

On David Hume's Philosophy of Suicide

Aldrin Matthew L. Go

Abstract: It is evident that suicide cases remain prevalent in society today, due to man's misery and experience of anxiety and frustration. Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume (1711 – 1779) is famously known through his skeptical approach on *epistemology*, *ethics*, and *religion*. Considerations of other vital aspects of his philosophy are, such as “being a man”, are often overlooked, primarily because Hume is viewed primarily within the positivist and utilitarian framework. Hence, the initial endeavor of the paper is to interpret Hume within the existential context of his *philosophy of suicide*. Hume recognizes that *misery* is caused by one's violent passions, and pure solitude, or the absence of companions such as family, friends, or relatives. Hume's moral philosophy endorses the importance of *benevolence* towards our fellow human beings; as conflict, oppression, and violence are often causes of *suicide*. Thus, the primary endeavor of this paper is to examine parts of Hume's life and philosophy in order to derive Hume's response on suicide. It can be observed that in Hume's posthumous essays *Of Suicide* and *On the Immortality of the Soul* denies the *arbitrary* determinations of the Supreme Deity. Following this, Hume presents four essays on happiness – a response against the violent nature of both the world and self. Through this can I construct a preliminary avenue for the possibility of a “*Humean Existentialism*” Thus; the primary endeavor of this paper is to examine Hume's life and philosophy in order to derive Hume's response to suicide; and subsequently, to misery, anxiety, and frustration.

Keywords: *Hume, Philosophy of Suicide, Pride, Benevolence, and Happiness*

“Be a philosopher; but amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.” - *David Hume*

Introduction

Understanding the prevailing reception of Hume's philosophical schema, it is evident that the lenses of interpretation primarily operate along the lines of positivism and utilitarianism.¹ Emphatically, the prevailing scholarship of Hume is arguably idiosyncratic²; in the sense that prevalent interpretations neglect what is perhaps most vital in Hume's philosophy; this is no other than his *philosophy of common life*.³ Beam sympathizes with this belief,

in which Hume's influence has primarily extended and attributed itself within the direction of Anglo-Saxon Analytic Philosophy⁴. But Hume's philosophical enterprise, in reality, expands beyond analyses of how propositions are verified or validated to be certain, as these discourses encompass only Hume's temperament of the *Platonist* form of happiness, in which he is observably less sympathetic.⁵ There is great merit in expanding

the horizons of understanding through the *habit of study*, but often are these inquiries expanded and stretched to its limits, which in turn, compromises its possibility for application in common life and stagnates the social being that is Man.

Hume emphasizes that struggles in *common life* originate from man's *violent passions*⁶; thus, the problems experienced by Man are existential and originate from misery, anxiety, frustration, and absurdities in life. In *The Natural History of Religion*, Hume observes that the emergence of religion (polytheistic and monotheistic) originates from the experience of anxiety and misery—a desire for unity and consolation from the absurdity of the world.⁷ It is evident that the inquiries made by Hume's predecessors⁸ acknowledges the existence of a Supreme Deity, an ultimate Being or an ultimate Principle which reconciles us with life and subsequently justifies human suffering.

Thus, the endeavor of this paper is to establish a preliminary appropriation of Hume's philosophy within the discourses of existentialism through the problem of suicide; and to examine the repercussions of Hume's response on suicide. Furthermore, the paper endeavors to construct Hume's response on suicide, provided that most of Hume's writings were set during the enlightenment era, in which philosophy was in the state of epistemological turmoil; through the attempt to weave Hume's philosophical schema or *psychologism*, his *four essays on happiness*, and his *posthumous essays*, towards a man of *pride* and *benevolence* with cultivated: *taste*, *perspective*, and *understanding*. Hume acknowledges the merits of being a man of *cultivation*, pride and benevolence, as these virtues enable the possibility of both solitary and solidary happiness.

