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# Hume’s Stoicism: Reflections on Happiness and the Value of Philosophy

**Abstract**: Philosophers have come to be accustomed to being queried as to the value of our discipline. Hume, too, grappled with these questions. In a collection of four essays, entitled ‘The Epicurean’, ‘The Stoic’, ‘The Platonist’, and ‘The Sceptic’, Hume discusses the nature of happiness. ‘The Sceptic’ closes by downplaying the value of philosophy, in particular its ability to meaningfully contribute to human happiness. Which of these four characters, if any, speak for Hume? In this paper, I will clarify the issue by comparing the four essays with Hume’s *Enquiries*, and I will find that his position is best expressed by the Stoic, as he contradicts the other three interlocutors on aspects of their primary theses—he disagrees with the conceptions of the happy life espoused by the Platonist and Epicurean, and he disagrees with the Sceptic and the Epicurean regarding the changeability of human nature. For Hume, the happy life is the virtuous and industrious one, and philosophy helps us to achieve this ideal by molding our passions and temperament.

**Keywords**: Hume; Eudaimonia; Passions; Skepticism; Stoicism; Epicureanism; Platonism.

## Introduction

Philosophers have come to be accustomed—inured, even—to being queried as to the value of our discipline. While one might think that this is a product of a certain feature of contemporary life—its focus on tangible output, perhaps, or its prioritization of STEM fields at the expense of the humanities—these attacks are not in fact new. While the façade might evolve, the underlying question remains the same: what good is philosophy? In a collection of four essays, entitled ‘The Epicurean’, ‘The Stoic’, ‘The Platonist’, and ‘The Sceptic’, Hume discusses the nature of happiness. ‘The Sceptic’ closes by downplaying the value of philosophy, in particular its ability to meaningfully contribute to human happiness.

Before we begin in earnest, what exactly is philosophy for Hume? First, note that the scope of what Hume includes under philosophy is far broader than contemporary conceptions thereof. Hume remarks: ‘philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected’ (EHU 12.25).[[1]](#endnote-1) Thus, philosophy is characterised more by a careful and systematic mode of thinking than it is by any sort of prescribed domain—systematic reasoning about the natural and social sciences, the humanities, art, and so forth would all count as philosophical in nature for Hume.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The four essays were published in the second volume of Hume’s *Essays, Moral and Political* in 1742, between the publication of the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) and the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748). Although Hume exhorts the reader in an Advertisement to the first volume of the *Essays* that they ‘not look for any Connexion among these Essays’, these four essays are obviously meant to be read together, as Hume indicates in the Advertisement to the second volume of the *Essays*, and also in a footnote at the beginning of the first essay of the four (‘The Epicurean’).[[3]](#endnote-3) As noted in the literature, Hume seems to have modelled the four essays on Cicero’s *De Finibus*, although he presents the discussion as a series of monologues, rather than a back-and-forth dialogue.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Which of the four characters speak for Hume, if any? Traditionally, the assumed view was that the Sceptic does, and this reading remains popular to this day, if not quite as ubiquitous.[[5]](#endnote-5) In more recent times, some commentators have argued that some other character speaks for Hume, or at least that the Sceptic is not the only character to do so;[[6]](#endnote-6) meanwhile, a handful of commentators have argued that none of the four characters speak for Hume.[[7]](#endnote-7) In this paper, I will clarify the issue by comparing the four essays with Hume’s *Enquiries*, and I will find that his position is best expressed by the Stoic, as he contradicts the other three interlocutors on aspects of their primary theses—he disagrees with the conceptions of the happy life espoused by the Platonist and Epicurean, and he disagrees with the Sceptic and the Epicurean regarding the changeability of human nature.[[8]](#endnote-8)

It has been argued that the form and style of the essays is significant.[[9]](#endnote-9) Indeed, the manner in which each essay is written mirrors the matter expressed within. ‘The Epicurean’, particularly as it reaches its crescendo, is dramatic and feverish, doubtless intended to mirror the fervency of the pursuit of natural desires.[[10]](#endnote-10) ‘The Stoic’ is steady and measured, as one might expect. ‘The Platonist’ takes on a high—some might say pompous—and judgmental voice, perhaps another of Hume’s digs against religion.[[11]](#endnote-11) Of the four, ‘The Sceptic’ is the most argument-oriented, and most closely resembles the philosophy contained in the *Treatise* and *Enquiries*.[[12]](#endnote-12) Nevertheless, while the form of the essays is doubtless important, no one will deny that the content is likewise significant, and it is the latter that is largely the focus of this paper.

## The Epicurean, the Stoic, and the Platonist

Hume begins with the Epicurean, or ‘the man of elegance and pleasure’ (EMPL 138). The Epicurean emphasizes the value of natural pleasures, while rejecting artifice. Pivotal to this worldview are two theses, one normative, and one descriptive. The descriptive thesis is that we *cannot* change human nature. The normative thesis is that we *should not* change human nature. Both are intertwined, for the Epicurean: we lack the ability to change our constitution, nor would such a thing be desirable, were it possible (EMPL 139).

Next is the Stoic, who is described as ‘the man of action and virtue’ (EMPL 146). He maintains that *industry* is a crucial component of happiness (EMPL 148). The Stoic accuses the Epicurean of falling into sloth and indolence.[[13]](#endnote-13) Since we have been endowed with intelligence, we are obliged to utilize this providential gift, and also to improve and perfect both our bodily and mental faculties. This is hard work, but the Stoic notes that a degree of effort is required for the enjoyment of any pursuit, pointing to the example of hunting (EMPL 149–150). This quite obviously mirrors Hume’s argument that curiosity requires a certain difficulty in the acquisition of truth to be properly stimulated (THN 2.3.10.3), as well as his comparison between philosophy and hunting (THN 2.3.10.8–10).[[14]](#endnote-14) To be happy is thus to be virtuous—if one seeks happiness, one ought to, with the utmost diligence, cultivate virtue in oneself (EMPL 149–150).[[15]](#endnote-15) He asks rhetorically of those who would be tempted by the Epicurean delights:

Compare, though but for once, the mind to the body, virtue to fortune, and glory to pleasure. You will then perceive the advantages of industry: You will then be sensible what are the proper objects of your industry. (EMPL 150)

However, the Stoic is not so naïve as to think that all will recognize the import of virtue: ‘[Nature] has provided virtue with the richest dowry; but being careful… has wisely provided, that this dowry can have no charms but in the eyes of those who are already transported with the love of virtue’ (EMPL 153).

The Platonist, described as ‘the man of contemplation, and *philosophical* devotion’ (EMPL 155), enjoys the least air-time of the four characters, likely because his view is furthest from Hume’s own.[[16]](#endnote-16) The Platonist condemns the Epicurean as unable to find lasting happiness from the pursuit of pleasure (EMPL 156). Meanwhile, the Platonist chastises the Stoic’s inward focus as ‘vain’ and ‘unprofitable’ (*ibid*.), and exhorts that we look outwards—or rather upwards—instead. For the Platonist, happiness derives from the contemplation and worship of the Supreme Being.

