general point of view, Hume was not interested in providing an account of what it is for our moral judgments to be *justified*; rather, he was only trying to *explain* their observed uniformity. However, Hume certainly cared about the question of whether or not our moral judgments are in fact correct, mentioning a '*right* or a *wrong* taste in morals,' a 'rule of right,' and a 'just sentiment of morals' (T 3.2.8.8, SBN 547; EPM 9.5, SBN 272; ST 229). Indeed, even Hume's claim that he is seeking a stable standard of moral judgment that will not admit of the 'great variation' associated with judging others from the point of view of our own interests (T 3.3.1.18, SBN 583) can be understood as a claim about justification.[10] More generally, for the moral theorist, Cohon's suggestion is a substantial bullet to bite, for most moral theorists are interested in the question of whether our moral judgments are justified and not merely in the explanation of the convergence of the moral judgments that we happen to make. Second, one could try to supplement the general point of view account with normative dimensions. Some commentators have tried to help Hume in this regard in one of two ways: (a) by appealing to the fact that the spectator surveys the actor through the eyes of an *idealized* version of anyone's acquaintances;[11] (b) by appealing to *reflective endorsement*, that is, to the fact that the standard we use in making moral judgments—or our moral sense—can pass the test of our reflective scrutiny.[12] However, both these solutions are ones that Hume does not (fully) endorse, and they need substantial refinement to be of help. Regarding (a), Hume does not argue for this type of idealization. On the contrary, Hume recognized that the actor's circle of influence cannot be anyone's circle, for it

needs to be located in the context of the actor's own social surroundings, which reintroduces the variability-of-sympathy problem. Regarding (b), Hume hardly discusses this issue: while he does mention in the conclusion of the *Treatise* that the moral sense passes the reflexivity test (T 3.3.6.3, SBN 619), he makes very little of it. Moreover, spectators' reflective processes might be biased and thus reflection will not necessarily produce the type of agreement in sentiments that Hume sought. Indeed, given the potentially biased nature of reflection, one might wonder whether subjecting our moral standards and faculties to reflective scrutiny and finding that they survive reflection means that we have reason to endorse them. It is thus also not clear why reflection should have normative authority over our moral standards and faculties.[13]

3. The *Enquiry* Account: Humanity and Constructivism

It seems that the general-point-of-view account is hopelessly flawed. Even Hume concedes that there are limits to the corrections that the general point of view can make and that its application is not always successful (T.3.3.1.21, SBN 585; T.3.3.3.2, SBN 603). However, Hume did continue to develop his general (or 'common') point of view in the second *Enquiry*, where he argues that when one man calls another man '*vicious* or *odious* or *depraved*,' he 'expresses sentiments, in which, he expects all his audience are to concur with him' and must thus 'depart from his private and particular situation, and must choose a point of view, common to him with others' (EPM 9.6, SBN 272). So perhaps the *Enquiry* account will shed additional light on the workings of the general or common point of view. One possibility is that Hume's talk of 'humanity' in the *Enquiry*, which he explicitly associates with the common point of view, will be of help:

> If he [who uses the terms 'vicious' or 'odious' or 'depraved'] mean, therefore, to express that this man possesses qualities, whose tendency is pernicious to society, he has chosen this common point of view, and has touched the principle of humanity, in which every man, in some degree, concurs. While the human heart is compounded of the same elements as at present, it will never be wholly indifferent to public good, nor entirely unaffected with the tendency of characters and manners. And though this affection of humanity may not generally be esteemed so strong as vanity or ambition, yet, being common to all men, it can alone be the foundation of morals, or of any general system of blame or praise. […] [T]he humanity of one man is the humanity of every one, and the same object touches this passion in all human creatures. [EPM 9.6, SBN 272-273]

Some commentators have placed substantial emphasis on the role that humanity plays in Hume's account of the general or common point of view, arguing that 'once we take up the general point of view […] only our humanity comes into play, and that […] is the same in everyone' (Sayre-McCord 1994, 226). But what does Hume actually mean when he uses the term 'humanity'? One possibility is that this term simply denotes 'extensive sympathy,' as it figured in the *Treatise* (Abramson 2001, 49-57). However, if this means the type of regulated sympathy that the general or common point of view is *supposed* to attain, then we still need a convincing argument showing that this form of invariable sympathy *will* in fact be attained. Without such an argument, there is no reason to assume, as Hume assumes, that 'the humanity of one man is the humanity of every one, and the same object touches this passion in all human creatures,' since, if sympathy remains variable, then different objects will touch different spectators. Alternatively, 'humanity' might denote 'benevolence,' that is, a disposition—which can become a passion when activated—of concern for the good of others.[14] However, this interpretation would also not explain why humanity is the same in everyone, since people vary widely in their disposition towards benevolence, and it is far from clear that merely leaving one's own point of view can alter this fundamental fact. Hence, without further argument, Hume's talk of 'humanity' in the

Enquiry cannot explain why adopting the general or common point of view will tend to bring about concurrence in moral sentiments among spectators, as, we saw, Hume had hoped.

