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Introduction

Esther Engels Kroeker and Willem Lemmens

In 1751 David Hume published *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (EPM), in his own words "of all my writings, historical, philosophical or literary, incomparably the best" (E, xxxvi). With this favorite of his philosophical performances Hume "casted anew" the main ideas of Book 3 of his *Treatise of Human Nature*, "Of Morals," which a decade earlier did not receive the reception he had hoped for.[1] In an attempt to reach the intellectual and cultural elite of his days, in EPM Hume polished his philosophical style and assimilated his method of investigation, while remaining faithful to the core ideas of the *Treatise*.

Hume's EPM is a pivotal contribution to eighteenth-century British moral philosophy and one of the hallmarks of the Scottish Enlightenment overall. And yet, despite the flourishing of Hume scholarship in the twentieth century, for a long time readers were drawn predominantly toward Book 3 of the *Treatise* when trying to reconstruct and understand the gist of Hume's moral philosophy. It is only in recent years that the second *Enquiry*, as EPM is usually called, has started to receive among philosophers and historians of ideas the attention it deserves. This Critical Guide joins this evolution. It offers a series of in-depth reflections on the several parts of the book, in an attempt to better understand its guiding ideas and assess its lasting intellectual heritage. There are three reasons for which Hume was right, we think, to be proud of his performance which deserves, consequently, the attention of this Critical Guide.

First of all, EPM is exemplary of Hume's attempt to develop an open and eloquent style of philosophical reflection that meets a certain change in view on the best way of doing moral philosophy. As James Harris

[1] In a letter of November 1755 to Abbé Le Blanc, Hume calls his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* "my favorite Performance" (L I, 227). In "My Own Life," he remarks, referring to the *Treatise*, EPM is "another part of my treatise that I cast anew" (E, xxxvi).

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recently argued, with the abandonment of the project of the *Treatise*, Hume did not give up his ambition as a philosopher but rather became skeptical about the attempt to construct a grand philosophical system or a foundational new "science of human nature" (2015, p. 13). Philosophical analysis, so Hume realized after the rather modest reception of his *Treatise*, should be adapted to the subject treated: topical reflections on politics or economics do not ask for the same approach as anthropologically minded analyses of aesthetic taste, the passions, morality, or religion (to name but a few of the philosophical topics of interest to the more mature Hume). EPM, written in a period of great inspiration and energy, exemplifies exactly the sort of approach that fitted best, in Hume's eyes, a search for the "origins" of human morality.[2] While distancing himself from the psychologizing anatomy of morals in the *Treatise*, with EPM Hume offers both a descriptive and explanatory analysis of human morality as a social reality, embedded in practices, language use, history, and common experience.

In this spirit, the book addresses the refined reader and intellectual of eighteenth-century Scotland and Europe, steering a sort of middle course between philosophical explanation and literary evocation. Here then is Hume's answer to Francis Hutcheson, who had criticized his Book 3 of the *Treatise* for its lack of "warmth in the cause of virtue" (L I, 32). While Hume first thought that the philosophical "anatomist" could not easily be reconciled with the "painter" of morality, his EPM definitely exemplifies exactly an attempt at this reconciliation. In a sense, Hume tries to remain faithful to the core ideas and underlying principles of his naturalist philosophy developed in the *Treatise*. However, as several of the contributions in this Critical Guide explain, EPM also contains some remarkable and significant changes in comparison to Book 3 of the *Treatise*. There is, first of all, the famous substitution of the principle of sympathy by that of humanity, but also Hume's more nuanced account of the respective roles of sentiment and reason in moral evaluation, next to his somewhat different approach to the role of convention in the establishment of justice and political society. The distinction between artificial and natural virtues, central in the *Treatise*, remains absent in EPM. And, last but not least, EPM also offers, through the well-known denigration of the "monkish virtues," a straightforward and head-on attack on a religiously inspired account of human morality which in the *Treatise* is to be found only implicitly.

[2] For a recent account of the biographical context of EPM: Harris (2015), pp. 250–65.