## The Sceptic

As has been pointed out in the literature, ‘The Sceptic’ is by some distance the longest of the four essays[[17]](#endnote-17)—indeed, about as lengthy as the previous three put together. And unlike the other three interlocutors, the Sceptic does not receive a pithy description. Perhaps this is because Hume sees her as offering only a negative argument against the other characters’ positions,[[18]](#endnote-18) rather than defending a positive view of her own on the ideal of the happy life.[[19]](#endnote-19)

The Sceptic declares that ‘there is nothing, in itself, valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed; but that these attributes arise from the particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection’ (EMPL 162). This is an unmistakably Humean principle. The Sceptic proceeds to suggest that beauty and deformity are akin to secondary qualities (EMPL 163), a thesis which is also instantly recognizable as falling under Hume’s brand. Indeed, Hume says as much in another essay in the same volume, ‘Of the Standard of Taste’ (EMPL 230).

The Sceptic goes on to note that ‘education, custom, prejudice, caprice, and humour’ will affect a person’s tastes. She claims that one ‘will never convince a man, who is not accustomed to ITALIAN music… that a SCOTCH tune is not preferable’, adding that one has ‘not even any single argument, beyond your own taste, which you can employ in your behalf’ (EMPL 163). But this ignores Hume’s careful work in ‘Of the Standard of Taste’ that explains the possibility of there being a standard for the arbitration of disagreements regarding matters of taste: it would be absurd to claim parity between Ogilby and Milton (EMPL 230–231).[[20]](#endnote-20) The Sceptic arrives at a lemma: ‘Objects have absolutely no worth or value in themselves. They derive their worth merely from the passion’ (EMPL 166).

Yet with respect to human happiness, not all passions are created equal. The factors that influence happiness are either a difference in the qualitative character of the passion, or a difference in the enjoyment of the passion.

For the former, passions that are neither ‘too violent nor too remiss’, that are ‘benign and social’ rather than ‘rough and fierce’, and that are ‘cheerful and gay’ rather than ‘gloomy and melancholy’, will promote happiness (EMPL 167).

Regarding the latter, salutary passions should ideally be ‘steady and constant’ (*ibid*.). In this respect, both philosophy and religion suffer: ‘*philosophical devotion*’ is ‘the transitory effect of high spirits’, while the ‘abstract, invisible’ notion of God ‘cannot long actuate the mind, or be of any moment in life’ (*ibid*.). Besides, the Sceptic repeats the Stoic’s point that our passions must also require some ‘application and attention’, likewise citing the examples of ‘gaming and hunting’ (*ibid*.). Moreover, passions that are directed inwards, such as the passion for learning, are more rewarding than those that pursue external objects, because the fulfillment of such passions is less subject to capricious fortune (EMPL 167–8). Finally, a strength of mind, ensuring that one is not overly disappointed by setbacks in the pursuit of one’s passions, is perhaps the most important factor (EMPL 168).

Having begun the essay on an ecumenical note, it is somewhat surprising that the Sceptic ends up endorsing a unique conception of the good life. She does so on the basis of the criterion just listed: ‘According to this short and imperfect sketch of human life, the happiest disposition of mind is the *virtuous*’ (EMPL 168).[[21]](#endnote-21) Virtuous passions are calm rather than violent (THN 2.3.3.8), nor are they negligent or remiss; they are also cheerful and sociable, insofar as virtues are useful and agreeable the self and to others (EPM 9.1). The virtuous disposition is steady and constant, and it requires application and effort. Virtues are mental qualities (EPM 9.1), and so a passion for virtue is necessarily directed inward. Finally, a virtuous disposition entails a strength of mind (EPM 6.15). Thus, the Sceptic fundamentally agrees with the Stoic that the life of virtue is the happy one.

However, she disagrees with respect to the prospects of cultivating such virtue for those not already predisposed towards it. The Sceptic here distinguishes between the vulgar and the wise, and points out the limitations of philosophy for both. She maintains that the vulgar are excluded wholesale from the province of philosophy and its supposed attendant benefits:

The fabric and constitution of our mind no more depends on our choice, than that of our body. The generality of men have not even the smallest notion, that any alteration in this respect can ever be desirable. As a stream necessarily follows the several inclinations of the ground, on which it runs; so are the ignorant and thoughtless part of mankind actuated by their natural propensities. Such are effectually excluded from all pretensions to philosophy, and the *medicine of the mind*, so much boasted. (EMPL 169)

This attitude is reminiscent of how Hume in the *Treatise* does not ‘pretend’ to ‘make philosophers’ of the ‘honest gentlemen’ of England (THN 1.4.7.14). But the wise are not much better off in this regard, having little capacity to attain virtue with which they are not naturally blessed:

But even upon the wise and thoughtful, nature has a prodigious influence; nor is it always in a man's power, by the utmost art and industry, to correct his temper, and attain that virtuous character, to which he aspires. The empire of philosophy extends over a few; and with regard to these too, her authority is very weak and limited. Men may well be sensible of the value of virtue, and may desire to attain it; but it is not always certain, that they will be successful in their wishes. (EMPL 168–169)

It is perhaps true that the wise might tend to be more virtuous. But we might ask on behalf of the Sceptic the extent to which this is merely a selection effect: the wise have an antecedent disposition to virtue and also to philosophy, and we cannot credit philosophy for their virtue, but must rather commend nature.

In general, humans are ‘almost entirely guided by constitution and temper’, and ‘general maxims have little influence, but so far as they affect our taste or sentiment’ (EMPL 169). Those who hold ‘no relish for virtue and humanity, no sympathy with his fellow-creatures, no desire of esteem and applause’ are ‘incurable, nor is there any remedy in philosophy’ for them (*ibid*.). This is evocative of Hume’s comments regarding the sensible knave, who cannot be convinced of the value of virtue (EPM 9.23). While akin to the Stoic’s concession that virtue has no value to those who do not antecedently love it (EMPL 153), the Sceptic goes further. The former leaves open the possibility that one might come to love and value virtue through philosophy, but the latter shuts this door.

Thus, like the Epicurean, the Sceptic agrees with the descriptive thesis that human nature is, if not immutable, then close to it. Yet she denies the normative thesis that we should not seek to change nature. If we could only modify our natures to one disposed to virtue, then happiness would be within our grasp: ‘No man would ever be unhappy, could he alter his feelings, PROTEUS-like’ (EMPL 168).