Of course, there is a question to what degree the common-point-of-view account in the *Enquiry* is similar to the general-point-of-view account in the *Treatise*. In particular, in contrast to the *Treatise* account, the Hume of the *Enquiry* does not discuss the general point of view as a solution to the variability-of-sympathy and virtue-in-rags problems: while he mentions the common point of view in the conclusion of the book (sec. 9), he discusses the two problems much earlier in the text, in the section entitled 'Why Utility Pleases' (sec. 5).[15] Moreover, there are no references to an actor's circle of influence in the *Enquiry*'s common-point-of-view account and so regulated sympathy cannot be attained by sympathizing with those within the actor's circle.[16] One way of understanding what Hume is up to in the *Enquiry* is that he is offering a *constructivist* account of the standard of virtue in the sense that a community of agents jointly constructs this standard. As Taylor (2002, 57-58) puts the point, 'in the *Enquiry*, moral evaluators construct a common point of view through conversation and argument, drawing on their own experience of human character and moral circumstance rather than relying on the responses of an agent's circle to make his character "appear the same" to all of them.'[17] Hume makes some remarks in the *Enquiry* that are friendly to this line of interpretation. First, he notes the importance of attaining all of the relevant non-normative facts in moral deliberation: '[I]n moral deliberations we must be acquainted beforehand with all the objects, and their relations to each other; and from a comparison of the whole, fix our choice or approbation. […] All the circumstances of the case are supposed to be laid before us, ere we can fix any sentence of blame or approbation' (EPM Appendix 1.11, SBN 290). Second, if we are to give a proper discernment of the objects of moral (and aesthetic) sentiments, it is often necessary that 'much reasoning

should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained'; that is, *reasoning* needs to be employed 'in order to feel the proper sentiment,' enabling a false relish to be 'corrected by argument and reflection' (EPM 1.9, SBN 173). In other words, attaining a reliable standard of virtue requires both knowledge of the non-normative facts *and* substantial reasoning. Third, and most importantly, the reasoning in question is, according to Hume, reasoning with others. In particular, reasoning with others can aid us in attaining all the non-normative facts needed for our 'judgments and discourse concerning the characters of men,' since 'the more we converse with mankind, and the greater social intercourse we maintain, the more shall we be familiarized to [relevant] general preferences and distinctions'; this process, Hume argues, 'render[s] our sentiments more public and social' (EPM 5.42, SBN 228-229).[18]

One might understand the constructivist account as follows: the standard of virtue is constructed by agents who converse and reason together and who then reach agreement about this standard. In other words, X is virtuous not because any single agent approves of X, but rather because a community of agents has reached agreement, following conversation and shared reasoning, that they jointly approve of X. If this is the case, then there would be a crucial difference between this type of account and the *Treatise* account. The general point of view in the *Treatise* aimed to provide a very modest ideal observer theory of the standard of virtue: the responses of spectators under certain suitable conditions—understood as sympathy with the agents with whom the actor interacts—constitute the standard of virtue. If the form of objectivity about moral judgment in the *Enquiry* relies on *actual* agreement between agents, then it is weaker than the one provided by an ideal observer theory: in the case of the latter theory, the specified *hypothetical* conditions are supposed to guarantee the reliability of an agent's responses

in constituting the normative standard in question, and, if an actual agent or an actual community of agents are not under these conditions, their responses are not reliable as setting this standard. Now, one could argue that, insofar as there is a constructivist strand in the *Enquiry*, Hume did not intend to imply that actual agreement ultimately constitutes the standard of virtue, for the remarks noted above merely suggest that conversation and shared reasoning might be the *means* of attaining the standard of virtue. So the constructivist account could be understood as follows: it is through conversation and shared reasoning that agents in a given society attempt to approximate certain *ideal* conditions—perhaps in the form of full knowledge of the relevant non-normative facts, such as human character and society's interests[19]—under which judgments of virtue ought to be made. In other words, the standard of virtue is constituted from hypothetical conditions that, while actual agents have yet to attain them, can be constructed from those agents' shared experiences. Of course, Hume does not say all of this in the *Enquiry*, but it is a plausible way of understanding Taylor's claim that evaluators construct a common point of view through conversation and argument. Since I will be developing a version of this type of account, I wish to highlight two aspects that would require further elaboration. First, we are owed an explanation of what makes a given agent suitable, in the first place, to be included in the set of agents who attempt to approximate the relevant ideal conditions. Second, we are owed an explanation of when the *correct* moral standards have been attained and thus deliberation between participants should come to an end. In other words, we are owed a *criterion of success* for these joint deliberations.

4. The 'Standard of Taste' Account: The Qualified Judges

Whether or not Hume intended his account in the *Enquiry* to be understood along constructivist lines, he certainly returned to a version of an ideal observer theory in his essay 'Of the Standard of Taste,' published together with three other essays in 1757. In this essay, Hume notes that sometimes there seems to be a consensus in evaluative judgments that transcends the peculiarities of various societies and eras. In particular, he notes the remarkable degree of consensus that is achieved regarding works of art and literature over long stretches of time. For example, Homer, who was admired in Athens and Rome two thousand years ago, is still admired in Paris and London today (ST 233). In order to explain this phenomenon, Hume argues that it is the responses of agents under suitable conditions that constitute evaluative (aesthetic) standards, arguing that 'some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric, are calculated to please, and others to displease; and if they fail of their effect in any particular instance, it is from some apparent defect or imperfection in the organ'; Hume continues, accordingly, that 'in each creature, there is a sound and a defective state; and the former alone can be supposed to afford us a true standard of taste and sentiment' (ST 233-234). This idea, as Hume points out, is analogous to ordinary sense perception: as only a well-functioning eye in normal day-light conditions can determine the true color of objects, so only a properly disposed aesthetic judge in the proper conditions can valuate correctly. In both of these cases, the object of the judgment—color or aesthetic value—is not independent of the properly disposed judge's responses, and, furthermore, these responses constitute the standard of correctness of the evaluative judgment (ST 234-235).[20] However, as my language of a 'properly disposed aesthetic judge' suggests, not everyone will be able to be under the relevant conditions. Rather, it is the *qualified* judges, whose verdicts we attempt to approximate when making aesthetic judgments,

who determine the standard of *correct* aesthetic judgment. In particular, Hume argues that some men are better judges of value than others because they satisfy certain epistemic and psychological conditions, namely, 'a perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention to the object' and 'strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice' (ST 232 & ST 241).[21] The reactions of the agents who satisfy this list of epistemic and psychological conditions constitute the standard of taste, which Hume explicitly calls a 'rule of right'; that is, 'a rule, by which the various sentiments of man may be reconciled' (ST 229).