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Here lies a second reason for which EPM deserves special attention and further study in this twenty-first century. Hume's moral tract is definitely an Enlightenment product, with a provocative and unorthodox agenda that was not misunderstood by his contemporaries. Critical voices like James Balfour, James Beattie, Alexander Gerard, and Bishop Robert Clayton were worried about its alleged relativism and hedonism, its disentanglement of religion and morality, its wide conception of the virtues, and its conventionalist theory of justice and political allegiance. Hume clearly wanted his EPM to be seen as radically innovative and challenging on all these points, as several contributions in this Guide highlight: the work marks a break with an austere ethics of self-denial and religious devotion or submission and offers a broadly humanistic, secularizing view on human morality. Without developing a truly normative ethics as such, with EPM Hume clearly propagates a view on human nature and sociability which exemplifies a typical Enlightenment confidence in the progress of society and a largely optimistic view of the moral capacities of human nature. In this perspective, Hume forms an unorthodox voice within the Scottish Enlightenment, where figures like Francis Hutcheson, Joseph Butler, Thomas Reid, and even Adam Smith remained closer to a religiously inspired account of morality, while nonetheless defending a progressist and moderately optimistic view on human nature and sociability.[3]

This brings us to a third motive underlying this Critical Guide. In contemporary moral philosophy, Hume is without doubt a master voice, recognized as the most important eighteenth-century philosopher writing in English. This influence stems, obviously, from his broadly naturalistic approach to human nature and at the same time from his secularizing and humanistic views on morals, politics, and the history of humankind. EPM mirrors this approach and thus reminds contemporary moral philosophy of its own philosophical and historical roots: the book offers a rich tableau of topics and philosophical puzzles that nowadays still dominate different debates in various branches of ethics. However, given its subtle and nuanced dialogue with the moral discourse of ancients like Cicero, Tacitus, and Plutarch, and his digressions on Hobbes and contemporaries like Montesquieu, in EPM Hume clearly develops a discourse that belongs to a divergent cultural context from the one we are living and thinking in. In this sense, a careful and critical reading of EPM might help us to appreciate why Hume, while being in a certain sense "one of us," is also

[3] For a synopsis of the most important first reactions, see the introduction to the Clarendon edition of EPM by Tom L. Beauchamp (1998), pp. lxiv–lxxx.

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a thinker of another era. As this Critical Guide hopes to show, we might still learn from this unique moral philosophical discourse and perhaps find inspiration in it to see some unexplored perspectives from which contemporary debates in different branches of ethics may profit.

This Critical Guide is composed along the broad argumentative lines and structure given by Hume to his second *Enquiry.* Several chapters of this volume consist of straightforward discussions of one or two sections of the book, while others cover more general topics discussed in several sections. Overall, the general topics and specific focus of each chapter reflect Hume's own sequence of topics.

In Chapter 1 Elizabeth S. Radcliffe examines how Hume manages, in Section 1 and Appendix 1 of EPM, to argue that the origin of morality is found in sentiment and at the same time that moral principles are universal and objective. She also wonders how Hume can reconcile his view that moral deliverances are truth-evaluable with his claim that morality is motivating. According to Radcliffe, universality is found in the source of moral distinctions, humanity, which yields consistent approvals and disapprovals, and not in self-interest. She also appeals to Hume's discussion of aesthetic evaluations in his two essays on taste to explain how he upholds his sentimentalism. She concludes that for Hume there are general principles of approbation and blame which are universal and objective in the sense that humans not perverted by extreme situations all approve of mental qualities that are useful or agreeable to themselves or to others.

Radcliffe then turns to an examination of how Hume's theory of motivation is compatible with his internalism, sentimentalism, and cognitivism. According to Hume, she argues, we form ideas of good, wrongness, etc., and since ideas are representations or cognitions, Hume's view is cognitivist. The source of motivation, Radcliffe writes, is not the representation, but the sentiment by which we form the representation. She ends by defending the claim that the sentiment of humanity is a nonmoral motive. She argues that despite what Hume explicitly writes, it should not be regarded as a virtue, but rather as a nonmoral good; a general instinct for human welfare, which motivates us to be sensitive to the interests of others, and which is the source of normative distinctions.

In Chapter 2, Willem Lemmens examines Hume's account of the relation between self-love and benevolence in Section 2 and Appendix 2 of EPM. In these sections Hume delivers an ingenious critique of the so-called selfish theories, exemplified by authors like Hobbes and Mandeville, and argues against these that the origin of morals derives from benevolence or an unselfish concern for others. Hume thus agrees with predecessors like

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Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Butler that people's spontaneous sociability forms the origin of morals. However, Lemmens shows that Hume also distances himself from these predecessors, whose views on human nature and morality, in sharp contrast with Hume's naturalism, still relied on a religiously inspired metaphysics. In so doing, Hume develops his own account of the role of self-love and benevolence in moral life, which brings him closer to the selfish theories than is sometimes recognized.

