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ARTICLE

RECONCILING THE STOIC AND THE SCEPTIC: HUME ON PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE AND THE PLURALITY OF HAPPY LIVES

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On the one hand, Hume accepts the view – which he attributes primarily to Stoicism – that there exists a determinate best and happiest life for human beings, a way of life led by a figure whom Hume calls 'the true philosopher'. On the other hand, Hume accepts that view – which he attributes to Scepticism – that there exists a vast plurality of good and happy lives, each potentially equally choiceworthy. In this paper, I reconcile Hume's apparently conflicting commitments: I argue that Hume's 'Sceptical' pluralism about the character of the happiest life need not conflict with his 'Stoic' advocacy of the supreme happiness of the true philosopher, given Hume's flexible understanding of how one might live as a true philosopher.

KEYWORDS: Hume; Stoicism; Scepticism; happiness; pluralism; philosophy

I

In various passages, Hume accepts the view – which he attributes primarily to Stoicism – that there exists a single best and happiest life for human beings, the way of life led by a figure Hume calls 'the true philosopher'. In other passages, however, Hume accepts the view – which he attributes to Scepticism – that there exists a vast plurality of good and happy lives, each potentially equally choiceworthy. On this Sceptical view, it is unduly narrow to identify the life of the true philosopher as happiest (given the diversity of human inclinations, circumstances, and talents).

Hume's thought on these matters may appear inconsistent: Hume appears both to accept, and to deny, that one determinate way of life – the life of the true philosopher – is *the* happiest for all. I argue, however, that it is possible to reconcile Hume's apparently conflicting commitments. In particular, I argue that, for Hume, the life of the true philosopher – i.e. the life that Hume, following the Stoic, believes happiest for all people – can be led in broader and more flexible ways than Hume's Sceptic apparently allows. Thus, I suggest that, for Hume, it is possible to construe the Stoic's claim for the superiority of the true

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philosopher's life in a manner that avoids the Sceptic's worries. In sum, Hume's considered assessment of the life of the true philosopher reconciles the Stoic and Sceptical themes in his ethical thought.

II

In a series of four essays – 'The Epicurean', 'The Stoic', 'The Platonist', and 'The Sceptic' – Hume articulates the character of these ancient philosophical schools as disciplined approaches to the pursuit of happiness ('Epicurean', 138n). Writing not in his own voice, but rather, from the point of view of each philosophical school, Hume provides character sketches of each.

Hume's Stoic, for instance, spells out a rank-order of different kinds of lives, which approximate happiness, 'the great end of all human industry' ('Stoic', 148), to different degrees. At the peak of this hierarchy, the Stoic places the life of 'the true philosopher':

> But as much as the wildest savage is inferior to the polished citizen, who, under the protection of laws, enjoys every convenience which industry has invented; so much is this citizen himself inferior to the man of virtue, and the true philosopher, who governs his appetites, subdues his passions, and has learned, from reason, to set a just value on every pursuit and enjoyment. ('Stoic', 148)

Here, the Stoic identifies the true philosopher as (i) the model of human excellence, (ii) the culmination of civilization, and (iii) the embodiment of complete happiness. Why does the true philosopher lead the happiest life? According to the Stoic, happiness requires security ('Stoic', 171), and such security the true philosopher has:

> The temple of wisdom is seated on a rock, above the rage of the fighting elements, and inaccessible to all the malice of man …. The sage, while he breathes that serene air, looks down with pleasure, mixed with compassion, on the errors of mistaken mortals, who blindly seek for the true path of life, and pursue riches, nobility, honour, or power, for genuine felicity. ('Stoic', 150–1)

Unlike other types, the true philosopher (or sage) does not pin his hopes for happiness on externals, which 'envious fortune' can always take away ('Stoic', 151). Rather, the true philosopher has a stable source of happiness, viz., the intrinsic satisfactions of being virtuous and enjoying a harmonious, well-ordered soul ('Stoic', 153).

Hume's Stoic accepts three main theses. The first thesis is *virtue-eudaimonism*, the claim that an agent's virtue makes a primary and constitutive contribution to that agent's happiness. According to Hume's Stoic, an

agent's happiness does not consist primarily of various externals (e.g. wealth and reputation). Indeed, it consists primarily of an agent's enjoyment of his virtues of character and thought, i.e. (i) his well-tempered desiderative/passionate dispositions and (ii) his wise assessment of the relative value of various goods.[1] (As stated, virtue-eudaimonism is consistent with the view that externals are secondary requirements of happiness – perhaps as favourable background conditions for a virtuous agent's happiness, or even as secondary constituents of that happiness itself. Virtue-eudaimonism, however, is also consistent with the view that virtue is, by itself, sufficient for happiness.) Second, Hume's Stoic is committed to *the reflection thesis*, according to which one's ongoing guidance of one's character and action by philosophical reflection, i.e. being a true philosopher, is a necessary condition of one's possessing and maintaining virtue. Thus, on the Stoic's view, one's pursuit of happiness will go astray if one lives by 'the blind guidance of appetite and instinct'. On the contrary, a certain philosophical 'reflection or intelligence' is crucial ('Stoic', 148). From these two theses, Hume's Stoic goes on to accept a third and final thesis, *the supremacy thesis*, according to which the happiest life is a (true) philosophical one.

One must not assume that Hume's Stoic speaks directly for Hume, or that Hume necessarily agrees with the Stoic point for point.[2] First, in 'The Stoic', as in the other three essays on happiness, Hume refrains from speaking in his own voice, except in footnotes (discussed later) that provide his external commentary. Second, Hume gives the final word, and the longest essay, to the Sceptic. Third, as I discuss in section III below, Hume occasionally criticizes actual (ancient) Stoics in his own works. Nevertheless, I argue that Hume *does* in fact accept his Stoic's three central theses, for Hume commits himself to these claims in passages where Hume writes *in propria persona*. By briefly unpacking Hume's accounts of (i) virtue's contribution to happiness and of (ii) philosophical reflection's role in cultivating virtue, one can better understand why (iii) it is reasonable to attribute the supremacy thesis to Hume as well.[3]

Hume's Commitment to Virtue-Eudaimonism

Hume does not offer a detailed account of happiness. He appears to identify it with long-range (as opposed to short-range) benefit and enjoyment (EPM 6.1.15 [SBN 239–40]) – in particular, that of a being who is at once

[1]Virtue-eudaimonism is not an exclusively Stoic position. The Platonist (156) and the Sceptic (168) also accept it. The Epicurean's position (142) is unclear, though, historically, Epicureans identify virtue as merely an instrumental means to happiness construed as pleasure.

[2]Immerwahr, 'Hume's Essays on Happiness', 308ff, rightly argues against identifying Hume's own view with that of any one of the four philosophers.

[3]For the claim that Hume's Stoic presents (at least some of) Hume's own views, see, generally, Martin, 'Hume as Classical Moralist', 326–7; Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, 138–42; Potkay, *Passion for Happiness*, 77–9.

reasonable, sociable, and active (EHU I.6 [SBN 8–9]). Yet it is plausible to attribute virtue-eudaimonism to Hume. For Hume thinks that virtue's 'sole purpose is, to make her votaries and all mankind … cheerful and happy' (EPM 9.2.15 [SBN 279]). He is confident that his work can elucidate 'the *happiness*, as well as the *dignity* of virtue' (T 3.3.6.6 [SBN 620]; cf. EPM 9.2.14 [SBN 278]). He insists that the 'right enjoyment' – i.e. the virtuous enjoyment – of life's activities 'forms the chief part of our happiness' ('On the Delicacy of Taste', 4).