Now, Hume presents the idea of qualified judges as setting the standard of *aesthetic* judgment. However, he also repeatedly makes comparisons between aesthetic and moral judgment in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*,[22] and, therefore, I believe that a comparison between the two forms of judgment is warranted. So if the qualified-judges account can also be applied to morality, we have an account in which there are qualified moral judges whose responses, under suitable conditions, constitute the standard of correctness for moral judgment. Thus, the account would retain the *Treatise*'s initial ambition of developing an ideal observer theory of the standard of virtue. However, while the general point of view is supposed to be, in the first instance, very accessible, this is not the case for the notion of a qualified judge. Indeed, Hume states that 'few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty' and that 'a true judge in the finer arts is observed, even during the most polished ages, to be so rare a character' (ST 241).[23] Therefore, while the *Treatise*'s general-point-of-view account specifies the conditions that potentially any agent can adopt in order to attempt to correct biases in his sentiments, the qualified-judges account in the 'Standard of Taste' specifies the conditions that only a select few can be in. Since this is the case,

one might think that the qualified-judges account provides the *idealization* that was missing in the *Treatise* in the following sense: the 'Standard of Taste' account is one of idealized agents, each of whose reactions are *necessarily* correct. Indeed, Hume speaks of 'the soundness of [the qualified judges'] understanding, and the superiority of their faculties above the rest of mankind' (ST 243). In other words, while a spectator who sympathizes with the agents in the actor's circle of influence might not have knowledge of all the non-normative facts and might have biased sympathetic reactions, the qualified judge simply *is* an individual who knows all of the relevant non-normative facts and is entirely free of bias. We could, therefore, presumably observe the reactions of any single qualified judge and from these observations infer the true standard of taste, precisely because all qualified judges would have the very same aesthetic reactions.

However, the qualified-judges account is more complicated, and this complication will be the key to my reconstruction of the general-point-of-view account. In particular, I wish to offer a two-stage interpretation of the qualified-judges account that will serve as the basis of my own account of the general point of view. Thus, although each qualified judge needs to satisfy certain conditions in order to count as a qualified judge, Hume argues that it is the 'joint verdict' of such judges that constitutes 'the true standard of taste and beauty,' noting that 'a certain degree of diversity in judgment is unavoidable' (ST 241 & 244). In other words, there are two stages to the establishment of the standard of taste. In the first stage, each judge needs to satisfy the epistemic and psychological conditions discussed above. Then, in the second stage of the process, the various qualified judges will share their assessments—or their assessments will be compared to each other by others—in order to reach a joint verdict. Thus, being in the *initial* epistemic and psychological conditions is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for setting the standard of taste: those agents who are under the relevant conditions set the standard of taste *together*.

16

Presumably, Hume's thought is that no single agent can attain the *full* epistemic and psychological conditions needed to set the standard of taste by him- or herself; rather, each qualified judge can do his or her best to approximate these conditions. This means that rather than being a straight-forward ideal observer theory, the qualified-judges account is ultimately an account of idealized intersubjective agreement: it is agreement among properly disposed agents that constitutes the standard of taste, and, by extension, the standard of virtue. Note that this type of account provides an answer to the first challenge I posed in connection with the *Enquiry* account, namely, what makes a given agent suitable, in the first place, to be included in the set of agents who set the standard of virtue: Hume provides us with a list of the epistemic and psychological conditions that the qualified judges are required to satisfy. However, the second challenge, pertaining to an explanation of when the correct moral standards have been attained and thus deliberation between participants should come to an end, is left unanswered in this account. For if Hume's qualified-judges account had been that the responses of any agent under the relevant conditions constitute the standard of taste, we would have an answer to this question: if agent A is under conditions C, then *ipso facto* agent A's responses constitute the standard of taste (as would those of *any* agent who satisfies conditions C). However, this is not Hume's position: he talks of a joint verdict, which, he adds, leaves room for diversity in judgment. This reference to a joint verdict, without mention of an end in light of which the qualified judges ought to deliberate, is what makes the delineation of a criterion of success for these joint deliberations so difficult.

5. The General Point of View: A Two-Stage Approach

I wish to offer a reconstruction of the general-point-of-view account modeled in part on the two-stage model proposed in the previous section. In the first stage of the process, spectators, much like on the 'Standard of Taste' account, have, as we saw in section 2, both an epistemic and a psychological task to perform by sympathizing with the agents with whom the actor regularly interacts. The epistemic task includes attainment of information regarding the effects of the actor's traits on the interests and pleasures of these agents. The psychological task consists of attaining command over one's sympathetic reactions, thus leading to greater impartiality. However, as we also saw in section 2, it is unlikely that any one agent will attain all of the relevant non-normative facts or that all variability in sympathy will be eliminated through sympathy with the agents in question. Indeed, the task that Hume sets up in the *Treatise* is even greater, because a given actor actually has *multiple* circles of agents with whom she interacts. These circles can include one's family members, friends, colleagues, and so on. And some actors might have circles that are quite broad: for example, one of a ruler's circles includes the citizens of the country.[24] Hume himself was sensitive to the fact that virtues are a function of one's roles and relationships to others:

> [W]e may observe in general, that if we can find any quality in a person, which renders him incommodious to those, who live and converse with him, we always allow it to be a fault or blemish, without any farther examination. On the other hand, when we enumerate the good qualities of any person, we always mention those parts of his character, which render him a safe companion, an easy friend, a gentle master, an agreeable husband, or an indulgent father. We consider him with *all* his relations in society; and love or hate him, according as he affects those, who have any immediate intercourse with him. [T 3.3.3.9, SBN 606; emphasis added]

Therefore, multiple circles will be required in order to consider all of the actor's relations in society and thus to ascertain the presence or absence of various virtues in the actor.[25] And an

actor's 'character' can only be deemed 'entirely perfect,' so Hume continues, 'if there be no relation of life, in which I cou'd not wish to stand to [him]' and 'if he be as little wanting to himself as to others.' This, Hume concludes, is 'the ultimate test of merit and virtue' (T 3.3.3.9, SBN 606). In other words, the 'ultimate' standard of virtue is not set by focusing on the effects of the actor's character traits on the interests and pleasures of *a* circle of agents with whom she regularly interacts, but rather of *all* the circles of agents with whom she interacts. It is unlikely that any one spectator could attain all of the (unbiased) information required to set *this* standard.

So an actor might indeed reveal different character traits to different members of a given circle or to members of different circles of people. Furthermore, these character traits can have different effects on different members of a given circle (or on members of different circles), and/or certain members of a given circle might be biased individuals. However, the more one knows about the actor and the members of the various circles the actor moves in, the more one will attain a complete picture of the effects of the actor's traits on the agents in these circles, including potential biases of its members. Moreover, even if spectators have different sympathetic reactions as a function of their distance from a given circle of influence, the more one knows about the reactions of different spectators, the more one will be able to account for one's own sympathetic biases. Therefore, in order to overcome the problems associated with insufficient information and variability in sympathy, a second stage in the process is needed, namely, conversation and shared reasoning among spectators. This brings me to my proposed two-stage reconstruction of Hume's general-point-of-view account. First, spectators are required to satisfy *initial* epistemic and psychological conditions by sympathizing with (at least some of) the agents in (at least some of) the actor's circles of influence. However, these conditions can at most serve as necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for attaining the ultimate standard of

19

virtue. This is so because it is unlikely that any single spectator can attain all of the relevant knowledge regarding the effects of the actor's character traits on the agents in all of her circles or have entirely unbiased sympathetic responses. In this first stage of the process, taking up the general point of view serves as the *actual* condition that spectators are required to satisfy in order to be among the agents who determine the standard of virtue. Therefore, and secondly, spectators attempt to attain *full* and *unbiased* knowledge of the effects of the actor's character traits on the interests and pleasures of the agents in all of her circles of influence, thus completing both the epistemic and psychological tasks. This is done through conversation and shared reasoning with other spectators, who, having sympathized with agents in one or more of the actor's multiple circles of influence, have attained at least some of the relevant non-normative knowledge about the effects of the actor's traits on the agents in her circles. Moreover, through conversation and shared reasoning, spectators can compare the various sympathetic reactions that different spectators have as a function of their distance from a given circle, and so can fix their own sympathy-related biases. Indeed, given the fact that spectators who have sympathized with some of the agents in the actor's circles will tend to have calmer and more principled sympathetic reactions, shared reasoning will be more effective in correcting their sentiments in general and their sympathetic reactions in particular. In this second stage of the process, taking up the general point of view serves as the *idealized* condition that agents approximate in order to set the standard of virtue.

While the proposed two-stage account is modeled in part on Hume's qualified-judges account in 'Of the Standard of Taste,' it also retains some of the main aspirations of the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* accounts of the general (or common) point of view. First, like the *Treatise* account of the general point of view, the two-stage approach relies on the responses of the agents in the

actor's circles of influence. Furthermore, the idealization in the account does not entail that spectators survey the actor through the eyes of an idealized version of anyone's acquaintances, thus retaining the *Treatise*'s ambition of locating the actor's circles of influence in her own social settings. Second, in line with Hume's remarks in the *Enquiry*, conversation and shared reasoning are the *means* of attaining the standard of virtue in the second stage of the proposed account.[26] Moreover, the proposed account also offers answers to *both* challenges that I posed in connection with the *Enquiry* account. First, regarding the question of what makes a given agent suitable to be included in the set of agents who set the standard of virtue, the answer is having sympathized with (at least some of) the agents in (at least some of) the actor's various circles of influence. However, in contrast to the 'Standard of Taste' account, in which only a select few qualified as suitable agents, the proposed two-stage approach retains the *Treatise*'s ambitions of specifying conditions that potentially any agent can adopt: potentially anyone—assuming they have sympathized with (at least some of) the agents in (at least some of) the actor's various circles of influence—can be among the spectators who set the standard of virtue. Second, regarding the question of when the correct moral standards have been attained and deliberation between participants should come to an end, the two-stage approach offers an answer, for there is an end in light of which agents deliberate and thus a clear criterion of success: If spectators were to attain all of the relevant information about the effects of an actor's character traits on the agents in her various circles of influence and exhibit unbiased sympathetic reactions, their verdicts would conclusively determine the standard of virtue. This is so because Hume's 'ultimate' standard of virtue is set by focusing on the effects of the actor's character traits on the agents in all of her various circles of influence. Indeed, were spectators to attain this end, there would be, as the Hume of the *Treatise* had hoped, concurrence in their moral sentiments. Thus,

the proposed account can also answer a challenge that most ideal observer theories face, namely, determining the *appropriate* degree of any quality we say the ideal observer must have, for there are clear parameters regarding the knowledge and reactions that are appropriate for setting the standard of virtue.[27]