On Hume's Psychologism

*Commit it then to the flames: For it contains nothing but sophistry and Illusion*⁹ - David Hume

The philosophical doctrines of *Rationalism* and *Empiricism* were most prevalent during Hume's time, as both competed for supremacy over the other. The cleavage between these doctrines establishes that knowledge can either be obtained through *reason* or *experience*. Taking the side of empiricism, Hume provides a distinguished twist in his mode of empiricism—placing under trial the principal mode of reasoning into scrutiny; this is no other than *causality*.¹⁰ In understanding the mode of reasoning utilized by Hume's predecessors, even the methodic skepticism exhibited by René Descartes, causality has not been subjected to rigorous examination, as such mode of reasoning is presupposed in every inquiry. It can be observed upon reading Hume—Hume's project was not to ascertain the existence of absolute principles; rather, he sought to explain the psychological operations of reasoning, provided that these have not been subjected to skepticism.¹¹ Furthermore, what distinguishes Hume from his predecessors would be his anti-metaphysical stance and *irreligion*—understanding that “the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous.”¹²

Through his empirical and skeptical approach, Hume cautiously dissects pernicious aspects of metaphysics and religion, such as its dogmatism, abnegation, and nihilism. It can be observed in multiple instances that Hume sought to naturalize man, or return man to his philosophical innocence; that is to say, that Hume demolishes the primacy of *reason* over the *passions*. Hume initiates his critique through the division between *relation of ideas* and *matters of fact*.¹³ The former pertains to a priori concepts in

which the idea's negation is inconceivable, e.g. Triangle has three-sides; while the latter pertains to ideas from experience in which its negation is equally conceivable with its affirmation, e.g. "the sun will rise tomorrow".

Hume explicitly provides this distinction in order to establish the boundary between an idea being determined by other ideas and ideas being determined by experience. Understanding that *relations of ideas* are certain insofar as ideas, such ideas therefore lack resemblance with experience. Hume being an empiricist establishes that discourses concerning natural phenomena or the world necessarily encompass the category of *matters of fact*, precisely because knowledge of phenomena can only be derived from experience. Following these contentions, Hume proceeds with his *problem of induction*.

Induction, as a mode of reasoning, lacks the capacity to ascertain, beyond reasonable doubt, the *necessary connexion* between a phenomena and another. It can be deduced from inductive data, for instance, that "the sun would rise tomorrow", but there is difficulty to conclusively ascertain that in reference to a past experience of the sun rising, that such phenomena were to occur again in the future. Provided that inductive reasoning derives its premises from experience, and as experiences of natural phenomena are experiences of matters of fact, it is evident therefore that arguments of induction remains insufficient in establishing a *necessary connexion* between one phenomena and another. Thus, inductive reasoning cannot ascertain any universal principles of natural phenomena—making such inferences inconclusive, as arguments inferred from causality is rendered unable to reveal transcendental principles of nature.

Following these contentions, Hume utilizes his critique of Causality against prevalent

rationalistic and metaphysical arguments on the existence of God. Understanding that God is the prime mover or the uncaused-cause, it necessary to inquire, "*from what impression is that supposed idea derived?*"¹⁴. Hume is not criticizing God *per se*; rather, he is criticizing man's capacity to induce, deduce, or conceive a Being with determinate and absolute qualities and principles. Inquiries concerning God's existence fundamentally rest on two modes of thinking, deduction (cause to effect) and induction (effect to cause). Evident between these modes of inferences is the relation between cause and effect. Hume contends that causes must bear proportionality with its effects, and effects with its causes; otherwise, the abstract philosopher is *leaping* through the use of analogy; from imperfection to perfection (induction) or entirely of perfection (deduction). By no means could we infer a perfect quality from an imperfect experience, as Omni-qualities¹⁵ are mere fictions made from the whims of *imagination*.¹⁶ Arguments derived from analogy, by no means, allow man real access to the operations of nature and of God. Through Hume's scrutiny over the inconclusive grounds of God's existence, Hume demolishes the primary arguments laid forth by his predecessors, as inferences from causality are insubstantial, so as God's existence.