To understand why, recall that, for Hume, a virtue is '*a quality of mind agreeable to or approved by every one who considers or contemplates it*' (EPM 8n50 [SBN 261n]). Hume – apparently like his Stoic – accepts a broadly *sentimentalist* conception (according to which virtue can somehow be analysed in terms of sentiment and passion).[4] On Hume's sentimentalist account, virtues belong to four main classes, each of which conduces to happiness in its own way:

(i) *Virtues immediately agreeable to oneself* – e.g. cheerfulness and pride – are enjoyable in themselves to possess (EPM 9.2.17 [SBN 280]). They 'diffuse a satisfaction on the beholders' of such virtues, even without producing any further goods (EPM 7.2 [SBN 250–1]). Accordingly, such virtues contribute constitutively to the virtuous agent's happiness.[5]

One such virtue of special note is 'that undisturbed philosophical tranquillity, superior to pain, sorrow, anxiety, and each assault of adverse fortune' which Hume identifies as a species of the virtue of greatness of mind (EPM 7.16 [SBN 256]; 9.1.2 [SBN 269–70]). Strikingly, Hume's own description of the tranquil agent directly borrows from the Stoic's description of the true philosophical sage: '[S]ecurely placed in his temple of wisdom, [the sage] looks down on inferior mortals engaged in the pursuit of honours, riches, reputation, and every frivolous enjoyment' (EPM 7.16 [SBN 256]). Fulfilled with the life that he leads at least partly in virtue of his greatness of mind, the sage avoids seeking happiness in externals. For Hume, as for the Stoic, the sage's greatness of mind contributes constitutively (and fundamentally) to the pleasantness of the sage's existence.[6]

(ii) *Virtues useful to oneself* – e.g. discretion, industry, and frugality – promote our happiness by freeing us from the temptations of potentially harmful short-term pleasures (EPM 9.2.17 [SBN 280]). Possessed of these virtues, an agent 'adheres tenaciously to his general resolutions, and is neither seduced by the allurements of pleasure, nor terrified by the menaces

[4]Hume's revisionist picture of a strikingly 'warm-hearted' Stoic (151) strongly suggests that Hume attributes sentimentalism about virtue to the Stoic. The Sceptic (162) also accepts sentimentalism, as apparently does the Epicurean (142).

[5]Martin ('Hume on Human Excellence', 394–5) argues that when Hume calls virtues immediately agreeable, he means that they are desirable for themselves.

[6]While Hume warns that '[t]hese pretensions, no doubt, when stretched to the utmost, are, by far, too magnificent for human nature' (EPM 7.16 [SBN 256]), I see no reason to suspect any irony in Hume's description of the sage.

of pain, but keeps still in view those distant pursuits, by which he, at once ensures his happiness and his honour' (EPM 6.1.5 [SBN 239–40]). Hume's portrait of the agent with such virtues again recalls the Stoic's true philosopher, who 'looks down with contempt on all the allurements of pleasure, and all the menaces of danger' ('Stoic', 153–4; Potkay, *Passion for Happiness*, 69).

Virtues useful to oneself are 'desirable in a view to self-interest' insofar as they correct for certain weaknesses in human nature. For instance, temperance is desirable in light of the human susceptibility to the harms of drunkenness (EPM 9.2.17 [SBN 280]). Nevertheless, I see no evidence that Hume believes that such virtues contribute to an agent's happiness in a *simply* instrumental way. To the extent that such virtues are 'immediately' useful to oneself (EPM 9.2.17 [SBN 280]), their benefit for one is *direct*. Just as it is bad in itself to suffer the pain that excessive drinking generates, it is desirable in itself to stay within temperate boundaries. Hence, it is plausible to think that, for Hume, such virtues contribute constitutively to our welfare *in virtue of* their corrective value for beings like us.

(iii) *Virtues immediately agreeable to others* – e.g. a well-honed wit (EPM 8.3–4 [SBN 262]) – stir immediate satisfaction in one's neighbours. Such virtues promote one's happiness instrumentally by rendering one fit for the social world, thus enabling one to enjoy the fruits of sociality (EPM 9.2.18 [SBN 280–1]). Yet such virtues also conduce to an agent's happiness more directly. As holds generally for virtues from *all* of Hume's categories, Hume thinks that possessing virtues from this third category is desirable for itself. For on Hume's account, one's 'peaceful reflection on one's conduct' (*qua* virtuous) is satisfying in itself, indeed, *more* satisfying than 'the unbought satisfaction of conversation, society, study, even health and the common beauties of nature' (EPM 9.2.25 [SBN 283–4]). Hume thus concurs with his Stoic that the virtuous agent experiences special satisfaction 'when he looks within' himself and enjoys his morally beautiful character ('Stoic', 153).

(iv) *Virtues useful for others* conduce to an agent's happiness in a similar fashion. Like those virtues immediately agreeable to others, virtues useful for others – e.g. humanity, generosity, and beneficence (EPM 9.2.19 [SBN 281]) – conduce to satisfactory social interactions, for they enhance one's good reputation (EPM 9.2.21 [SBN 282]). At the same time, Hume again believes that these virtues are satisfying in themselves (and that these satisfactions are stable). On the one hand, 'the immediate feeling' of such benevolent virtues for their possessor is pleasant in itself (EPM 9.2.21 [SBN 282]). On the other hand, the virtuous agent is capable of pleasantly viewing himself as having contributed to mankind (EPM 9.2.21 [SBN 282]).

These points also hold for such artificial virtues as justice. Hume believes that if we adopted the strategy of the 'sensible knave', and sought certain goods through vicious means (e.g. by committing secret acts of injustice against others), we would ultimately cheat ourselves. It is not just that we

are apt to get caught (though Hume thinks that we are). More importantly, Hume thinks, we would sacrifice 'the invaluable enjoyment' of our own character *qua* virtuous. We would cut ourselves off from '[i]nward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct' – all of which Hume thinks are 'very requisite to happiness' (EPM 9.2.23 [SBN 283]). Similarly, Hume maintains that an agent's 'peace and inward satisfaction entirely depend on the strict observance' of such social virtues. For only the mind of the agent who possesses them 'can bear its own survey'. And none of the 'advantages of fortune' can compensate for the mind's inability to do so (T 3.3.6.6 [SBN 620]).

In all these ways, Hume shows his agreement with the Stoic's thesis that the virtues make a primary and constitutive benefit to the happiness of the agent who possesses them. It is unsurprising, then, that Hume names his 'model of perfect virtue' after Cleanthes the Stoic (EPM 9.1.2 [SBN 269–70]). But before continuing, I note that Hume appears to reject the bold claim that virtue is the only good, such that, by itself, it guarantees happiness. For instance, in a letter to Frances Hutcheson (17 September 1739; *Letters* I.35), Hume appeals to an argument from Cicero's *De Finibus* IV to distance himself from this traditional Stoic position. Since Stoics traditionally accept that virtue suffices for happiness, one might wonder to what extent Hume and the Stoic are ultimately on the same page.