My account can answer another challenge that ideal observer theories face, namely, why the idealization in question is well-motivated and not objectionably ad-hoc. In particular, one of the rationales that idealizing theorists of normative facts could use to motivate their theory in a way that is not objectionably ad hoc is to argue that idealization is warranted given our justificatory practices: we believe that we are fallible in our normative judgments, and that there is room for genuine normative advice, and so we also believe that from our practices of justifying normative claims a rationale for idealization can be extracted.[28] The two-stage account of the general point of view suggests the following when it comes to our justificatory practices regarding a spectator-based account of the standard of virtue: if, per Hume, the standard of virtue is constituted by spectators who sympathize with the agents in the actor's circles, and if those spectators come to realize that they are fallible in their normative judgements about the actor's virtues, then they should also realize that from their practices of justifying claims about virtue a rationale for idealization can be extracted. In particular: (a) spectators come to realize that they are fallible, since they might have incomplete and biased knowledge of the effects of the actor's character traits on the agents in her various circles; (b) a way of fixing such deficiencies is by attaining more knowledge of those effects and remedying biases in sympathy; (c) these justificatory practices suggest that a promising way of attaining full and unbiased knowledge of the relevant effects is by approximating certain ideal conditions; (d) since sympathy with the agents in the actor's circles *constitutes* our initial assessment of her virtues, it is warranted to assume that

sympathy with those same agents under the idealized conditions in question also constitutes, and is not evidence of, the standard of virtue. Therefore, what best explains our justificatory practices is the fact that the standard of virtue is constituted by our responses under idealized conditions. Note that points (a) through (c) demonstrate why we have good reason to think that we ought to approximate the idealized conditions of the general point of view: we assess actors in their specific social settings, we come to realize that these initial assessments may be distorted, and so we reason with other spectators in order to correct these distortions by approximating certain idealized conditions. Given the constitutive role that our patterns of approval have in our initial assessment of virtue, point (d) provides us with a reason to think that an idealized general point of view constitutes the standard of virtue. Taken together, points (a) through (d) demonstrate that we have good reason to think that we ought to approximate the idealized conditions of the general point of view and that this point of view constitutes the standard of virtue.

6. Conclusion

I have offered a novel two-stage reconstruction of Hume's general-point-of-view account, modeled in part on his qualified-judges account in 'Standard of Taste'. First, spectators sympathize with (at least some of) the agents in (at least some of) the actor's circles of influence, thus attaining (at least some of) the relevant non-normative facts and a calmer and more principled form of sympathy. Second, these spectators, who have already sympathized with agents in the actor's various circles, reason together, with the end of attaining all of the non-normative facts about the effects of the actor's character traits on all the circles of agents with whom the actor regularly interacts as well as unbiased sympathetic responses. This end serves as a criterion of success and thus there is an answer to the question of when the standard of virtue

23

has been attained and deliberation between participants should come to an end. This reconstruction of the general-point-of-view account, which draws heavily on Hume's later views on evaluative judgments, can deal with the challenges that commentators have posed to Hume's *Treatise* account. It does so by providing, in the second stage of the process, the idealized conditions from which judgments of virtue ought to be made. Of course, if the basis of comparison is Roderick Firth's 'ideal observer,' then the general point of view is indeed not ideal:[29] not only is it the case that the general point of view does not transcend the point of view of human beings, but it is also the case that this point of view is based on the actor's various circles of influence and is thus a function of the actor's particular social settings, rather than of an idealized version of anyone's acquaintances. Nevertheless, the general point of view in the second stage of the process is ideal in the following sense: it is an idealized standpoint of full information and unbiased sympathetic reactions that no *single* spectator is likely to attain. While this might seem like a high bar, it is this idealization that allows the account to provide the grounds for an adequate ideal observer theory of the standard of virtue. Moreover, through conversation and shared reasoning, agents can approximate this idealized state of affairs, and so the standard is sufficiently attainable. Finally, until the ultimate standard of virtue is attained, the provisional standards we attain through the first stage of the process should be, per Hume, 'sufficient for discourse' and 'serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools' (T.3.3.3.2, SBN 603; EPM 5.42, SBN 229).[30]

Department of Philosophy

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Notes

¹ When discussing specific sentences and passages in Hume's texts throughout the current paper, *A Treatise of Human Nature* will be referenced as 'T' with the relevant book, chapter, section, and paragraph in the Clarendon Edition (Hume 2007), followed by the corresponding page number in the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch (SBN) Edition (Hume 1978); *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* will be referenced as 'EPM' with the relevant section and paragraph in the Clarendon Edition (Hume 1998), followed by the corresponding page number in the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch (SBN) Edition (Hume 1975); 'Of the Standard of Taste' will be referenced as 'ST' with the relevant page number in the Liberty Fund Edition (Hume 1987b).

² Hume makes additional remarks about the relations between sympathy and moral sentiments. See, for example, T 3.2.1.12, SBN 481; T 3.3.1.10, SBN 577-578; T 3.3.1.23, SBN 586.

³ According to Hume, the objects of moral approval and disapproval are character traits. Hume notes that when we praise actions, we 'consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper' (T 3.2.1.2, SBN 477). Indeed, individual actions are virtuous or vicious only insofar as they are indicative of an agent's character, which alone is '*durable* enough to affect our sentiments concerning the person' (T 3.3.1.5, SBN 575).

⁴ Amongst other things, Hume notes the relation of virtue and vice to pride/humility and to love/hatred in order to explain the uniqueness of the pleasure and pain characteristic of vice and virtue (T 3.1.2.5, SBN 473). See also: T 2.1.7.4-6, SBN 296; T 3.2.2.24, SBN 499; T 3.2.5.4, SBN 517; T 3.3.1.3, SBN 574-575; T 3.3.1.30, SBN 591. Some of the features of Hume's model of approbation and disapprobation are also discussed in the *Enquiry*: EPM 9.1, SBN 268; EPM 5.15, SBN 218; EPM 8.15, SBN 267; EPM 9.12, SBN 277; EPM Appendix 1.10, SBN 289.