The Sceptic does grant a concession that although the maxims of philosophy have little direct effect, the study of philosophy might present more oblique advantages: ‘the chief benefit, which results from philosophy, arises in an indirect manner, and proceeds more from its secret, insensible influence, than from its immediate application’ (EMPL 170). She proclaims that ‘the chief triumph of art and philosophy’ is that ‘it insensibly refines the temper, and it points out to us those dispositions which we should endeavour to attain, by a constant *bent* of mind, and by repeated *habit*’ (EMPL 171). That is, philosophy primarily influences us in two ways. First, by softening and humanizing our temper; second, by identifying virtues (much like Hume himself does in his own moral philosophy, notably in the second *Enquiry*), which we should proceed to cultivate by means of education and habit.[[22]](#endnote-22) However, beyond this, the Sceptic ‘cannot acknowledge it to have great influence’ (*ibid*.). The attainment of these identified virtues depends on ‘conviction’ and ‘resolution’, which ‘never can have place, unless a man be, before-hand, tolerably virtuous’ (EMPL 171). Philosophy can only go so far—that is to say, not very far at all.

Without antecedently valuing virtue, the identification of the virtues does little to effect meaningful change. How then might philosophy nudge us towards a desire for the life of virtue? The Sceptic then notes that in general, philosophy might modulate certain passions by pointing out various circumstances attending the objects of our passions, such as their rarity. Perhaps this could apply to the virtues and vices as well, in order to make them more or less appealing. However, the Sceptic poses a dilemma: either the adduced circumstances are natural and obvious, or they are unnatural. If the former, philosophy is otiose: these views ‘would have occurred of themselves, without the assistance of philosophy’ (EMPL 172). If the latter, then the philosopher is akin to a man trying to cure himself of love by viewing the object of his ardour through a microscope as to highlight their flaws. In this case, philosophy is inert: ‘the reflections of philosophy are too subtile and distant to take place in common life, or eradicate any affection. The air is too fine to breathe in, where it is above the winds and clouds of the atmosphere’ (*ibid*.).

The Sceptic adduces a further concern regarding the capacity of philosophy to negatively impact our passions for vice. It might be thought that philosophy could identify circumstances surrounding the vices that render them *less* desirable. But this will not work, according to the Sceptic. Philosophy cannot eliminate our vicious passions without also eliminating our virtuous: ‘those refined reflections, which philosophy suggests to us… commonly… cannot diminish or extinguish our vicious passions, without diminishing or extinguishing such as are virtuous. In vain do we hope to direct their influence only to one side’ (EMPL 173).

Having discussed the practical impotency of philosophy in abstract terms, the Sceptic moves from the general to the particular. She discusses two specific philosophical considerations that are commonly proposed ‘in books of philosophy’ as able to effect change in our conduct (EMPL 176). First, reflections on the ‘shortness and uncertainty of life’, which make our projects appear mean and despicable (*ibid*.). Yet the dilemma earlier raised cannot be avoided, and such reasonings fall on the horn of contrivance: such reflections ‘counterwork the artifice of nature’ and so are to a degree unnatural (*ibid*.). Moreover, such reflections do not obviously engender virtue, and indeed might lead to ‘the flowery fields of indolence and pleasure’ (*ibid*.). Second, reflections derived from ‘a comparison of our own condition with the conditions of others’ (EMPL 177). We are naturally disposed to compare ourselves with our superiors, provoking pain and humility, but philosophy might correct this bias by urging us to also compare ourselves with our inferiors. Yet for those who are overly sympathetic, such a comparison might detract from rather than promote happiness.

The Sceptic concludes by floridly dismissing the role of philosophy in attaining happiness: ‘while we are reasoning concerning life, life is gone’ (EMPL 180). Her final suggestion is that the only reason to pursue philosophy is the enjoyment it engenders:

To reduce life to exact rule and method, is commonly a painful, oft a fruitless occupation: And is it not also a proof, that we overvalue the prize for which we contend? Even to reason so carefully concerning it, and to fix with accuracy its just idea, would be overvaluing it, were it not that, to some tempers, this occupation is one of the most amusing, in which life could possibly be employed. (EMPL 180)

This recollects Hume’s recovery from the spleen and indolence provoked by his skeptical crisis in THN 1.4.7, whereby he maintains that ‘the origin of [his] philosophy’ is that he fears being ‘a loser in point of pleasure’ (THN 1.4.7.12). But this is a dim view of the value of philosophy indeed. If this is true, philosophy is no better than backgammon. Unobjectionable at best; to each their own.

This is not quite the last word of the four essays, however. Hume inserts a number of footnotes where he seems to speak *in persona propria*. The first footnote, at the start of the Epicurean’s soliloquy, is a caveat that the four essays are not intended to exactly represent the corresponding ancient schools, but rather are meant to ‘deliver the sentiments of sects, that naturally form themselves in the world, and entertain different ideas of human life and happiness’ (EMPL 138). Another substantive footnote occurs in ‘The Sceptic’, where Hume makes explicit that beauty, deformity, vice, and virtue are secondary qualities.

But perhaps most intriguing is the final footnote near the end of the four essays. Here, Hume gently corrects the Sceptic’s limitation of philosophy’s avenues to effect behavioral change to only two (reflections on the shortness of life and interpersonal comparisons).[[23]](#endnote-23) Instead, Hume then lists twelve examples of philosophical reflections that can engender an improvement in our conduct. Here Hume clearly affirms a more sanguine view of the value of philosophy than the Sceptic does.

This footnote is significant in discerning the extent to which the Sceptic speaks—or does not speak—for Hume, and we will return to it near the end of the paper. Indeed, Martin cautiously suggests that we can see these footnotes as representing a fifth interlocutor in this series of monologues—that is, Hume himself.[[24]](#endnote-24) The Sceptic chides the earlier three commentators, but is herself corrected. She does not have the final word, which belongs to Hume. One might see the footnote as a result of an imperfect adherence to the Ciceronian model. As Walker has pointed out, on such a model, the dialogue writer looks to keep hidden so as to avoid becoming a dogmatic authority.[[25]](#endnote-25) Although the official structure of the four essays does not explicitly offer the writer a distinct and overriding voice, perhaps this footnote is an instance where Hume cannot resist saying his piece.

## Discerning Hume’s Position

Who, then, among the four interlocutors, speaks for Hume? Hume clearly agrees with the Sceptic on a variety of philosophical theses, but it would be too hasty to conclude that she speaks for him. For one, we have seen that the Epicurean and the Stoic also endorse Humean positions.[[26]](#endnote-26) Even the Platonist, in drawing a close analogy between beauty and virtue (EMPL 158), makes a uniquely Humean point.[[27]](#endnote-27) For another, it should not be forgotten that the Sceptic also *disagrees* with Hume on a number of points, notably in her *laissez faire* attitude towards disagreements regarding taste. And Hume’s corrective footnote to her discussion muddy the waters a great deal.

It will not be controversial to quickly rule out the Platonist as a viable candidate. Hume never meaningfully endorses the view that religious devotion is key to human happiness. This leaves us with the Epicurean, the Stoic, and the Sceptic.