In response, while Stoics traditionally do maintain the sufficiency of virtue claim, at least some Stoics do not. As Adam Potkay argues, 'The Stoic' shows the influence of Hume's readings of Cicero, and of Cicero's borrowings from Panaetius, whose eclectic, moderate Stoicism departs from other, more stringent forms of Stoicism. In particular, whereas early Stoics (e.g. Zeno) and later Stoics (e.g. Epictetus and Seneca) defend the sufficiency of virtue claim, Panaetius (as a middle Stoic) allows that health, material resources, and strength are also required for one's happiness (Potkay, *Passion for Happiness*, 77–8).[7] At *De Finibus* IV.79, Cicero reports Panaetius's departure from traditional Stoic views, including the sufficiency of virtue claim: 'Panaetius rejected this depressing harshness of [traditional Stoics]. He had no time either for the severity of their views or their tortured way of arguing for them. His doctrines were gentler, and his style more lucid'.[8] This assessment appears in the very section of *De*

[7]On the views of Panaetius (and his student, Posidonius), see, e.g. Hicks, *Diogenes Laertius*, VII.128.

[8]Translation from Woolf, *Cicero: On Moral Ends*, 116. The *De Finibus* identifies Panaetius as an authority on Stoicism (e.g. at I.23). In the same 1739 letter to Hutcheson, Hume writes, 'Upon the whole, I desire to take my catalog of Virtues from Cicero's *Offices*, not from the *Whole Duty of Man*' (17 September 1739; *Letters* I:34; cf. EPM Appendix 4.11 [SBN 318–9]). Yet in the *De Officiis* (e.g. II.17.60; III.2.7), Cicero explicitly identifies the work of Panaetius (presumably his *Peri tou kathêkontos* ['On Duties']) as a model. Elsewhere, citing Cicero, Hume praises Panaetius as the only Greek Stoic to question augury and divination (Hume, 1932, 63).

Finibus to which Hume's 1739 letter appeals in rejecting the traditional Stoic's sufficiency of virtue claim. Hume, then, was aware of the range of Stoic opinion.

To be sure, Hume's Stoic is not altogether explicit about the place of externals in happiness, other than rejecting the view that they are primary constituents of happiness. Hume's Stoic, then, defends the *general* thesis of virtue-eudaimonism as defined earlier. But that thesis is all that one requires if one is ultimately to derive the supremacy thesis. In short, Hume agrees with *enough* of the Stoic's position to accept the supremacy thesis.

Hume's Commitment to the Reflection Thesis

Just as Hume agrees with the Stoic that virtue is a primary constituent of happiness, so too Hume agrees that to cultivate virtue, one must guide one's character and action by ongoing philosophical reflection. Hume takes his bearings from Ovid's motto, 'A faithful study of the liberal arts humanizes character and permits it not to be cruel' ('On the Delicacy of Taste', 6; Hume's translation; cf. 'Sceptic', 170). For Hume, philosophical reflection is occasioned by liberal study. Hume's Sceptic, for instance, identifies the sciences and liberal arts with 'speculative studies' (170). As I discuss in Section IV, Hume elsewhere advises his audience to cultivate themselves with such 'entertaining moralists' as Cicero, Plutarch, and Seneca, philosophers who would have been on the reading lists of Hume's liberally educated contemporaries.[9] Yet, as I also discuss in Section IV, Hume allows further that one can reflect philosophically (and benefit ethically) by engaging with more 'abstruse', technical works. Hence, philosophical reflection for Hume encompasses many modes of forms of expression, reasoning, and argumentation – some more direct and emotionally engaging, others calmer and more systematic. In this way, Hume invites comparison with the ancient Stoics themselves. As Martha Nussbaum notes, these philosophers sought to engage and affect their audiences through many styles of speaking and writing, at various levels of technicality (Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 331).

Negatively, Hume suggests that philosophical reflection 'extinguishes' those violent passions that stir internal disorder; positively, such study 'improves our sensibility for all the tender and agreeable passions' ('On the Delicacy of Taste', 6). By tranquilizing the violent passions, Hume believes, such reflection can, by itself, strengthen the motivational influence of the calm passions, e.g. the love of life, kindness to children, the desire for goodness, and the aversion to evil (T 2.3.3.8 [SBN 417]). Yet Hume identifies some of these calm passions, or at least passions closely linked to them – e.g. beneficence, charity, generosity, clemency, and moderation – *as* virtues (T 3.3.111 [SBN 578]). For Hume,

[9]See 'Sceptic', 179n12 (where Hume speaks in his own voice) and Hume's reference to these authors in his letter to a physician (March or April 1734; *Letters* I:14). Eighteenth-century Scottish university students would have likely studied Cicero's *De Officiis* and Epictetus. See Emerson, 'What Did Eighteenth-Century Scottish Students Read?', 63–4.

then, philosophical reflection develops and maintains virtue by moderating those violent passions that manifest themselves in vice, and by encouraging those calm passions that manifest themselves in virtue.[10]

Through what mechanism, however, does philosophical reflection exercise its influence over the passions? This question is puzzling, of course, given Hume's claims for the slavery of reason to passion (T 2.3.3). Indeed, Hume identifies passions as non-representational 'original existences', which are not by themselves reasonable or unreasonable (T 2.3.3.5 [SBN 415]).

Space limitations preclude a full account of Hume's views on philosophical reflection's many modes of influence on the passions. Most directly, simply engaging in 'speculative studies' – and focusing one's attention and dedication on *them*, as opposed to other ends, e.g. wealth and honour – 'must mortify in [one] the passions of interest and ambition' ('Sceptic', 170). More generally, philosophical reflection affects the passions in an indirect fashion, via the understanding and the imagination (cf. 'Sceptic', 161; EHU 1.1 [SBN 1–2]). As we engage in the philosophical task of sorting out our pre-theoretical beliefs about various topics, we attain a sounder, more coherent view, a set of opinions that 'might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination' (T 1.4.7.14 [SBN 272]). One variety of opinion-sorting maintains consistency at any cost and proceeds unbounded by common habit and experience. Hume calls such an approach 'false philosophy' and insists that it actually precludes happiness by inducing an all-encompassing Scepticism (T 1.4.7.7 [SBN 267–8]). What Hume himself calls 'true philosophy', by contrast, consists of 'reflections of common life, methodized and corrected' (EHU 12.3.25 [SBN 162]). Like false philosophy, true philosophy *does* make certain revisions to our set of pre-reflective beliefs; yet unlike false philosophy, it attempts to remain faithful to pre-theoretical, common opinion (T I.4.3.9 [SBN 222–3]).[11]

As we proceed in the manner of the true philosopher, and sort out our pre-theoretical beliefs accordingly, we receive the following central benefit:

> We shall form juster notions of life: Many things, which please or afflict others, will appear to us too frivolous to engage our attention: And we shall lose by degrees that sensibility and delicacy of passion, which is so incommodious.
>
> ('On the Delicacy of Taste', 6)

[10]My account in this paragraph has benefited from Immerwahr, 'Anatomist and the Painter', 7–10.

[11]On true and false philosophy in Hume, see (especially) Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*; Tollefsen, 'Hume on True and False Philosophy'.