⁵ See Foot (2002, 76-77) for a subjectivist interpretation of Hume's moral theory.

⁶ See Sayre-McCord (2013) for an excellent discussion of Hume's (and Smith's) 'sympathy, approbation, and moral judgment' framework.

⁷ Here I am disagreeing with Jacqueline Taylor's (2002, 49) position, according to which it is the responses of the people in the circle of influence, rather than those of the spectators, which establish the standard of virtue.

⁸ I am following commentators who argue that the general point of view constitutes the standard of virtue. See Abramson (2011), Sayre-McCord (1994 & 2013), and Taylor (2002). Other commentators, such as Reed (2012), have questioned this assumption. While I will not be defending the claim that Hume believed that the general point of view constitutes the standard of virtue, establishing this claim is less important for my purposes. My first aim is to demonstrate that Hume's later philosophy can solve the problems that commentators have identified in the *Treatise*'s account of the general point of view, whether or not the general point of view constitutes the standard of virtue. My second aim is to reconstruct Hume's ideas into an adequate ideal observer account, and for this purpose I will assume that Hume would not object to the claim that the general point of view constitutes the standard of virtue.

⁹ In this passage, Hume mentions not only the interests and pleasures of the agents with whom the actor regularly interacts, but also those of the actor herself. However, there is no guarantee that different spectators will have the same knowledge of the actor's interests and pleasures. Moreover, even if they do have the same knowledge, basing their moral evaluation on sympathy with the actor does not eliminate the variability of sympathy, since, as noted in a parenthetical remark above, spectators' sympathetic reactions will vary as a function of their distance from the actor.

¹⁰ While his focus is Hume's epistemology, Louis Loeb (2002) offers a stability-based interpretation of Hume's theory of justification (see chapter IV of the book for his discussion of variations in sentiments due to sympathy and corrections in moral judgments). Given the challenges to stability in the general-point-of-view account discussed above—primarily the fact that Hume has not shown that different spectators will tend to make the same judgments about the same case—it is far from obvious that Hume's account of moral judgment provides sufficient stability to

attain the sought-after justification in the moral domain. Nevertheless, for those sympathetic to Loeb's justification-as-stability view, it offers another piece of evidence that Hume was at least *aspiring* to provide an account of what it is for our moral judgments to be justified. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to mention Loeb's view.

[11] Abramson (1999, 338-339) raises this suggestion, but notes that Hume would not endorse it. See Brown (1994, 24) for a more modest version of this idea, as well as Taylor (2002, 54).

[12] Baier (1991, 196-197 & 277) argues that endorsement of moral sentiments is Hume's test of the perfection of morality and practical reason. Korsgaard (1996, 62-66) argues that according to Hume our moral sense passes the reflective endorsement test and Sayre-McCord (2013, 231-232) defends the importance of reflective endorsement for Hume's moral project. Brown (2011, 219) notes that what makes first-order sentiments valuable, according to Hume, are 'our reflective, second-order sentiments, sentiments we have about our sentiments or those of others.'

[13] See Kornblith (2012) for an excellent critical discussion of reflection and the reflective endorsement test.

[14] One can find analogies in the *Enquiry* between humanity and benevolence. For example, Hume argues that benevolence is 'infused in our bosom' and gives rise to '*a moral distinction*' and to 'a general sentiment of blame and approbation'; he then argues, similarly, that humanity is 'common to all mankind,' recommends 'the same object to general approbation, [making men] agree in the […] decision concerning it,' and 'can alone be the foundation of morals, or of any general system of blame or praise' (EPN 9.4-6, SBN 271-273). See Debes (2007b, 32-33) for an excellent interpretation of humanity as benevolence, which draws on these (and other) analogies.

[15] When Hume mentions the variability-of-sympathy and virtue-in-rags problems, he argues—in contrast to his *Treatise* view—that 'thought' and 'judgment' can ultimately correct our sentiments (EPM 5.41, SBN 227-228).

[16] More generally, I am skeptical of Abramson's (2001, 55) position that the Hume of the *Enquiry* 'remained committed to the claim that the moral point of view is constituted by a special, regulated form of sympathy.' Such skepticism does not entail that Hume entirely abandoned his associationist account of sympathy from the *Treatise* or his view that sympathy is the source of our moral sentiments. See Debes (2007a) for a defense of the claim that Hume retained the associationist theory of sympathy in the *Enquiry* and Debes (2007b) for a defense of sympathy's essential role in Hume's moral theory in the *Enquiry* (via the principle of humanity, which is dependent on sympathy). Nevertheless, given the observations above, there is good reason to question whether Hume remained committed to idea that the general point of view is constituted by a regulated form of sympathy.

[17] See Taylor (2015, ch. 4) for further discussion of her views about the differences between the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* accounts of moral evaluation.

[18] While Taylor (2002) discusses many of the *Enquiry* references that I present above, she also relies on Hume's claim that 'the intercourse of sentiments […] in society and conversation, makes us form some general unalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners' (EPM 5.42, SBN 229) in order to make the case for her constructivist interpretation. However, this claim, which also appears in T.3.3.3.2 (SBN 603), is ambiguous: it could mean that the intercourse of sentiments serves as the means for attaining the common point of view, but it could also mean that the common point of view serves as the means for attaining the intercourse of sentiments. In particular, the mere fact that 'X makes Y occur' does not imply that 'X is the needed means for achieving Y.' For example, one might say 'every Saturday my desire for ice cream makes me go to the ice cream parlor.' In this case, satisfaction of the desire for ice cream is the end, and visiting the ice cream parlor is the means. Likewise, when Hume claims that the 'intercourse of sentiments' makes us 'form some general inalterable standard,' it is plausible that the 'intercourse of sentiments' is the desired end, and the means for achieving that end is forming some consistent and impartial standard from which we judge the characters of others. Indeed, Hume makes additional claims in both EPM 5.42 and T.3.3.3.2 that support this reading. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this point.