In the first part of the chapter, Lemmens elucidates Hume's definition of the concepts of benevolence and self-love and explains the difference between the sentiments of benevolence and humanity. He highlights how, in Hume's view, the virtue of benevolence belongs to a class of social virtues distinct from justice. In the second part, focusing on the example of Pericles on his deathbed, Lemmens shows how this case is illustrative of Hume's positive account of benevolence, but could also be interpreted as an instance of a reductionist suspicion concerning benevolence and the social virtues, in line with the selfish theories. In the third part, Lemmens reconstructs how Hume, by debunking the selfish theories, gives further evidence that benevolence forms an irreducible feature of human nature. The chapter concludes with some reflections on the unorthodox character of Hume's moral theory and his appraisal of a modified self-love as constitutive of the flourishing of the sense of humanity.

In Chapter 3 Ryan Patrick Hanley turns to the theory of justice Hume presents in Section 3 and Appendix 3 of EPM to explain how Hume shifts away from his earlier characterization of justice as an artificial virtue. His more mature account is still premised on the idea that human nature lacks an original motive to justice, but he now moves the focus to the issue of how justice may be most effectively realized in actual political conditions.

Hanley first examines Hume's foundational account of the origins of justice based on public utility. Hume frames his argument in terms of counterfactual situations in which justice is useless, and Hanley points out that although this approach entails important challenges, it allows Hume to present a positive account of the place of justice in actual society and political life. The approach to justice in EPM is thus much more contextual than in the *Treatise*. Hanley shows in the following sections that this allows Hume to remind his readers of the role of wise legislators and positive law in the establishment of a well-ordered political society and equally to demonstrate the shortcoming of political idealism or fanaticism. In the last part of his chapter Hanley highlights how the EPM account of justice reflects, next to a *Treatise*-inspired account of convention, an interesting reference to the influence of education and acquired habits in

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the establishment of justice as a social virtue. As Hanley argues, with this reference to the role of education Hume clearly abandons a noncognitive understanding of justice: a reason-based sense of duty is developed through education, which even reflects, Hanley contends, a recognition of the need for an impartial concern for humanity in the establishment of justice.

In Chapter 4 Marc Hanvelt also argues that Hume's discussion of political society in Section 4 of EPM changes in important ways from the *Treatise* account. The arguments for the foundation of the duty of allegiance change little from the *Treatise* to EPM, yet, Hanvelt argues, Hume's change in style offers important developments. Drawing on Hume's political and historical writings, Hanvelt argues that Hume notably drops the conjectural history employed in the *Treatise* in order to bring to light the fact that English political history is shaped by accidents of history and unintended consequences.

By appealing to context and history, Hanvelt writes, Hume poses challenges for both social contract theory and republican political thought. Hanvelt argues that a survey of different forms of rule reveals that political authority is founded on public opinion concerning interest and rights, on the prevalent practice of the age, and on wherever people look for authoritative decision-making. Political contexts may change significantly in short periods of time, and according to Hanvelt Hume thinks that different contexts required different kinds of politics and methods of rule, and hence that the study of politics required a careful study of history. In the final sections of his chapter Hanvelt shows how changes in political contexts give rise to new rules that are useful in their own specific settings, and hence how the perception of the utility of virtues necessary for life in society is shaped by context. Hanvelt concludes by arguing that Hume also advocates virtues such as moderation and politeness because he thinks reasonable people may disagree without being unreasonable.

In Chapter 5, Emily Kelahan examines how Hume, in EPM 5, presents utility as the pivotal principle underlying moral evaluation. In Part I of this section, Kelahan points out that Hume skillfully applies his experimental method to illustrate how a sense of public utility, and not self-interest, explains why humans approve of the social virtues. Hume stresses the irreducible role of positive fellow-feelings, even toward strangers, and the negative feelings of disinterested resentment of the plight of others, and then further explains how we come to have other-regarding moral sentiments. In contrast with the *Treatise*, where Hume argues that moral sentiments arise through the sympathy of the moral evaluator within the agent's narrow circle, EPM introduces a more general benevolence and

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humanity to account for the impartial view from which moral sentiments emerge. Kelahan argues that the EPM account of moral evaluation is an improvement on Hume's earlier one, and that it is better understood as a descriptive rather than normative moral theory.