Based on what we have seen of their positions in the previous discussion, we can compare their positions as follows. The Epicurean takes natural pleasures to be integral to happiness, and endorses the immutability of human nature. The Stoic takes industry and virtue—and particularly, industry as applied to virtue (that is, moral self-improvement)—as essential to human happiness.[[28]](#endnote-28) In this, the Stoic disagrees with the Epicurean that human nature is unchangeable. Fundamental to the Stoic’s worldview is that with effort and hard work, we can cultivate a virtuous disposition (EMPL 149–150). If the Epicurean were right that human nature is immutable, then the Stoic’s position would be untenable. Finally, the Sceptic agrees with the Stoic that virtue is key to human happiness, and Watkins argues that the Sceptic also agrees with the Stoic to some extent on the importance of industry to happiness;[[29]](#endnote-29) however, the Sceptic sides with the Epicurean on the issue of the immutability of human nature, taking particular issue with the capacity of philosophy to effect any meaningful change in our dispositions.

The Epicurean’s position is a relatively more plausible candidate for Hume’s own than the Platonist’s, at least: few will deny that natural pleasures can contribute to at least some extent to human happiness. But Hume surely finds that the Epicurean goes too far in this respect. On the contrary, Hume argues that happiness is best achieved by a capacity to resist immediate pleasures of the sort championed by the Epicurean:

All men, it is allowed, are equally desirous of happiness; but few are successful in the pursuit: One considerable cause is the want of STRENGTH of MIND, which might enable them to resist the temptation of present ease or pleasure, and carry them forward in the search of more distant profit and enjoyment. (EPM 6.15)

He continues in this vein:

A man of a strong and determined temper adheres tenaciously to his general resolutions, and is neither seduced by the allurements of pleasure, nor terrified by the menaces of pain; but keeps still in view those distant pursuits, by which he, at once, ensures his happiness and his honour. (EPM 6.15)

In this light, it seems unlikely that Hume would identify himself with the Epicurean.

This leaves us with the Stoic and the Sceptic. As Watkins points out, Hume repeatedly takes industry to be crucial to happiness. He says of a number of virtues that include industry: ‘can it be doubted… that the tendency of these qualities to promote the interest and happiness of their possessor, is the sole foundation of their merit?’ (EPM 9.12).[[30]](#endnote-30) And Hume takes industry to be of crucial importance to happiness in ‘Of the Refinement of the Arts’:[[31]](#endnote-31)

….labour itself is the chief ingredient of the felicity to which thou aspirest, and that every enjoyment soon becomes insipid and distasteful, when not acquired by fatigue and industry. (EMPL 149)

Moreover, as Watkins and Potkay note, industry is pleasing in itself:[[32]](#endnote-32)

In times when industry and the arts flourish, men are kept in perpetual occupation, and enjoy, as their reward, the occupation itself, as well as those pleasures which are the fruit of their labour. (EMPL 270)

Hume also clearly takes virtue to be essential to happiness. Walker points out that Hume takes virtue’s ‘sole purpose’ to be ‘to make her votaries and all mankind… cheerful and happy’ (EPM 9.15), and he hopes that his system ‘may help us to form a just notion of the *happiness*, as well as of the *dignity* of virtue’ (THN 3.3.6.6).[[33]](#endnote-33) Potkay likewise notes that Hume presents the virtuous life as the essentially happy one:[[34]](#endnote-34)

Inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct; these are circumstances very requisite to happiness, and will be cherished and cultivated by every honest man, who feels the importance of them. (EPM 9.23)

Thus, Hume agrees with both the Sceptic and the Stoic with regard to the importance of industry and virtue to human happiness.[[35]](#endnote-35) Which of the two speaks for Hume? Since they by and large share a conception of the good life as a virtuous one,[[36]](#endnote-36) we must look elsewhere to distinguish the two. The key disagreement between the Stoic and the Sceptic is with regard to the malleability of human nature: the Stoic believes that human nature is fundamentally mutable, and thus exhorts us to cultivate virtue; on the other hand, the Sceptic agrees with the Epicurean that human nature cannot be significantly molded, particularly by philosophy. In what remains of the paper, I will argue that Hume in the *Enquiries* clearly takes philosophy as capable of effecting meaningful change on human dispositions and temperaments. In this, he clearly disagrees with the Sceptic (and indeed, the Epicurean). Insofar as any character in the four essays represents Hume, it is the Stoic.

## The Value of Philosophy in Molding Human Nature in the *Enquiries*

As remarked, the main thrust of the Sceptic’s attack on the Stoic is against the notion that philosophy can effect meaningful change on our behavior. To contextualize her target, it is important to keep in view Hume’s discussion of the different species of philosophy in EHU 1. Hume distinguishes between the ‘easy and obvious’ philosophy, and the ‘accurate and abstruse’ philosophy (EHU 1.3).

Abramson argues that we can distinguish the easy philosophy from the abstruse along at least three dimensions: intended audiences, domain, and methods.[[37]](#endnote-37) First, abstruse philosophy is targeted at a narrow and recondite philosophical audience, while the easy philosophy aims at a less rarefied crowd. Second, the easy philosophy considers the practical and passionate aspects of human nature, while the abstruse philosophy regards the more theoretical aspects of human nature. As Hume puts it, the former ‘considers man chiefly as born for action; and as influenced in his measures by taste and sentiment; pursuing one object, and avoiding another, according to the light in which they present themselves’; the latter considers ‘man in the light of a reasonable rather than an active being, and endeavour to form his understanding more than cultivate his manners’ (EHU 1.1). Third, with regard to methods, the easy philosophy appeals to an eloquent and engaging style that draws deeply from common life:

…this species of philosophers paint [virtue] in the most amiable colours; borrowing all helps from poetry and eloquence, and treating their subject in an easy and obvious manner, and such as is best fitted to please the imagination, and engage the affections. They select the most striking observations and instances from common life; place opposite characters in a proper contrast; and alluring us into the paths of virtue by the views of glory and happiness, direct our steps in these paths by the soundest precepts and most illustrious examples. (EHU 1.1)

Meanwhile, the abstruse philosophy makes use of a ‘mental geography’ that delineates the faculties of the mind (EHU 1.13), alongside a systematizing methodology of reducing phenomena to ‘the secret springs and principles’ of the human mind (EHU 1.15).[[38]](#endnote-38)

The Sceptic’s target is, naturally, the easy philosophy. Her criticism is primarily directed at the Epicurean, the Stoic, and the Platonist, who are clearly engaging in the easy rather than the abstruse philosophy. First, with regard to audience, it seems quite obvious that the three interlocutors do not intend to limit their reach to an esoteric philosophical literati; their exhortations seem targeted at a broader audience. Second, these three interlocutors take as their topic the question of how we should live our lives. This certainly considers us ‘chiefly as born for action’ (EHU 1.1), and directs us as to what objects to pursue and avoid; in this, these three interlocutors clearly are concerned with the domain of the easy philosophy.