[19] In the passage in the *Enquiry* in which Hume discusses the importance of shared reasoning for moral evaluation, he makes a point about general language, proclaiming that 'the epithets of praise and blame' are fixed 'with conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interests of the community' (EPM 5.42, SBN 228).

[20] Hume's qualified-judges account, as I understand it, does *not* characterize evaluative properties independently of the qualified judge's reactions. Indeed, Hume clarifies that while 'there are certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce […] particular feelings,' it is 'certain' that 'beauty and deformity […] are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment' (ST 235). The account thus offers a constitutive, rather than an evidential, standard of correctness. In this regard, I disagree with Peter Railton (2003, 100-106), who uses Hume's 'Standard of Taste' account in order to offer a naturalized yet realist conception of aesthetics.

[21] Hume (1987a) makes remarks in a somewhat similar spirit in his 'Of the Delicacy of Taste and of Passion,' 4-5.

[22] In the *Treatise*, Hume writes: 'We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. The case is the same as in our judgments concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations' (T 3.1.2.3, SBN 471). Later in the *Treatise*, he argues that aesthetics is similar to ethics in that in both we make judgments based on the pleasure/displeasure we feel via sympathy (T 3.3.1.1-10, SBN 574-577). Indeed, Hume states in this regard that 'the same principle produces, in many instances, our sentiments of morals, as well as those of beauty' (T 3.3.1.9, SBN 577). He also continues with the analogy between aesthetics and ethics when discussing the general point of view (T 3.3.1.15, SBN 581-582). In the *Enquiry*, Hume makes repeated analogies between aesthetics and ethics, for example, when discussing the need for the employment of reasoning in order to feel the proper sentiments (EPM 1.9, SBN 173). When he argues that moral distinctions are ultimately based on our sentiments rather than on reason, Hume notes that this doctrine is even more evident 'if we compare moral beauty with natural, to which in many particulars it bears so near a resemblance' and then argues that aesthetic distinctions also arise from our sentiments (EPM Appendix 1.13, SBN 291). Indeed, Hume commences the essay 'Of the Standard of Taste' by trying to account for agreement in moral questions before moving on to aesthetics; he sees both of these enterprises as grounded in sentiment (ST 227-229).

[23] This is because the sensibilities of most men 'either labour under some defect, or are vitiated by some disorder; and by that means, excite a sentiment, which may be pronounced erroneous.' Hume provides examples: 'When the critic has no delicacy, he judges without any distinction, and is only affected by the grosser and more palpable qualities of the object […]. Where he is not aided by practice, his verdict is attended with confusion and hesitation. Where no comparison has been employed, the most frivolous beauties, such as rather merit the name of defects, are the object of his admiration. Where he lies under the influence of prejudice, all his natural sentiments are perverted. Where good sense is wanting, he is not qualified to discern the beauties of design and reasoning.' (ST 241)

[24] There has been a debate in the literature regarding how far Hume's 'narrow circle' extends. See, for example, Kelly (2004) and Loeb (2004). Despite Hume's talk of a 'narrow circle' in one reference from the *Treatise*, he is not committed to the claim that this circle is limited to the actor's family, friends, and so on. Indeed, in the first three references from the *Treatise* that I noted earlier, Hume merely speaks of 'those who have an intercourse with any person,' 'those, who have any commerce with the person we consider,' and '[the] persons, who have a connexion with him,' leaving open the possibility that a given circle of influence is quite wide. Furthermore, what is of philosophical importance is the fact that the actor might manifest different character traits towards different circles of people, even if some of those circles are wider than others.

[25] For discussions of the claim that virtues on Hume's account are role- and relationship-dependent and that different circles of acquaintances will be needed to recognize different virtues, see Baier (2006) and Frykholm (2016).

[26] Shared reasoning in the *Enquiry* pertains primarily to establishing *general* standards of virtue and vice: recall Hume's talk, in EPM 5.42, of 'general unalterable standards,' 'conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interests of the community,' and 'general preferences and distinctions.' In other words, the *Enquiry* account does not suggest that shared reasoning is required to make *particular* moral judgments about the characters of specific individuals, which *is* what my two-stage approach holds. However, my position is not a strict explication of Hume's texts—although he does in fact focus on such particular moral judgments in the *Treatise*—but a reconstruction of Hume's account. Accordingly, I am incorporating the idea of shared reasoning from the *Enquiry* in order to develop a new account of the general point of view that does make particular moral judgments about the characters of individuals. Of course, it may be the case that further conversation and shared reasoning will allow

spectators to formulate general standards of virtue and vice that are derived from these particular moral judgments, but I will not be exploring this possibility in the current paper. I am indebted to Zac Harmon for pressing me to clarify this point.

[27] I am grateful to an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this point.

[28] This point is taken from Enoch (2005, 769-70). Enoch argues that response-dependence views of the normative cannot consistently employ the natural rationale for idealization, according to which responses under idealized conditions serve as *evidence of* mind-independent facts, since this rationale would undermine their claim that it is the responses of agents under suitable conditions that *constitute* the facts in question. He does concede that this 'natural rationale,' which applies to physical properties, might not apply to normative properties, and so he introduces the appeal to our justificatory practices. Nevertheless, he argues that this rationale will not do either, because our moral discourse incorporates an objective purport, which can be captured by realism but not by response-dependence views. I cannot settle in this paper whether or not Enoch is right about this last claim; my aim in the discussion above is merely to show that the idealization in my two-stage approach is well-motivated and not objectionably ad-hoc.