Kelahan continues by showing that to think of Hume as a utilitarian or the parent of utilitarianism is a distorting lens for Hume understanding. Contrary to utilitarian views, Hume does not think we have an obligation to consider everyone's interests and he does not hold that anyone is required to be included in the social sphere. Moreover, Kelahan points out that for Hume utility is not the single criterion of morality, as utilitarianism requires. Kelahan ends her chapter by defending Hume against Adam's Smith's criticism of "Why Utility Pleases" – the focus of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

James Fieser, in Chapter 6, adopts a more critical stance toward Hume's account of natural talents and moral virtues, as he examines Sections 6, 7, and 8 and Appendix 1 of EPM, arguing that Hume does not make a convincing case for the conclusion that natural talents are genuine virtues. After showing how Hume draws from Cicero's classification of virtues, Fieser discusses Hume's method of first observing what we call "virtues" before identifying the features these qualities have in common. Hume, Fieser subsequently explains, argues that there is no clear separation between virtues and talents in modern languages, and that the possible criteria for distinguishing them are defective.

After presenting what he calls "Hume's four-pronged test for virtue" (mental qualities are virtues if they are either useful or agreeable to the possessor of the qualities or to others), Fieser examines the moral psychology behind Hume's principle, and shows how each motivated action that is agreeable or useful involves an actor, a receiver of the actor's action, and a spectator that sympathetically experiences the pleasure of the actor or the receiver. Fieser then considers the views of some of Hume's earlier critics, siding with those who held that Hume failed to adequately separate assessments that are relevant to morality from those that are not. He ends by showing how the virtues that are immediately agreeable to the actor or to others could be grouped among those that are useful, and he suggests that Hume, with little alteration to EPM, could dispense with immediate agreeableness as a criterion of moral assessment.

In Chapter 7 Margaret Watkins sheds light on the many puzzles found in EPM 7's list of virtues immediately agreeable to self. She points out that Hume's treatment of some of these virtues, such as poetic talent, does not clearly explain why they are immediately agreeable to self. Moreover,

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Watkins notices that Hume spends less time discussing qualities for which he expresses unbounded admiration, such as delicacy of taste, philosophical tranquility, benevolence, poetic genius, and cheerfulness, than for those she calls "suspect virtues" such as greatness of mind and courage. According to Watkins, Hume, in discussing these last virtues, takes the stance of a journalistic photographer who seeks to reveal the often-concealed side of these qualities, and how they might give rise to both admiration and disapproval.

Watkins continues by explaining that Hume categorizes courage as immediately agreeable to self, despite its notable utility, because utility, for Hume, is not the primary reason that we approve of courage. Rather, it is a virtue that generates the particular kind of pleasure he characterizes as "sublime." These virtues tend to be blinding and include less reasoning than is involved in considerations of utility. Watkins then explains how these virtues involve an elevation of sentiment that expands the spirit of their possessors and produces awe in the observer. Watkins ends her chapter by showing that although we might correct suspect virtues by the social virtues, Hume also holds that their correction comes from careful attention to the cultivation of delicacy of taste – a virtue also agreeable to self that is important for all moral judgments.

Offering a careful overview of EPM 2, 3, 5, 7, and 9, Jacqueline Taylor, in Chapter 8, reconstructs Hume's arguments that seek to establish, she argues, that humanity has the force and authority to provide the foundation of morals and to counter self-love. She argues that utility and humanity as the source of praise of utility is for Hume the most important part of morality.

Taylor begins by showing that utility is part of the merit of the social virtues of benevolence, for Hume, because the benevolent person tends to promote the interests of others. Moreover, she presents the set of circumstances about human nature that show that utility is the sole foundation of justice and that justice is necessary for the support of society. But why does utility have a great command over our esteem, Taylor then wonders? The answer, she argues, is found in the force of humanity. Humanity is the more reflective form of social sympathy – the type of sympathy that is a general or broad capacity for communicating passions and for concern for the happiness and misery of others. Taylor brings to light various passages from EPM that show that, for Hume, this humanity as a reason-informed source of our praise of utility is in fact the chief part of morals. That the sentiments of humanity are the moral sentiments, Taylor argues, establishes that for Hume humanity rather than self-love is the foundation of

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morality. She continues by showing how the sentiments deriving from utility and humanity require the use of reason, and hence differ from the unreflective sentiments that arise in response to immediately agreeable qualities.