The true philosopher's view of things is, as Hume repeatedly maintains, 'juster'. It is not only truer to the phenomena, but also more balanced and less disposed to doctrinal extremes than non-philosophical (or false philosophical) views.

For example, consider Hume's views on how such philosophical reflection moderates fears concerning the gods. One key benefit of such reflection is 'the sovereign antidote, which it affords to superstition and false religion' ('Of Suicide', 577). For Hume, superstition has exhibited a pervasive (negative) influence on human affairs throughout history, and it seems ineradicable through other means ('Of Suicide', 577–9). 'But when sound philosophy has once gained possession of the mind', Hume insists, 'superstition is effectually excluded' ('Of Suicide', 579). Hume admits that passions can be 'founded on' certain assumptions, and can be reasonable or unreasonable in a derivative way (depending on whether those assumptions are true or false) (T 2.3.3.6 [SBN 416]). Indeed, he devotes an entire section of the *Treatise* to examining the role of belief in influencing passion (T 1.3.10, 'Of the Influence of Belief'; Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*', 157–66). So, true philosophical reflection – which Hume suggests, though does not specify, can be occasioned by philosophical dialogues such as Cicero's *De Divinatione* ('Of Suicide', 579) – eradicates the influence of superstition by methodizing and correcting our pre-theoretical beliefs: '[S]uperstition, being founded on false opinion, must immediately vanish, when true philosophy has inspired juster sentiments of superior powers' ('Of Suicide', 579). By freeing us from false beliefs about the gods, true philosophy moderates those violent passions (e.g. of fear and hatred), which rely upon those beliefs and which, in turn, motivate vicious behaviour (e.g. religious persecution and fanaticism).[12]

Other modes of philosophical reflection also cultivate and maintain virtue. Stoic (and Epicurean) principles, Hume allows, 'have an effect on conduct and behaviour' (EHU 12.2.23 [SBN 160]). Here, I take it, Hume has in mind the sorts of pithy, rhetorically striking philosophical principles and maxims that he outlines and recommends in 'The Sceptic', footnote 17. On the one hand, these reflections – and others, from, e.g. Plutarch, Cicero, and Seneca – engage the passions. On the other hand, meditating on, and thinking through, such reflections is continuous with the sort of reflection Hume describes in 'Of Suicide'. Such reflections provide an occasion for methodizing and correcting one's pre-theoretical beliefs about, e.g. the value of certain goods. They offer new ways of understanding one's relation to the world and the options one faces in one's particular

[12]Elsewhere, Hume offers his own essays (including his essays on the original contract and passive obedience) as efforts to moderate the violent passions manifest in Tory/Whig political disputes. Cf. 'On the Coalition of Parties', 494 and 'That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science', 27. See Immerwahr, 'Anatomist and the Painter', 11; and Immerwahr, 'Hume on Tranquillizing the Passions', 299–302, 306.

circumstances.[13] By studying, weighing, and committing such maxims to memory ('Sceptic', 177n17), and by refining his views over time, the true philosopher develops and maintains a tempered, moderated perspective conducive to virtue.

In emphasizing the value of ongoing philosophical reflection for cultivating and maintaining virtue, Hume does not claim that such reflection is sufficient for these ends. Like the ancient philosophical schools that accept the reflection and supremacy theses, Hume is fully aware of the accompanying value of *habituation* for virtue. Thus, through sheer practice, one can develop character-traits that philosophical reflection indicates are best, and correct one's character ('Sceptic', 170–1). Moreover, Hume notes the primary importance of 'the virtuous education of youth, the effect of wise laws and institutions' ('Of Parties in General', 55). Indeed, such early habituation makes it possible for one to benefit from philosophical reflection. For those whose passions are already tolerably well-ordered (and who are thus basically well-motivated), philosophical reflection can 'fortify that temper, and furnish it with views, by which it may entertain and nourish itself' ('Sceptic', 177n17). Thus, philosophical reflection cultivates *excellence* in those who have at least attained *decency* through a good upbringing and who, when persuaded that virtue is necessary for happiness, have motivation to become better people.[14] Further, such ongoing reflection *sustains* virtue by keeping in check one's tendencies towards violent passions, passions to which even the best human beings are prone (see, e.g. 'Sceptic', 179n17). For Hume, 'habit and study', at best, work together ('Sceptic', 179n17).

Still, Hume denies that means *other than* ongoing philosophical reflection suffice for cultivating and sustaining virtue. And so, he denies that a reliably virtuous agent can do without philosophical reflection. Thus, (i) in an early letter, Hume claims a 'pastoral and Saturnal happiness'. He writes, 'This Greatness and Elevation of Soul is to be found only in Study & contemplation, this can alone teach us to look down upon upon [sic] humane Accidents' (4 July 1727; *Letters* I:10). (ii) Later, after his breakdown, Hume recognizes the limitations of philosophical reflection in self-improvement. In a letter to a physician, Hume concedes that he pursued such philosophical therapy in the wrong way (viz., excessively, in solitude). Nevertheless, Hume explicitly *grants* the value of broadly Stoic philosophical reflections against death, poverty, shame, and pain: 'These no doubt are exceedingly useful, when joined with an active life, because the occasion being presented along with the reflection, works it into the soul, and makes it take a deep impression' (March or April 1734; *Letters*

[13]Such reflections, presumably, 'suggest particular views, and considerations, and circumstances, which otherwise would have escaped us; and, by that means … either moderate or excite any particular passion' ('Sceptic', 172).

[14]Martin ('Hume as Classical Moralist', 330) compares Hume's view on the role of philosophical education in cultivating virtue to Aristotle's.

I:14). (iii) In his mature work, Hume claims that 'easy' philosophical works 'send back the student among mankind full of noble sentiments and wise precepts, applicable to every exigence of human life'. To cultivate 'the most perfect character', Hume suggests, 'nothing can be so useful' (EHU 1.4 [SBN 8]). Thus, ongoing reflection would appear to be, at least *practically* speaking, necessary for cultivating and preserving virtue. On all these grounds, one can attribute the Stoic's reflection thesis to Hume himself.

Given Hume's acceptance of the reflection thesis, in conjunction with Hume's earlier acceptance of the Stoic's virtue-eudaimonism, it is reasonable also to attribute to Hume some version of the Stoic's supremacy thesis as well. For Hume, as for the Stoic, one who guides his character and action in, and through, ongoing philosophical reflection – i.e. the true philosopher – leads the happiest life. For Hume, as for the Stoic, the philosopher Cleanthes is a model of happiness (EPM 9.1.2 [SBN 269–70]).[15]

III

If Hume's Stoic believes that the true philosopher is exemplary, not only in his virtue and wisdom, but in his happiness (the supremacy thesis), Hume's Sceptic holds that only a philosopher could believe such a thing. The Sceptic maintains that philosophers are disposed to one distinct intellectual vice: 'They confine too much their principles, and make no account of that vast variety, which nature has so much affected in all her operations' ('Sceptic', 159). For Hume's Sceptic, this tendency of philosophers reveals itself especially in their self-understanding. On the Sceptic's view, philosophers are disposed to think that the philosophical life guided by ongoing reflection is uniquely happy:

> [T]hey are led astray, not only by the narrowness of their understandings, but by that also of their passions. Almost every one has a dominant inclination, to which his other desires and affections submit, and which governs him … through the course of his life. It is difficult for him to apprehend, that any thing, which appears totally indifferent to him, can ever give enjoyment to any person, or can possess charms, which altogether escape his observation. His own pursuits are always, in his account, the most engaging: The objects of his passion, the most valuable: And the road, which he pursues, the only one that leads to happiness.
>
> ('Sceptic', 160)

[15] I have focused on philosophical reflection's instrumental role in cultivating and maintaining essential components of happiness, viz., the virtues. Hume presumably thinks that philosophical reflection also contributes constitutively to happiness, e.g. as a way of exercising intellectual virtues: see, e.g. EHU 1.6 [SBN 8–9]); EPM Appendix IV. Still, I suggest, one can uphold the supremacy thesis even if one attributes instrumental value alone to philosophical reflection.