Finally, with regard to method, the three interlocutors also are clearly aligned with the easy philosophy. The Stoic certainly seeks to paint virtue ‘in the most amiable colours’, and make us ‘feel the difference between vice and virtue’, particularly in his closing passages (EHU 1.1). All three, but especially the Epicurean (particularly in his description of his mistress Cælia), borrow ‘all helps from poetry and eloquence’, and seek to ‘please the imagination, and engage the affections’ (*ibid*.). And by contrasting their positions with one another, all three ‘place opposite characters in a proper contrast’ (*ibid*.). Indeed, to abstract up a level, Hume himself is engaging in the easy and obvious philosophy in the four essays—he utilizes flowery language and eloquence, he contrasts opposite characters, and he discusses the question of what we ought to do to be happy.[[39]](#endnote-39) The Sceptic, in attacking the easy philosophy as impotent, attacks not only her three predecessors, but also the author himself. If she speaks for Hume, then the essay is a reflexive self-critique.

But the *Enquiry* surely disagrees with the Sceptic on the value of the easy philosophy, as it is fulsome in its praise of it. The easy philosophy is described as achieving ‘the most durable, as well as justest fame’ (EHU 1.4). It will be recommended by many ‘not only as more agreeable, but more useful’ than the accurate and abstruse philosophy, since it enters’ more into common life’, and reforms the conduct of its practitioners, bringing them ‘nearer to that model of perfection which it describes’ (EHU 1.3). Hume notes that ‘nothing can be more useful’ than the easy philosophy in diffusing and cultivating virtue (EHU 1.5). Moreover, Hume defends the accurate and abstruse philosophy partly on the basis of its instrumental use for the easy philosophy; the former is described as being in ‘subserviency’ to the latter, playing the anatomist to the latter’s painter: ‘accuracy is, in every case, advantageous to beauty, and just reasoning to delicate sentiment’ (EHU 1.8).[[40]](#endnote-40) Needless to say, that the abstruse philosophy aids the easy philosophy is only noteworthy if the latter has value. And indeed, Hume writes the *Enquiry* having enjoyed much success in trying his own hand at the easy philosophy in his essays. It is unsurprising that he would explicitly acknowledge the value of such an endeavor in his more mature *Enquiry*. The easy philosophy is valuable, and capable of cultivating virtue.

The reason that the Sceptic expresses pessimism regarding the capability of philosophy to effect behavioral change is because she thinks philosophy unable to meaningfully affect the passions. However, the *Enquiry* makes quite clear that philosophy can and does influence our passions. In this, EHU 5.1 is instructive:[[41]](#endnote-41)

THE passion for philosophy, like that for religion, seems liable to this inconvenience, that, though it aims at the correction of our manners, and extirpation of our vices, it may only serve, by imprudent management, to foster a predominant inclination, and push the mind, with more determined resolution, towards that side, which already *draws* too much, by the biass and propensity of the natural temper. (EHU 5.1)

Hume recognizes that the problem with a great portion of philosophy is not that it has too little effect on our passions, as the Sceptic maintains, but rather that it has too much effect in pushing us towards ‘the biass and propensity of the natural temper’. Crucially, this critique of philosophy extends to the easy philosophy, as he proceeds to illustrate with the example of the Stoics:

It is certain, that, while we aspire to the magnanimous firmness of the philosophic sage, and endeavour to confine our pleasures altogether within our own minds, we may, at last, render our philosophy like that of Epictetus, and other *Stoics*, only a more refined system of selfishness, and reason ourselves out of all virtue, as well as social enjoyment. While we study with attention the vanity of human life, and turn all our thoughts towards the empty and transitory nature of riches and honours, we are, perhaps, all the while, flattering our natural indolence, which, hating the bustle of the world, and drudgery of business, seeks a pretence of reason, to give itself a full and uncontrouled indulgence. (EHU 5.1)

The worry is that the Stoic philosophy, by stressing the emptiness of materialistic goods, inadvertently engenders ‘indolence’ and ‘indulgence’ in its practitioners. Intriguingly, this critique maps directly on to a note of caution voiced by the Sceptic: ‘such a reflection [on the shortness and uncertainty of life might] be employed with success by voluptuous reasoners, in order to lead us, from the paths of action and virtue, into the flowery fields of indolence and pleasure’ (EMPL 176). Such an explicit callback suggests that Hume wrote this passage with the four essays in view. Yet it is important to note that EHU 5.1 is not criticizing the *ideology* of Stoicism, but only some of its practitioners.[[42]](#endnote-42) In the same breath, Hume speaks admiringly of the ‘magnanimous firmness of the philosophic sage’. This follows from a more general principle: Hume is not claiming in EHU 5.1 that the easy philosophy should not be pursued (which would contradict his message in EHU 1), only that it can lead to pitfalls if improperly executed (as with all endeavors). But for all that, the point remains: the easy philosophy can certainly stir the passions, indeed to the point of being problematic.

Hume then identifies one exception that manages to avoid this problem insofar as it dissociates itself from the passions, and that is his own academical philosophy (with which he explicitly identifies at the concluding section of the *Enquiry*):

There is, however, one species of philosophy, which seems little liable to this inconvenience, and that because it strikes in with no disorderly passion of the human mind, nor can mingle itself with any natural affection or propensity; and that is the Academic or Sceptical philosophy... Nothing, therefore, can be more contrary than such a philosophy to the supine indolence of the mind, its rash arrogance, its lofty pretensions, and its superstitious credulity. Every passion is mortified by it, except the love of truth; and that passion never is, nor can be carried to too high a degree. (EHU 5.1)

But it seems that the philosophy of the *Enquiry* is not easy, but abstruse: after all, Hume begins this project with a defense of the abstruse philosophy.[[43]](#endnote-43) As such, the fact that it is less prone to stir the passions adds little succor to the Sceptic’s assault on the easy philosophy. And even then, Hume does note that the academical philosophy, while it mortifies every other passion, can indeed stir the passion of curiosity—that is, ‘the love of truth’.

To return to Stoicism for a moment, Hume of course does not mean to claim that all the Stoic’s principles have an effect on behavior, whether salubrious or pernicious. He notes in his discussion of free will that some of the Stoic’s teachings may be utterly inert, particularly the thesis that all apparent ills are in reality for the best (EHU 8.34):

But though this topic be specious and sublime, it was soon found in practice weak and ineffectual…. These enlarged views may, for a moment, please the imagination of a speculative man, who is placed in ease and security; but neither can they dwell with constancy on his mind, even though undisturbed by the emotions of pain or passion; much less can they maintain their ground, when attacked by such powerful antagonists. (EHU 8.34)

Importantly, Hume here does not endorse the claim that Stoicism cannot have an effect on human conduct, only that this particular Stoic thesis cannot. At the end of the *Enquiry*, Hume explicitly states that he considers Stoicism, as well as Epicureanism, to be capable of effecting long-lasting changes in our conduct: ‘A Stoic or Epicurean displays principles, which may not only be durable, but which have an effect on conduct and behaviour’ (EHU 12.23).