Therefore, concerning ontology and transcendental principles, Hume attests that such inquiries are frivolous; nefarious once stretched towards matters of ethics. Establishing immutable ontologies and transcendental principles, in turn, provides an avenue for dogmatism, complacency, and nihilism. The following sections of these paper proceeds from these contentions—an application of Hume's philosophical schema on moral philosophy, suicide, and happiness.

On Hume's Moral Philosophy

*Reason is and ought to be a slave to the passions and cannot pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.*¹⁷ - David Hume

Moral philosophy, in relation to Hume's predecessors, constructed their ethical systems based on rationally determined principles anchored on abstruse principles, such as moral perfection. But for Hume *reason* is inert, as *per se*, its operations pertain merely on inductive and deductive inferences. Thus, Hume examines the underlying psychologism behind actions; in other words, what are the motivational forces that enable human actions?

Hume makes multiple categories of human passions; concerning motivation and volition, Hume presents his distinction between *direct* and *indirect passions*. The former pertains the motivational forces of action,¹⁸ while the latter pertains to passions over one's self or other people or objects which are related to one's self.¹⁹ It is evident in these distinctions that Hume endeavored to re-invent ethical discourses, placing man as the sole arbiter of ethical decisions. Thus, understanding that Hume's moral thought sought not to anatomically illustrate the fundamental connections between actions and principles of Good and Evil; on the contrary, Hume's project was to derive principles of Good and Evil from man himself and paint to present man, not merely as machines determined by transcendental necessities, but by illustrating the unfolding of man through the experience of passions and the promulgation of natural benevolence and justice over rational and normative ethics.

It is understandable that the *passions* are often characterized as *arbitrary*, in the sense that actions originating from *passions* are crude and

unrefined. Hume understands that these contentions are equally plausible and implausible. Actions or volitions motivated by the passions, even those *seemingly* determined by reason. For instance, the experience of touching a candle-flame excites the feeling of physical pain; reason would subsequently dictate that candle-flame should not be touched as it causes pain. Evident from this example would be to mistakenly derive the dictum "the candle-flame should not be touched" from rational analysis of the proposition; rather, the tendency to avoid the candle-flame is derived from the passions of *aversion*. Reason plays a passive role, as the passions are the active forces of human action and volition. Human tendencies towards actions arise from the passions, a reaction or response to experiences; on the other hand, the role of reason in actions and volitions is to temper crude and inexperienced passions through the recollection of past experiences. While it is established that inductive inferences are insufficient grounds for certainty, it is within human nature to establish *custom* or habit in order to exhibit equilibrium between skepticism and dogmatism. Thus, *customs* or *habits* are constantly cultivated and refined for the purpose of appropriation with the current affairs of common life.

In contemplation of man's actions, even the passions are subject to *Causality*, i.e. everything must have a cause, even our passions. Finally, *Passions* should therefore be cultivated to "counter-act" man's *Violent Passions* (Untamed and Vulgar) create *Calm Passions* or the by-product of man's cultivation of his *passion*.

Solitary cultivation and habit enables us to appropriate ourselves within the chaotic world, but Hume understand that solitude cannot be exercised as there are other people whom man co-exists with. Virtue, as Hume says, are actions which excite approbation, while vices excite

disapprobation. Hume establishing an ethics that is a man of virtue, must act virtuously and possess the motivation towards a virtuous life; Human actions ought to be authentic than imposed, an imposition of doing "virtuous act" does not make one virtuous.

On Deontological Restraints of Suicide:

After the necessary preliminaries on Hume's epistemological and moral thought, I can now proceed with my philosophical examination and appropriation of Hume's response on suicide. Hume understands and contends that free will and determinism are non-contradictory; rather, they are pre-established and are natural. Furthermore, upon reconciling that liberty and necessity are non-contradictory, Hume's moral philosophy maintains that despite our actions being causally determined²⁰ by the determinations of our will (*liberty*) and other wills (*necessity*), there are no contradictions in man's subjective autonomy as necessity plays a significant role in liberty and vice versa. Thus, actions are still within the province and responsibility of the agent.