Given their ruling passion for philosophical activity, philosophers overlook (i) the range of other lives that human beings can live and (ii) the respective happiness that those lives can provide those who live them.[16] According to Hume's Sceptic, philosophers reveal a self-imposed blindness, for experience brings to light a *plurality* of happy lives, each of potentially equal value and happiness:

> Do they [i.e., philosophers] not see the vast variety of inclinations and pursuits among their own species, where each man seems fully satisfied with his own course of life, and would esteem it the greatest unhappiness to be confined to that of his neighbour?
>
> ('Sceptic', 160)

To be sure, the Sceptic grants that a broadly virtuous life is happiest for all ('Sceptic', 168). Still, the Sceptic denies that anything as determinate as a philosophical life can be happiest for all. Philosophers forget that, among human beings, 'there is a considerable diversity in the sentiments of beauty and worth, and that education, custom, prejudice, caprice, and humour, frequently vary our taste of this kind' ('Sceptic', 163).[17]

Thus, Hume's Sceptic rejects the supremacy thesis as an absurd, overly narrow view, and he criticizes what he sees as a common tendency of the ancient philosophical schools to accept the thesis. Against the supremacy thesis, the Sceptic proposes *the plurality thesis*, viz., that there exists a vast range of happy lives, each of potentially equal value and happiness. But in criticizing philosophers for parochialism, the Sceptic singles out the Stoic, for the Stoic adheres especially strongly to the reflection thesis. The Stoic, after all, believes that 'art and industry' – i.e. ongoing, disciplined philosophical reflection – are of paramount importance for securing the goods of virtue and happiness. To be sure, the Sceptic grudgingly admits that philosophical reflection *can* influence the passions, at least to some limited extent. Reflection on the shortness of life and uncertainty of life can 'mortify the passions'; reflection on the superiority of one's own (humble) position in relation to that of one's inferiors can conduce to one's tranquility ('Sceptic', 176–7). The Sceptic also identifies, throughout his essay, mechanisms by which reflection can modify the passions.

Yet the Sceptic insists that, on the whole, philosophical reflection's influence on passion is restricted and lacking the special efficacy that the Stoic claims for it. First, the Stoic, dazzled by the power of art and industry in other domains of human life, overlooks the general recalcitrance of our passions and sentiments to the influence of philosophical reflection. Reflection

[16]Cf. the Platonist's criticism of the Stoic and the Epicurean ('Platonist', 155–6).

[17]Heydt ('Relations of Literary Form', 11) suggests that Montaigne's 'On Experience' influences the Sceptic's view. Heydt identifies the other philosophical schools' ignorance of human diversity as the Sceptic's main objection to them (Heydt, 'Relations of Literary Form', 18n48).

can have no 'great influence' on character and action ('Sceptic', 171); rather, 'mankind are almost entirely guided by constitution and temper', over which reflections 'have little influence' ('Sceptic', 169). Second, to the extent that the Stoic's philosophical therapy *does* succeed, the Sceptic maintains, it will drive out the good with the bad. The philosopher's 'refined reflections', the Sceptic holds, 'cannot diminish or extinguish our vicious passions, without diminishing or extinguishing such as are virtuous, and rendering the mind totally indifferent and unactive' ('Sceptic', 173).

I take Hume himself to agree with the Sceptic about (i) the Stoic's overvaluation of philosophical reflection's efficacy as a means towards cultivating virtue and (ii) the tendency of philosophers, and especially Stoics, to overlook what is potentially good in non-philosophical lives. First, Hume agrees with the Sceptic that the powers of philosophical reflection are limited. While philosophy may be good against superstition, it fares less well against other violent passions, e.g. love, anger, ambition, and avarice, 'which the soundest reason is scarce ever able fully to correct' ('Of Suicide', 579).

Second, Hume agrees with the Sceptic that, to whatever extent philosophical reflection is effective, the Stoic's reliance on it is at risk of driving out virtue:

> The *Stoics* were remarkable for this Folly among the Antients; and I wish some of more venerable Characters in latter Times had not copy'd them too faithfully in this Particular. The virtuous and tender Sentiments, or Prejudices, if you will, have suffer'd mightily by these Reflections; while a certain sullen Pride or Contempt of Mankind has prevail'd in their Stead, and has been esteem'd the greatest Wisdom; tho', in Reality, it be the most egregious Folly of all others.
> ('Of Moral Prejudices', 539)

Hume believes that Stoic reflection not only can fail to promote virtue, but it can generate a haughty sense of one's superiority to other mortals. On this basis, Hume explicitly criticizes the thinking of Epictetus and other Stoics as 'only a more refined system of selfishness'. Stoic reflections on the impermanence of human affairs, wealth, and honours, Hume writes, are prone to flatter 'our natural indolence' and mask a simple hatred of 'the bustle of the world' (EHU 5.1.1 [SBN 40–1]). And so, Hume criticizes ancient Stoics for their 'magnificent professions and slender performances' of virtue (EPM 6.1.21 [SBN 242]).[18]

IV

Hume, then, appears to be caught in a dilemma. Hume accepts the Stoic's view that the true philosopher's life is happiest (the supremacy thesis).

[18]Cf. 'Epicurean', 139–41; 'Platonist', 156–7.

Yet it is unclear how Hume can also accept the Sceptic's claim that there exists a vast range of happy lives, each of potentially equal value and happiness (the plurality thesis). And vice versa.

Hume has the resources to escape this dilemma. Scholars accept that Hume's model in writing the essays is Cicero's *De Finibus*, in which representatives of the Epicurean, Stoic, and Sceptic schools present speeches that articulate their accounts of the human good (Heydt, 'Relations of Literary Form', 18; Immerwahr, 'Hume's Essays on Happiness', 309). The weaknesses of each account come to light as the speeches progress, and Cicero's final position departs from the view of each school, rejecting their errors, but seeking to incorporate what is right in each. Hume, I suggest, proceeds in a similar fashion. *On the one hand*, like the Sceptic, Hume accepts that the happiest life can be realized in multiple ways and that the happiest life need not be narrowly philosophical. In some (qualified) sense, non-philosophical lives can be among the happiest. Hence, Hume accepts *some* version of the plurality thesis. But unlike the Sceptic, Hume denies that the plurality thesis requires him to reject the supremacy thesis. For he thinks that the life of the true philosopher can be construed in a broader manner than the Sceptic's criticisms assume. *On the other hand*, like the Stoic, Hume accepts some form of the supremacy thesis. But Hume rejects the Stoic's tendency to overvalue the efficacy of philosophical reflection in influencing passion and to ignore the possibility that lives that are, at least in some sense and under some description, non-philosophical, can count among the happiest lives. Hume's considered view, then, is a measured position that seeks to do justice to both sides of the Stoic/Sceptic dispute.