The second *Enquiry* similarly indicates that philosophy has the capacity to effect behavioral change:

The end of all moral speculations is to teach us our duty; and, by proper representations of the deformity of vice and beauty of virtue, beget correspondent habits, and engage us to avoid the one, and embrace the other. (EPM 1.7)

This does not in itself claim that ethical philosophy *does* have such an effect—it might be the case that it is fundamentally unable to achieve its stated aims, not unlike the plight of the ancient philosophy (THN 1.4.3.9). But if Hume really thought this, he would have had to concede that the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* fails to achieve its end. On the contrary, come the end of the work, he expresses optimism that his own philosophizing can precipitate such change:

We have the satisfaction to reflect, that we have advanced principles, which not only, it is hoped, will stand the test of reasoning and enquiry, but may contribute to the amendment of men's lives, and their improvement in morality and social virtue. (EPM 9.14)

While it is true that the sensible knave is irredeemable (EPM 9.23), this does not mean that philosophy cannot help the greater part of humanity. The sensible knave is a truly atypical case. Philosophy is of no use to such characters. But this does not mean that it is of no use *simpliciter*.

Of course, the philosophy contained in the second *Enquiry* might be characterized as abstruse rather than easy—although Abramson argues that this work in fact marries the two kinds of philosophy.[[44]](#endnote-44) But if even abstruse philosophy can change our conduct, then how much more so for the easy philosophy, given its many natural advantages in this respect? After all, the easy philosophy borrows help from ‘poetry and eloquence’, and treats its subject in a manner that ‘is best fitted to please the imagination, and engage the affections’ (EHU 1.1). On the whole, it seems the *Enquiries* are clear that both the easy and the abstruse philosophy are able to effect changes in our passions and our conduct.

## The Role of Philosophy in Cultivating Virtue

We have seen that Hume in the *Enquiries* thinks that philosophy, in particular the easy philosophy, can have a meaningful effect on motivation and action. But how is this possible, in light of the Sceptic’s argument? Recall a key pivot of the Sceptic’s argument: philosophy can effect change on us by adducing relevant circumstances attending virtue and vice, rendering them more or less desirable. In this regard, the Sceptic poses a dilemma: either the circumstances philosophy reveals are obvious, or they are unnatural; if the former, philosophy is otiose, and if the latter, philosophy is ineffective.

Here Hume’s final footnote to the Sceptic contains a reply in this regard. Here he gently chides the Sceptic for carrying ‘the matter too far’ in limiting the value of philosophical reflection to merely two (considering the brevity of life, and the circumstances of our inferiors), and proceeds to offer twelve other relevant considerations, which naturally ‘tranquillize and soften all the passions’ and exert a ‘thoughtful, gentle, and moderate’ influence on the temper (EMPL 177). He then concedes that:

These reflections are so obvious, that it is a wonder they occur not to every man: So convincing, that it is a wonder they persuade not every man. But perhaps they do occur to and persuade most men; when they consider human life, by a general and calm survey. (EMPL 179)

Thus, Hume falls on the first horn of the Sceptic’s dilemma. Little wonder, then, that he refers to this form of philosophy as ‘easy and obvious’ (EHU 1.1).

Yet Hume rejects the Sceptic’s implication that philosophy must therefore be redundant. For he continues:

But where any real, affecting incident happens; when passion is awakened, fancy agitated, example draws, and counsel urges; the philosopher is lost in the man, and he seeks in vain for that persuasion which before seemed so firm and unshaken. (EMPL 179)

Just because something is obvious under usual circumstances does not mean that it will continue to be thus under all lights. The purpose of philosophy, then, is to remind us of the (usually obvious) circumstances that render virtue desirable, even when we are overtaken by the passions. But this is not the only way in which philosophy can bear on our behavior. He continues:

What remedy for this inconvenience? Assist yourself by a frequent perusal of the entertaining moralists… Moral percepts, so couched, strike deep, and fortify the mind against the illusions of passions. But trust not altogether to external aid: By habit and study acquire that philosophical temper which both gives force to reflection, and by rendering a great part of your happiness independent, takes off the edge from all disorderly passions, and tranquillizes the mind. (EMPL 179)

In short, philosophy thus plays a dual role. First, as discussed above, it is a *panacea* for passionate infirmities: by reminding us of the value of virtue, it cures us of passionate disorder. Second, it is a *prophylactic* for passionate infirmities: by internalizing a philosophical temper, we grant ourselves a degree of immunity to the caprice of the passions in the first place. This latter effect on our temper even the Sceptic concedes is ‘the chief triumph of art and philosophy’ (EMPL 171).

With regard to the second effect of philosophy on our passions, it is perhaps striking that Hume opens his first volume of the *Essays* with his essay ‘Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion’, which might be seen as providing a backdrop to the four essays. This opening piece recommends we diminish the delicacy of our passions (that is, a propensity to be overly affected by the passions) precisely by engaging in philosophical study:

And this is a new reason for cultivating a relish in the liberal arts. Our judgment will strengthen by this exercise: 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. (EMPL 6)

Thus, we have seen that philosophical study has the power to moderate our temper, granting us a degree of resistance to the caprice of the passions. This points to Hume’s rejection of a conception of philosophy as falling solely under the province of reason. For Hume is clear that reason alone can only affect our passions insofar as it bears on beliefs associated with these passions (THN 2.3.3.6). This corresponds to the first effect of philosophy on our passions, whereby it points out various circumstances attending virtue and vice in order to nudge our passions one way or another. But philosophy can go beyond this limited role in influencing our passions. In stressing philosophy’s role in moderating our temper, Hume also reveals his conception of philosophy as not merely theoretical, but also practical. At the start of the paper, we saw that philosophy is not characterized by domain so much as it is by a systematic mode of cognition. For Hume, philosophy is not merely a subject or discipline to be abstractly studied, but it is in itself a kind of practice, a way of thinking in which to be immersed; such immersion will deliver not only theoretical but also practical wisdom. We do philosophy a disservice when we lose sight of this fact.