[29] In making this comparison to Firth, I am in agreement with Sayre-McCord's (1994, 202-204) observations about the general point of view's lack of ideality, although my account requires more idealization than he would allow for.

[30] I am grateful to Daniel Brudney, Åsa Carlson, Remy Debes, Samuel Fleischacker, Zac Harmon, Emily Kelahan, Brian Leiter, Martha Nussbaum, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, Reed Winegar, and Jeff Wisdom for illuminating conversations about, and/or excellent written comments on, various drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank audiences at the following conferences for their feedback: the Annual NYC Workshop in Early Modern Philosophy (2017), the Annual Conference of the Illinois Philosophical Association (2017), the APA Central Division Meeting (2018), the Scottish Tradition Conference at the Center for the Study of Scottish Philosophy (2018), and the Annual Hume Society Conference (2019). Finally, I would like to thank an anonymous referee for *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, whose comments were invaluable in improving this paper.

References

Abramson, K. (1999). 'Correcting *Our* Sentiments about Hume's Moral Point of View,' *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 37(3), pp. 333-361.

Abramson, K. (2001). 'Sympathy and the Project of Hume's Second Enquiry,' *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 83(1), pp. 45–80.

Abramson K. (2011). 'Sympathy and Hume's Spectator-centered Theory of Virtue,' in E. S. Radcliffe (ed) *A Companion to Hume*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 240-256.

Baier, A. (1991). *A Progress of Sentiments*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Baier, A. (2006). 'How Wide is Hume's Circle?' *Hume Studies* 32(1), pp. 113–117.

Brown, C. R. (1994). 'From Spectator to Agent: Hume's Theory of Obligation,' *Hume Studies* 20(1), pp. 19-35.

Brown, C. R. (2011). 'Hume on Moral Rationalism, Sentimentalism, and Sympathy,' in E. S. Radcliffe (ed) *A Companion to Hume*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 219-239.

Cohon, R. (1997). 'The Common Point of View in Hume's Ethics,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57(4), pp. 827-850.

Darwall, S. (1994). 'Hume and the Invention of Utilitarianism,' in M. A. Stewart & J. P. Wright (eds) *Hume and Hume's Connections*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 58-82.

Debes, R. (2007a). 'Has Anything Changed? Hume's Theory of Association and Sympathy after the *Treatise*,' *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 15(2), pp. 313-338.

Debes, R. (2007b). 'Humanity, Sympathy, and the Puzzle of Hume's Second Enquiry,' *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 15(1), pp. 27-57.

Enoch, D. (2005). 'Why Idealize?' *Ethics* 115(4), pp. 759-787.

Firth, R. (1952). 'Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 12(3), pp. 317-345.

Foot, P. (2002). 'Hume on Moral Judgment,' in *Virtues and Vices*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 74-80.

Frykholm, E. (2016). 'Associative Virtues and Hume's Narrow Circle,' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 97(4), pp. 612-637.

Hume, D. (1975). 'An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,' in L.A Selby-Bigge & P. H. Nidditch (eds) *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals* (third edition). New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 167-323.

Hume, D. (1978). *A Treatise of Human Nature* (second edition). L.A Selby-Bigge & P. H. Nidditch (eds). New York: Oxford University Press.

Hume, D. (1987). 'Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion,' in E. F. Miller (ed) *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* (revised edition). Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, pp. 3-8.

Hume, D. (1987). 'Of the Standard of Taste,' in E. F. Miller (ed) *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* (revised edition). Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, pp. 226-249.

Hume, D. (1998). *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. T. L. Beauchamp (ed). New York: Clarendon Press.

Hume, D. (2007). *A Treatise of Human Nature* (volume 1). D. F. Norton & M. J. Norton (eds). New York: Clarendon Press.

Kelly, E. I. (2004). 'Stability and Partiality in Hume's Moral Philosophy: A Response to Louis Loeb,' *Hume Studies* 30(2), pp. 329–338.

Kornblith, H. (2012). *On Reflection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Korsgaard, C. M. (1996). *The Sources of Normativity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Loeb, L. E. (2002). *Stability and Justification in Hume's Treatise*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Loeb, L. E. (2004). 'Stability and Justification in Hume's *Treatise*: Another Look-A Response to Erin Kelly, Frederick Schmitt, and Michael Williams,' *Hume Studies* 30(2), pp. 339–404.

Railton, P. (2003). 'Aesthetic Value, Moral Value, and the Ambitions of Naturalism,' in *Facts, Values and Norms: Essays Toward A Morality of Consequence*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 85-130.

Reed, P. A. (2012). 'What's Wrong with Monkish Virtues? Hume on the Standard of Virtue,' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 29(1), pp. 39-56.

Sayre-McCord, G. (1994). 'On Why Hume's 'General Point of View' Isn't Ideal – And Shouldn't Be,' *Social Philosophy and Policy* 11(1), pp. 202-228.

Sayre-McCord, G. (2013). 'Hume and Smith on Sympathy, Approbation and Moral Judgment,' *Social Philosophy and Policy* 30(1-2), pp. 208-236.

Taylor, J. (2002). 'Hume on the Standard of Virtue,' *The Journal of Ethics* 6(1), pp. 43-62.

Taylor, J. (2015). *Reflecting Subjects: Passion, Sympathy, and Society in Hume's Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press.