First, despite his agreement with the Sceptic on various points, Hume ultimately does not join the Sceptic all the way. To be sure, in 'Of Suicide', Hume accepts the Sceptic's worries about the limitations of philosophical reflection in moderating violent passions such as anger, ambition, etc. (579). Yet unlike the Sceptic, Hume never actually *rejects* the Stoic's reflection thesis. While Hume insists that the 'soundest reason is scare ever able *fully to correct*' excessive passions (my emphasis), Hume leaves open the possibility that ongoing reflection can moderate these passions at least partly and to a beneficial extent. And while Hume says that true philosophy's triumph over superstition is '*more compleat* than over most of the vices and imperfections, incident in human nature' (my emphasis), Hume recognizes philosophy's important contribution towards overcoming our other vices as well.

Further, in the longest passage from the four essays on happiness where Hume writes *in propria persona* (viz., footnote 17 of 'The Sceptic'), Hume expresses his basic agreement with the Stoic's reflection thesis. Indeed, he takes it upon himself explicitly *to respond* to the Sceptic's rejection of the thesis. According to Hume, the Sceptic 'carries the matter too far' in restricting philosophical reflection's efficacy in influencing the passions. On the contrary, Hume indicates that there exist a great many reflections (of a broadly Stoic variety) 'whose truth is undeniable, and whose

natural tendency is to tranquilize and soften all the passions'. Thus, Hume thinks that philosophical reflection can play a 'considerable' role in shaping our characters, thereby contributing to our virtue and happiness.[19]

Like the Sceptic, Hume denies that philosophical reflection, by itself, can *instil virtues* in those altogether lacking even basic decency. Unlike the Sceptic, Hume denies that one should abandon the reflection thesis, even if the powers of such reflection are limited: 'Despise not these helps; but confide not too much in them neither; unless nature has been favourable in the temper, with which she has endowed you'. In short, Hume agrees with the Sceptic that Stoics overestimate the efficacy of philosophical reflection and that this Stoic tendency must be moderated. Yet Hume accepts that Stoics are right to affirm (and Sceptics are wrong to deny) that such reflection is at least *sufficiently efficacious* as to be practically necessary to cultivate and nourish virtue – and, by extension, the happy life.[20]

Although Hume also agrees with the Sceptic that philosophical reflection can impede virtue, and although Hume joins the Sceptic in criticizing the ancient Stoics on this score, Hume nevertheless parts company with the Sceptic in important ways. For Hume thinks that neither all Stoics, nor Stoicism as a general approach to the pursuit of happiness, are subject to these Sceptical criticisms. Thus, in 'The Stoic', Hume presents us with a refined Stoic whose reasonings do not eliminate his compassion for others:

> But does the sage always preserve himself in this philosophical indifference, and rest contented with lamenting the miseries of mankind, without ever employing himself for their relief? Does he constantly indulge this severe wisdom, which, by pretending to elevate him above human accidents, does in reality harden his heart, and render him careless of the interests of mankind, and of society? No; he knows that in this sullen *Apathy*, neither true wisdom nor true happiness can be found. He feels too strongly the charm of the social affections ever to counteract so sweet, so natural, so virtuous a propensity.
>
> ('Stoic', 151)

Hence, while Hume thinks that one may rightly criticize *certain* Stoics for cold-heartedness and self-absorption, he denies that such criticisms are

[19]Cf. Hume's measured remarks on philosophical reflection in his letter to a physician: while Hume recognizes that such reflection 'in solitude' can be debilitating, he also insists that it can benefit one when pursued as part of an active life. Cf. Hume's praise of the mixed life, which grants a key place to action (EHU 1.6 [SBN 8–9]). Moreover, Hume identifies his Stoic as 'the man of action and virtue' ('Stoic', 146n1). For Hume, then, Stoicism is most charitably construed as an approach to happiness that incorporates an active life.

[20]I agree with Immerwahr ('Hume's Essays on Happiness', 316) that Hume's view of philosophy's efficacy belongs 'midway between the pessimism of the Epicurean and the Sceptic, and the optimism of the Platonist and the Stoic'. That Hume's considered view unites aspects of the Stoic's and the Sceptic's, cf. Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, 170.

applicable to Stoicism generally, and especially to Stoicism in its best formulation. On the contrary, when Hume presents a Stoic 'bathed in tears' ('Stoic', 151), he indicates that Stoicism is best understood not as promoting an ideal of *apatheia*, but rather, as seeking to moderate violent passions so that virtuous, sympathetic passions can exert motivational force. Hume's Stoic – and, by extension, Hume himself – sketches a possible way of living as a Stoic that pre-emptively responds to the Sceptic's later attack. Indeed, if one reads Hume as a simple anti-Stoic in ethics (on the basis of his critical remarks about Epictetus and the like), one overlooks the influence of eclectic (and moderate) strains of Stoicism on Hume's thinking. Again, as Potkay notes, instead of seeking to *extirpate* the passions, the Stoicism of Panaetius, with which Hume was familiar, seeks only to *temper* the potentially destructive passions of citizens *qua* citizens, e.g. ambition, military courage, and the love of fame (Potkay, *Passion for Happiness*, 78).[21]

I now examine more specifically how Hume can reconcile his commitment to the supremacy thesis with his acceptance of the plurality thesis. Here, I consider Hume's remarks on the goals of his philosophical writing and its intended audiences. In the opening to the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume distinguishes two kinds of philosophical writing, 'each of which has its peculiar merit, and may contribute to the entertainment, instruction, and reformation of mankind' (EHU 1.1 [SBN 5]). Hume calls the first variety of philosophical writing 'easy', the latter 'abstract', 'accurate', and 'abstruse'. Roughly speaking, Hume draws a distinction between (i) belletristic works meant for a general readership and (ii) theoretical works intended for scholars.

Hume warns that the abstruse philosopher is at risk for developing tendencies towards false philosophy by living 'remote from communication with mankind, and [by getting] wrapped up in principles and notions equally remote from their comprehension' (EHU 1.5 [SBN 8]). Conversely, Hume warns that the man or woman of worldly affairs is equally at risk of falling victim to a kind of unthinking philistinism. Thus, Hume elsewhere bemoans the radical separation of the 'learned' from the 'conversible' world, which he calls 'the great Defect of the last Age' ('Of Essay-Writing', 534).

If ivory tower scholasticism and ignorant philistinism are the polar vices to be avoided, then

> [t]he most perfect character is supposed to lie between those extremes; retaining an equal ability and taste for books, company, and business; preserving in

[21]On Hume as an anti-Stoic Epicurean in ethics, see, e.g. Moore, 'Eclectic Stoic, the Mitigated Sceptic'. As Loptson ('Hume and Ancient Philosophy', 761–2) argues, however, the textual evidence for the Epicurean reading is slim. Yet given Hume's criticisms of Epictetus and company, Loptson (757–8) ultimately agrees that Hume is fundamentally an anti-Stoic in ethics.