## Conclusion

We have seen that Hume agrees with both the Stoic and the Sceptic about the virtuous life being the happy one. Where Hume disagrees with the Sceptic is with regard to the capacity of philosophy to cultivate such virtue. Hume believes in the power of philosophy to cure us of passionate disorders and fortify our tempers against the violent storm of passions. Virtue is hard work. In this, Hume agrees with the Stoic: nothing worthwhile is easy, and what could be more worthwhile than happiness itself?[[45]](#endnote-45)

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1. In the references to Hume’s texts throughout, ‘THN’ refers to the *Treatise of Human Nature*, ‘EPM’ to the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ‘EHU’ to the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and ‘EMPL’ to *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*. Arabic numerals refer to section and paragraph numbers (EPM and EHU); or to book, part, section, and paragraph numbers (THN). EMPL numbers refer to pages in the Miller revised edition of the *Essays* (Liberty Fund Inc., 1985). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. In this, I am in agreement with Harris that Hume considered his *Essays* as no less philosophical than his *Treatise* and *Enquiries*; see James Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015)., p. 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. John Immerwahr, "Hume's Essays on Happiness," *Hume Studies* 15, no. 2 (1989)., p.308; James Harris, "Hume's Four Essays on Happiness and their Place in the Move from Morals to Politics," in *New Essays on David Hume*, ed. Emilio Mazza and Emanuele Ronchetti (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007)., p.223. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. See Immerwahr, "Hume's Essays on Happiness.", p.309; Colin Heydt, "Relations of Literary Form and Philosophical Purpose in Hume's Four Essays on Happiness," *Hume Studies* 33, no. 1 (2007)., p.7; Harris, "Hume's Four Essays on Happiness and their Place in the Move from Morals to Politics.", p.225; Jacob Sider Jost, "Hume's Four Philosophers: Recasting the *Treatise* *Of Human Nature*," *Modern Intellectual History* 6, no. 1 (2009)., p.12; Matther Walker, "Reconciling the Stoic and the Sceptic: Hume on Philosophy as a Way of Life and the Plurality of Happy Lives," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21, no. 5 (2013)., p.892; Amyas Merivale, *Hume on Art, Emotion, and Superstition: A Critical Study of the Four Dissertations* (New York: Routledge, 2019)., p.21; Kelly Martin, "Dialogue with a Skeptic: Hume's Fourth Essay on Happiness," (Unpublished Draft). Potkay sees these essays as more indebted to Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum*; see Adam Potkay, "Discursive and Philosophical Prose," in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature: Volume 3 (1660-1790)*, ed. David Hopkins and Charles Martindale, The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)., p.595. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. As Potkay, "Discursive and Philosophical Prose.", p.601 puts it, ‘readers have often equated “The Sceptic” with Hume himself’, although Potkay sees this as ‘incorrect’ (p.608). Fogelin takes the Sceptic to represent Hume ‘under the thinnest possible disguise’; see Robert Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985)., p.119. Similarly, Stewart says that ‘the author’s persona comes through as transparently [in ‘The Sceptic’] as it does in the character of Philo…’; see M.A. Stewart, "The Stoic Legacy in the Early Scottish Enlightenment," in *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquility: Epicurean and Stoic Themes in European Thought*, ed. Margaret J. Osler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)., p.278.

   This view dates back to Thomas Hill Green and Thomas Hodge Grose, "History of the Editions," in *Hume's Philosophical Works* (London: Longmans, 1875). Other proponents include Peter Jones, "'Art' and 'Moderation' in Hume's Essays," in *McGill Hume Studies*, ed. David Norton, Nicholas Capaldi, and Wade Robison (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1979).; Christopher Williams, *A Cultivated Reason: An Essay on Hume and Humeanism* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998)., p.85; Dale Dorsey, "Objectivity and Perfection in Hume's Hedonism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, no. 2 (2015)., p.249; Heydt, "Relations of Literary Form and Philosophical Purpose in Hume's Four Essays on Happiness.", p.17, ft.35; Harris, "Hume's Four Essays on Happiness and their Place in the Move from Morals to Politics."; Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*., pp.193–194; and Dennis Rasmussen, *The Infidel and the Professor: David Hume, Adam Smith, and the Friendship that Shaped Modern Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017)., p.27.

   Siebert largely agrees with this line; see D.T Siebert, *The Moral Animus of David Hume* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1990)., p.187. Siebert remarks that the role of the Sceptic is one ‘requiring little acting’ on Hume’s part (p.190), although he does note some complications. Jost, "Hume's Four Philosophers: Recasting the *Treatise* *Of Human Nature*." offers a similar view, taking the Sceptic’s view to be ‘closest to Hume’s’ (p.25), while maintaining that the Sceptic ultimately recognizes her own view to be flawed in some respects. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Potkay takes the Stoic to best represent Hume; see Adam Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000)., p.63. Watkins emphasizes Hume’s valuing of industry in the four essays, and in this aligns Hume’s position most closely to the Stoic’s; see Margaret Watkins, *The Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)., pp.96–104. That said, she recognizes that this endorsement of industry is a unifying theme in the four essays to some extent (p.101).