Lorraine L. Besser, in Chapter 9, closely examines Hume's account of sympathy in EPM and shows how it diverges from the *Treatise* account. She argues that Hume's analysis of virtue in EPM depends upon features of his moral psychology, and in particular on the *Treatise* view of sympathy. Besser draws on many passages from EPM, but predominantly from EPM 5–9 and Appendixes 1 and 2. In the *Treatise*, Besser argues, Hume's view is that the motivational state of the virtuous person is best understood as a form of self-love or pride in one's character. Sympathy, she writes, shapes our passions and, according to the *Treatise* account, explains why we approve of traits that are useful and agreeable to ourselves and others, and how we develop pride in virtue without appealing to benevolence or humanity.

Such a robust principle of sympathy, as what connects people and shapes agency, and communicates feelings of pleasure but also of pain, seems to be mostly absent from EPM, Besser writes. Rather, the attention is now on benevolence and humanity, which, together with all social virtues, proceed from tender sympathy with others. Sympathy now essentially responds to the happiness of others. She argues that the EPM view of sympathy lacks the regulating normative effect described in the *Treatise*. In EPM sympathy stimulates other-regarding concern for the happiness of others, revealing Hume's effort to distance himself from the selfish schools. Nevertheless, Besser argues that Hume needs the more robust account of the *Treatise* to explain our approval of immediately agreeable qualities and how virtuous persons keep alive sentiments of right and wrong.

In EPM, Hume appeals to Cicero, Aaron Garrett argues in Chapter 10, to get his contemporaries to reconsider the breadth of what count as virtues. Garrett examines Appendix 4, and he argues that Hume, in line with Cicero, wishes greater tolerance from his audience of challenging philosophical positions. Garrett writes that this open-minded attitude was threatened by strong religious positions. Contrary to such positions, Hume embraces moral diversity in EPM while showing that the system of utility and agreeableness unites diverse moral practices.

According to Garrett, the goal to undermine the distinction between natural endowments and moral virtues persists from the *Treatise*, but in EPM Hume appeals to the ancients to back up his claim. Garrett seeks to understand this shift, and he argues that Hume appeals to Cicero and the

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ancients to draw his readers to his own position while trying to move them away from religiously informed dogmatic morality, which supports what Hume considers to be the blameworthy qualities of humility and abasement.

In the last part of his chapter, Garrett shows how Hume utilizes Cicero's open-minded attitude with regards to morality as part of his theory of rights. Garrett points out that rights, for Hume, are social conventions that exist to serve stability and utility. A remarkable addition to Hume's theory of rights in EPM, Garrett points out, is that Hume now suggests that regard to justice enlarges when those who see themselves as subject to justice consider it useful to include others whom they had not previously included. For Hume, Garrett points out, confederacy with all human beings is useful. And as European men put aside prejudices concerning who should be included, reflecting a Ciceronian attitude, they thereby enlarge their regard to justice.

Hume's rejection of religiously informed morality is also a theme Esther Engels Kroeker discusses in Chapter 11. In Section 9 of EPM, Kroeker points out, Hume argues that false religious systems have perverted the understanding and have kept his own system from being recognized. She argues that Hume explicitly mentions superstition and enthusiasm as those corrupt systems, but his main target is nonetheless the religious philosophers and Protestants who would reject both superstition and enthusiasm. Hume's criticism of modern philosophers and men of letters who have mixed philosophy with theology is made evident in Appendix 4. She argues that this aim is also revealed when we examine some of the central claims of two dominant Protestant texts of Hume's time – *The Whole Duty of Man* and the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

Kroeker shows that Hume rejects *The Whole Duty of Man*'s narrow list of virtues, which restricts them to the voluntary ones and fails to include natural tempers. And, in response to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Kroeker observes, Hume replaces thoughts about the whole purpose of man with reflections about the sole purpose of virtue, which is man's cheerfulness and happiness in this life, and he also rejects its depiction of man as totally depraved. Most importantly, however, Kroeker shows how Hume mimics the literary style of these religious texts, and even adopts some of their language and ideas. Hume's religiously styled EPM, according to Kroeker, is evidence of his target, but also of his aim to reach a larger audience and to replace the Protestant texts and their influence in public life with his own moral philosophy.

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