> conversation that discernment and delicacy which arise from polite letters; and in business, that probity and accuracy which are the natural result of a just philosophy.
>
> (EHU 1.5 [SBN 8])

To cultivate this character, Hume recommends 'easy' philosophical works (EHU 1.5 [SBN 8]). Not only do such writings require no major sacrifice of time and effort to be understood and enjoyed, but they have a positive influence on the characters of their readers: given their eloquence, they 'send back the student among mankind full of noble sentiments and wise precepts, applicable to every exigence of human life' (EHU 1.5 [SBN 8]). In his own writing, then, and especially in the *Enquiries*, Hume suggests that he will attempt to write abstruse philosophy, but abstruse philosophy of a particular stripe. The hybrid form of writing that he adopts will have the pleasing literary qualities of the easy philosophy, just as it proceeds in an accurate manner, thus 'reconciling profound inquiry with clearness, truth with novelty' (EHU 1.17 [SBN 16]). In this way, Hume aspires to write philosophy that is accurate, but faithful to the impressions of common life; learned, but accessible to a wide readership.

Before continuing, I make two observations about the above passage concerning 'the most perfect character' and his philosophical reading. First, Hume's formulation may suggest that while the easy philosophy has a purely instrumental role in guiding conduct, abstruse philosophy is enjoyed for its own sake in eliciting understanding. Yet Hume is explicit in the opening lines of the first *Enquiry* that *both* species of philosophy can entertain, instruct, and inform mankind (EHU 1.1 [SBN 1]). While abstruse philosophy may not directly stir the emotions by 'painting' virtue in the mode of the easy philosophy, the clear 'anatomy' of human nature and happiness that it provides is no less useful.[22] Again, abstruse philosophy does not seek to instill good (or compassionate) motivation where it is altogether lacking; rather, its 'anatomy' of virtue and happiness provides agents a clearer view of the end that they already seek. Second, the 'most perfect character', who lies between the extremes of philistine ignorance and scholastic

[22]Elsewhere, Hume writes, '[T]he most abstract speculations concerning human nature, however cold and unentertaining, become subservient to *practical morality*; and may render this latter science more correct in its precepts, and more persuasive in its exhortations' (T, 3.3.6.6 [SBN 621]). On the continuity of Hume's thinking about ethics in the *Treatise* and the *Essays*, see Immerwahr, 'Anatomist and the Painter'. Hume also indicates the practical benefit of abstruse philosophy in a letter to Hutcheson (17 September 1739; *Letters* I:33): 'An Anatomist, however, can give very good Advice to a Painter or Statuary: And in like manner, I am perswaded, that a Metaphysician may be very helpful to a Moralist'. On Hume's anatomy/painting distinction, and how Hume's writing attempts to blur it, see Abramson, 'Hume's Distinction'.

withdrawal, can take more than one form. For instance, moving towards one pole, though not reaching the point of what one might call scholastic vice, the 'most perfect character$_1$' could be the abstruse philosopher who remains faithful to common life. Such a philosopher bears perhaps some resemblance to Hume himself (at least given Hume's description of himself and his aims in the *Enquiries*). Moving towards the other pole, though not reaching the point of vicious ignorance, the 'most perfect character$_2$' could include the man or woman of affairs with a special taste for easy philosophical works, yet receptive to the more difficult kinds of hybrid philosophical works that the Hume of the *Enquiries* aspires to compose.

Given Hume's remarks on (i) these two species of philosophy and (ii) 'the most perfect character', I propose that Hume allows one to be a true philosopher in two different paradigmatic ways (and in a range of different ways in between). The first way is through enjoyment of, and guidance by, abstruse philosophy (and accurate philosophy of Hume's hybrid style). The second way is through enjoyment of, and guidance by, easy philosophy (and accurate philosophy of Hume's hybrid style). Corresponding roughly to these two ways of being a true philosopher are two different forms of the (true) philosophical life. Those true philosophers with an inclination for abstruse philosophy live, at best, what one might call a *(narrow) true philosophical life*, whereas those with an inclination for easy philosophy live, at best, what one might call a *(broad) true philosophical life*.

To clarify this distinction between narrow and broad true philosophical lives, consider, by analogy, what it can mean to lead a 'religious life'. On the one hand, to lead a narrowly religious life (a religious life$_1$), one takes up monastic vows, pursues advanced training in systematic theology, adopts a clerical leadership role in a religious community, etc. To lead a narrowly religious life is to pursue religious activity as an organizing goal or ruling passion within one's life. On the other hand, to lead a broadly religious life (a religious life$_2$), one need not pursue religious activity in this focused manner. One can lead a broadly religious life while – and not necessarily in addition to – pursuing many different determinate ways of life that are reasonably describable as non-philosophical, e.g. the lives of a sea captain, a secretary, or the head of a salon. While living a religious life$_2$ usually requires some competence and understanding of the basic theology of the religion one lives – often assisted by theological reflection and scriptural exegesis pitched at a general level of accessibility – such a life need not require advanced expertise in, or a temperament for, the fine points of writing and interpreting works of systematic theology. Nevertheless, even if religious activity does not serve as the organizing principle or ruling passion of a religious life$_2$, religious activity still shapes the character of such a

life (and of the person who leads it). Such a life is, after all, *broadly* religious.[23]

By parity of reasoning, Hume can say that the (narrow) true philosophical $life_1$ – led by the 'most perfect $character_1$' – is pursued by orienting one's thought and action by abstruse (and hybrid) philosophical discourse. Abstruse philosophical reflection serves in such a life as a ruling passion or organizing principle. By contrast, the (broad) true philosophical $life_2$ – led by the 'most perfect $character_2$' – is pursued by orienting one's thought and action by easy (and hybrid) philosophical discourse. Here, some aim other than philosophical reflection serves as a ruling passion or organizing principle, but philosophical insight, obtained through reading and conversation, guides that life nonetheless. Both narrow and broad true philosophers value philosophical activity for itself and for its instrumental value in cultivating virtue. Yet while the true $philosopher_1$ organizes his life around the abstruse philosophical pursuits that constitute the ruling passion of that life (and which also inform it), the true $philosopher_2$ pursues a non-philosophical ruling passion (even while he guides his thought and action with philosophical works of a more accessible variety). Thus, philosophical reflection constitutes a less-than-ruling passion for the true $philosopher_2$, but it still constitutes an *important* or *guiding* passion. And insofar as philosophical reflection retains this status for the true $philosopher_2$, the (broad) true philosophical life is still recognizably a *philosophical* life.[24] Just as a (broad) religious life differs in kind from an atheist's, so too a (broad) true philosophical life differs in kind from a traditional way of life lacking, and unguided by, ongoing philosophical reflection.