   Walker, "Reconciling the Stoic and the Sceptic: Hume on Philosophy as a Way of Life and the Plurality of Happy Lives." argues that Hume fundamentally agrees with the crucial theses of the Stoic and the Sceptic, and takes Hume’s position to be one that does justice to both (p.892), although he is cautious about claiming that either speaks directly for Hume (p.881). Similarly, Livingston argues that ‘Hume’s own view of human excellence is expressed in “The Stoic”’, although he takes the Sceptic to be responsible for disentangling the Stoic’s speech from ‘the false philosophy in which it is embedded’; see Donald Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)., p.138. Livingston goes on to suggest that Hume’s position is an amalgamation of the Stoic and the Sceptic: ‘Hume here appropriates and transforms the Skeptical and Stoical traditions, unifying them into a philosophical-historical image that governs his understanding of true philosophy as practical wisdom’ (p.170). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. For instance, see Immerwahr, "Hume's Essays on Happiness." and Martin, "Dialogue with a Skeptic: Hume's Fourth Essay on Happiness.". [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Immerwahr, "Hume's Essays on Happiness." compares the Essays with the *Treatise* in arguing that none of the four essays completely represent Hume. Jost, "Hume's Four Philosophers: Recasting the *Treatise* *Of Human Nature*." also compares the four essays with the *Treatise*, arguing that there is an epistemological continuity between the two. These comparisons raise interpretive points that are both excellent and orthogonal to my paper. In my view, Hume more directly speaks to value of philosophy in his later *Enquiries*. I explore the differences between Book 1 of the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry* is some detail in my Hsueh Qu, *Hume's Epistemological Evolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020)., including Hume’s differing aims and methodologies in both. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Immerwahr argues that the essays are written the way they are because their purpose is ‘therapeutic rather than analytic’; see Immerwahr, "Hume's Essays on Happiness.", p.308. Similarly, Heydt notes that the four essays ‘do *not* simply argue for one position over others’, but ‘also rely on the power of feeling and imagination to modify the reader’s outlook and to improve the reader’s understanding in service to moral ends’; see Heydt, "Relations of Literary Form and Philosophical Purpose in Hume's Four Essays on Happiness.", p.5. Jost and Potkay argue that Hume in these essays shows, rather than tells, his views; see Jost, "Hume's Four Philosophers: Recasting the *Treatise* *Of Human Nature*.", p.1 and Potkay, "Discursive and Philosophical Prose.", p.596. Nevertheless, while acknowledging this aspect of the essays, Martin, "Dialogue with a Skeptic: Hume's Fourth Essay on Happiness." cautions against sidelining the theoretical content contained within. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Graham characterises ‘The Epicurean’ as melodramatic and amateurish; see Roderick Graham, *The Great Infidel: A Life of David Hume* (East Lothian, Scotland: Tuckland Press, 2004)., p.169. However, Engström sees it as deliberately hyperbolic such as to ironically undermine the content of the message; see Timothy H. Engström, "Foundational Standards and Conversational Style: The Humean Essay as an Issue of Philosophical Genre," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 30, no. 2 (1997)., p.169. Jost sees Hume’s execution as successfully intending to highlight the role of vivacity; see Jost, "Hume's Four Philosophers: Recasting the *Treatise* *Of Human Nature*.", p.14. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Heydt takes it to be a failure of the essay that the Platonist portrays his opponents in a negative light rather than painting his own paradigm of happiness as desirable; see Heydt, "Relations of Literary Form and Philosophical Purpose in Hume's Four Essays on Happiness.", p.11. However, this might have been intentional; perhaps Hume wished to underscore what he took to be the judgmental attitudes of the religious. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. See Siebert, *The Moral Animus of David Hume*., p.190; Heydt, "Relations of Literary Form and Philosophical Purpose in Hume's Four Essays on Happiness.", p.12; Stewart, "The Stoic Legacy in the Early Scottish Enlightenment.", p.277; and Martin, "Dialogue with a Skeptic: Hume's Fourth Essay on Happiness.". Siebert sees it as most closely paralleling the second *Enquiry* in particular. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Watkins stresses this theme of the value of industry over indolence generally over the four essays; see Watkins, *The Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays*., pp.96–104. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Jost, "Hume's Four Philosophers: Recasting the *Treatise* *Of Human Nature*.", p.16. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Potkay, "Discursive and Philosophical Prose.", p.598. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Immerwahr, "Hume's Essays on Happiness.", p.313; Siebert, *The Moral Animus of David Hume*., p.189. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Siebert, *The Moral Animus of David Hume*., p.189; Heydt, "Relations of Literary Form and Philosophical Purpose in Hume's Four Essays on Happiness.", p.10. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Hume identifies the Epicurean, the Stoic, and the Platonist as male, but leaves open the Sceptic’s gender. I use female pronouns in this paper to refer to the Sceptic. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Heydt says: ‘The Sceptic defends no particular end for man’; see Heydt, "Relations of Literary Form and Philosophical Purpose in Hume's Four Essays on Happiness.", p.11. As we will see, this is not exactly correct—the Sceptic endorses a conception of the good life as a virtuous one, but does not think that we can bring about this end. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Watkins, *The Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays*., p.102. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Walker adroitly explores this tension in some detail in Walker, "Reconciling the Stoic and the Sceptic: Hume on Philosophy as a Way of Life and the Plurality of Happy Lives.". In this I disagree with Harris, who reads both Hume and the Sceptic as claiming: ‘There is no means for deciding what the best life for human beings is’; see Harris, "Hume's Four Essays on Happiness and their Place in the Move from Morals to Politics.", p.231. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. ‘Education’ refers to brute repetition (THN 1.3.9.19). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. A number of commentators see this footnote as Hume speaking *in propria persona* and challenging the Sceptic. See Immerwahr, "Hume's Essays on Happiness.", p.317; Siebert, *The Moral Animus of David Hume*., p.191; Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy*., p.169; Potkay, "Discursive and Philosophical Prose.", p.601; James Wiley, *Theory and Practice in the Philosophy of David Hume* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012)., p.121; Walker, "Reconciling the Stoic and the Sceptic: Hume on Philosophy as a Way of Life and the Plurality of Happy Lives.", pp.892–893; Watkins, *The Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays*., p.103; and Martin, "Dialogue with a Skeptic: Hume's Fourth Essay on Happiness.".

    For a contrary view, see Williams, *A Cultivated Reason: An Essay on Hume and Humeanism*., p.84, which takes the footnote as establishing ‘a bond of intimacy’ between Hume and the Sceptic, who is taken to speak for Hume. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Martin, "Dialogue with a Skeptic: Hume's Fourth Essay on Happiness.". [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Matther Walker, "Aristotle’s *Eudemus* and the Propaedeutic Use of the Dialogue Form," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (Forthcoming). As Walker points out, in *De Natura Deorum* 1.5, Cicero laments that ‘the authority of those who profess to teach is often a positive hindrance to those who learn’, and in *Tusculan Disputations* 5.11, he notes that his mode of dialogues allows him to ‘conceal [his] own private opinion’. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Jost, "Hume's Four Philosophers: Recasting the *Treatise* *Of Human Nature*.", p.16. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. E.g. EPM App. 1.21; more obliquely, THN 2.1.1.3’s reference to ‘beauty and deformity in action’ seems to refer to virtue and vice respectively. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Potkay, "Discursive and Philosophical Prose.", p.598. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Watkins, *The Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays*., p.98. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Watkins, *The Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays*., p.93. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Watkins, *The Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays*., p.97. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Watkins, *The Philosophical Progress of Hume's Essays*., p.94, Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume*., p.69. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Walker, "Reconciling the Stoic and the Sceptic: Hume on Philosophy as a Way of Life and the Plurality of Happy Lives.", p.882. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume*., p.70. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. As Garrett carefully points out, Hume also agrees with the Sceptic in her claims about the nature of value. See Don Garrett, "Finding the Value in Hume’s Human Animals," in *The Value of Humanity: A Re-evaluation*, ed. Nandi Theunissen and Sarah Buss (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021). [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. As noted by Livingston and Potkay; see Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy*., p.168 and Potkay, *The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume*., p.63. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Kate Abramson, "Sympathy and the Project of Hume's Second *Enquiry*," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 83, no. 1 (2001)., Kate Abramson, "Hume's Distinction between Philosophical Anatomy and Painting," *Philosophy Compass* 2, no. 5 (2007)., p.683. Abramson uses ‘perspectives’ rather than ‘domain’, and in the 2001 paper further discusses the dimensions of purposes and writing styles. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Qu, *Hume's Epistemological Evolution*., Ch.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Immerwahr, "Hume's Essays on Happiness.", p.318. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Hume draws the same analogy between the anatomist and the painter at the very conclusion of Book 3 of the *Treatise*, although he does not so clearly delineate the easy and abstruse philosophies, nor does he explicitly endorse the former. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. I discuss this passage in detail in my Hsueh Qu, "The Title Principle (or Lack Thereof) in the *Enquiry*," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2016). and Qu, *Hume's Epistemological Evolution*., pp.171–178. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Walker, "Reconciling the Stoic and the Sceptic: Hume on Philosophy as a Way of Life and the Plurality of Happy Lives.", pp.893–894. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Although Abramson suggests that the first *Enquiry* might marry the two forms of philosophy; see Kate Abramson, "Happy to unite, or not?," *Philosophy Compass* 1, no. 3 (2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Abramson, "Sympathy and the Project of Hume's Second *Enquiry*."; Abramson, "Happy to unite, or not?.", p.292. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. I am grateful to very detailed and helpful comments from Don Garrett and Matthew Walker, as well as from two anonymous referees for his journal, which improved the paper greatly. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)