Now, Hume allows that the population with a temperament for the (narrow) true philosophical life is apt to be small and self-selecting (EHU 1.10 [SBN 11]). Hume's point here is consistent with one that the Sceptic presses: any life centred on, and reciprocally guided by, abstruse philosophy will be suited, and will provide happiness, for only a special sub-population. And if the only available true philosophical life were the narrow one, Hume would presumably agree that the Stoic's supremacy thesis is absurd and worth rejecting. Yet in alluding to different modes of philosophical writing, which allow for different modes of ongoing philosophical reflection, and so, different ways of living philosophically, Hume suggests that the Sceptic's standpoint itself must be corrected. For the Sceptic overlooks other ways in which the philosophical life may be realized and lived. Not all philosophical lives must be narrowly philosophical, or the lives of true

[23]According to Hume, both philosophy and religion aim at 'the correction of our manners, and extirpation of our vices' (EHU 5.1.1 [SBN 40]; cf. 'A Dialogue' 53 [SBN 341–2]). For a similar point on different ways of living a religious life, see Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* 275.

[24]Contrast Aristotle. See Cooper, 'Contemplation and Happiness', 229n14.

philosophers$_1$. On the contrary, philosophical lives can be broadly philosophical, i.e. the lives of true philosophers$_2$.

If Hume allows that one can live as a true philosopher by leading the true philosophical life$_2$, then he can also insist that the Stoic's supremacy thesis – as a general claim – avoids the Sceptic's main worries. For one can lead the (broad) true philosophical life without having a ruling passion for philosophical reflection. Indeed, one can lead the true philosophical life *while* pursuing some other ruling passion having nothing to do with philosophical reflection, and *while* leading what is, under another description, a robustly non-philosophical life.[25] For instance, one can lead a (broad) true philosophical life while pursuing the life of a farmer, i.e. a life principally organized around agricultural activity.[26] While broadly and meaningfully philosophical, such a life is, in virtue of its dominant organizing principle, also meaningfully *non*-philosophical.

Therefore, Hume can say that the supremacy thesis need not imply that some narrowly specified philosophical way of life must be happiest for all people. Rather, for a life potentially to belong to the set of happiest lives, it suffices for that life to be at least broadly philosophical. Hume can go on to point out that the true philosophical life (at least in its broad form) is open to a wide range of people with a diversity of aims, inclinations, and temperaments – indeed, potentially to any literate human being. The true philosophical life need not be fit for, and appealing to, only a small sub-population.[27]

The Sceptic might reply that the supremacy thesis is still problematic, for even if the thesis allows (broad) true philosophical lives potentially to count as happiest, it still implausibly excludes too many ways of life from the (potentially) happiest set. For according to the supremacy thesis, lives that are not at least (broad) true philosophical lives cannot be among the happiest lives. Yet Hume can reply that (i) there are reasonable constraints or generic conditions that any particular candidate for the happiest way of life must fulfill, and that (ii) the Stoic offers good general reasons for thinking that devoting time and effort to philosophical reflection is one of these conditions. The Sceptic himself, after all, allows that for a life to belong to the happiest set, it must be virtuous ('Sceptic', 168). Yet the virtuous life need not be narrowly specified. Similarly, Hume can say, contrary to the

[25]As a figure, argued by Mossner to be Hume himself, writes, 'The same person, may, without any inconsistency, be considered in several different views' (quoted by Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 145).

[26]Roman Stoics, of the sort with whom Hume was familiar, argue that one can be a philosopher while pursuing a farmer's life. See, e.g. Epictetus's teacher, Musonius Rufus, Lecture 11 (translated in Lutz, *Musonius Rufus*). On the workman-philosopher, cf. Epictetus's remarks on Cleanthes, *Discourses* 3.26.23. Recall that Hume identifies Cleanthes as a model of virtue (EPM 9.1.2 [SBN 269–70]). I thank Brian E. Johnson for references.

[27]According to Livingston (*Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, 393), Hume is a pluralist about flourishing lives who, nevertheless, accepts generic constraints on flourishing. Yet Livingston appears to deny that philosophical reflection is one of those constraints. On my reading, by contrast, Hume insists that philosophical reflection is a requirement for flourishing.

Sceptic, the true philosophical life need not be narrowly specified. It can be broadly specified in a way that does justice to the Sceptic's insight about human diversity. Likewise, Hume can consistently deny that everyone should (i) adopt the end of health as a ruling passion and (ii) pursue a certain narrow form of the healthy life (e.g. by becoming a champion specimen of physical strength and functioning). Hume suggests that such a life would be choiceworthy, at best, only for someone of 'vigorous and florid health' (EHU 1.10 [SBN 11). Still, Hume can consistently, and plausibly, maintain that the good of health is a necessary component of, and requirement for, any life belonging to the happiest set.[28] For a life to belong to the happiest set, Hume can say, that life should be (at least) a (broadly) healthy one.

Hume's remarks (in *Treatise* 1.4) about the 'many honest gentlemen' of England pose a potential problem for my reading. Instead of pursuing philosophy, Hume says, such gentlemen 'do well to keep themselves in their present situation' (T 1.4.7.14 [SBN 272]). If such gentlemen leave their ordinary stations to set out on philosophy's high, stormy seas, they risk shipwreck on the rocks of false philosophy (see, e.g. T I.4.7.1 [SBN 263–4]). Hence, the philosophical life might appear *not* to be happiest for all.

In response, if one considers the distinction that I have drawn between the two kinds of true philosophical lives, then Hume's claim in *Treatise* 1.4 can be read in (at least) two ways. On the one hand, Hume might be saying that England's many honest gentlemen should not be refined into philosophers of the *narrow* variety. If so, the *Treatise* passage poses no inconsistency in principle with the supremacy thesis. For if England's many honest gentlemen should not be refined into true philosophers$_1$, they can still become true philosophers$_2$. On the other hand, Hume might be saying that England's many honest gentlemen should not be refined into philosophers of *any* variety. If so, two remarks are in order. (i) It is safe to say that Hume does not contend that ordinary people without any inclination towards philosophy (even of the easier, broadly accessible varieties) necessarily have *bad* characters. While Hume denies that such figures exemplify 'the most perfect character', honest non-philosophers can still exemplify a *decent* character: Hume calls them *honest gentlemen*, after all, and Hume's Stoic calls them 'polished citizens'. Accordingly, Hume should allow that they lead choiceworthy lives, if not necessarily lives of perfect happiness. (ii) If Hume really is saying that such honest gentlemen should not be refined even into true philosophers$_2$, one might understand his suggestion as one of circumstantial prudence. If these honest gentlemen are entrenched in their customary ways of life, it may well be too late for them to become true philosophers of even a broad variety. Yet if this is Hume's point, it is not necessarily a prescription for human beings in general.

[28]As Hume writes, 'Bad Health, be[sides other] Inconveniences, is the greatest Interruption to Study in the World' (*Letters* II:306).

V

In this paper, I have argued that Hume's 'Sceptical' pluralism about the character of the happiest life need not conflict with his 'Stoic' advocacy of the supreme happiness of the true philosopher, given Hume's flexible understanding of how one might live as a true philosopher. My paper has been brief, and it does not address all of the many controversies that concern the interpretation of Hume's ethics. By exploring Hume's views on Stoic and Sceptic conceptions of the good life, however, I have hoped to draw further attention to Hume's largely neglected essays on happiness, and to offer a plausible reading of Hume that will spark further discussion. More generally, in showing how Hume can reconcile both the Stoic and the Sceptical commitments of his ethics, I have sketched a Humean account of how the ancient conception of philosophy as a way of life remains a conception worth examining even today. Given perennial debates about the practical value of philosophy, Hume shows his continuing relevance.[29]

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