In Hume's philosophical terms, I shall now illustrate and integrate Hume's discussion on *passions*, along with its resembling elements on the suicide itself. Actions as explained in the previous section, arise through our Direct Passions or the motivational forces that enables human volition. Angst²¹ arises from the condition of man, i.e. the inability to cope up with the absurdity of reality. The underlying Indirect Passion of suicide includes Hatred towards the world; thus suicide is when man is constantly bombarded of his disapprobation towards life;²² consequently, the tendency towards the *Direct Passions* of *Desire* and *Hope* and the Indirect Passions *Humility* and *Hatred*. Committing suicide requires a motivational force of desire or the will to commit suicide,

and with Hope supposing, "through this act of suicide would man be emancipated from his misery". Indirect Passions that are exhibited in the act is Humility towards the self, and Hatred towards the world in relation to the self. Passions interplay with volitions, as they are necessary towards understanding the reason man is condescended to extinguish one's life. Underlying within human volitions are series of passions conjoined forming definitive actions, while at the same time, operates within causal determinations.

On Hume's essay *Of Suicide*, human life either rests in the enduring state of existence or the desire for emancipation from the miseries of existence. Hume's understands that the urge to commit suicide is primarily related to man's miserable existence. Provided that suicide is directly related to a miserable life, there are also deontological arguments that denominate suicide as "transgression of our duty towards God, our neighbor, or ourselves"²³. Hume sought to pacify the conception suicide through a scrupulous scrutiny of "common arguments against suicide, and by showing that, that action may be free from every imputation of guilt and blame"²⁴. Through Hume's Is-Ought contention in the *Treatise*, Hume primarily criticized theistic arguments that eliminate man's subjective autonomy, i.e. *Divine Providence*. When Hume speaks of transgression, it implies a pre-established moral code that prohibits man to extinguish his existence. But upon stating, "I wish to commit suicide", it does not intrinsically or immediately presuppose that suicide is evil. As explained in the previous section, the origins of human approbation and disapprobation towards actions are directly related on how an action entreats man to exhibit passions of approbation or disapprobation. The immediate misinterpretation of suicide arises from the ideas that man associates with the act, i.e. through Association of Ideas. Hume contends

the insufficiency of logical articulations to entreat man towards actions; thus the endeavor to tame and constrain the passions through reason alone is futile.

Upon these necessary acknowledgements of certain details in Hume's philosophical design, I can confidently proceed with my critical examination of Hume's philosophy of suicide. Holden understands that "... Of Suicide is a philosophical polemic"²⁵ directed to criticize the metaphysical grounds of suicide. Philosophical discourses exhibited by Hume's predecessors presented deontological explanations on suicide. Ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle contested that extinguishing one's life is transgressive towards the gods and the state.²⁶ Medieval philosophers Augustine and Aquinas contend that suicide is a clear transgression towards God—a blasphemous mockery of God's divine commandment "Thou Shalt not Kill" or man's moral obligation to God. Therefore, Hume's argument serves as an anti-thesis against deontological arguments.

In relation to God, suicide could not have been transgressive to God, because upon Hume's examination of *Liberty* and *Necessity*, human actions are causally determined through constant conjunctions of cause to effect. Theists would contend that God is the ultimate determination of all wills, the unmoved force that accounts for all subsequent forces. Establishing that God is the ultimate cause of all things, it follows that God holds responsibility to all subsequent effects, either Good or Evil. Hume argues that:

All events ... may be pronounced the action of the Almighty; they all proceed from those powers with which he has endowed his creatures... When the passions play, when the judgment dictates, when the limbs obey; this is all the operations of God.²⁷

Evidently, because all human actions or volitions fall under the general deterministic laws governing nature, man is rendered unable to circumvent divine order.²⁸ Man's existence is subjected towards causally determined natural laws designed by the supreme deity; thus diverting the course of nature does not presuppose an intervention of natural laws, precisely because when we speak of "diverting the courses of nature", it is an exhibition of man's natural powers provided by nature itself. Nature has created numerous circumstances that are completely detrimental to the preservation of man's life, as "a hair, a fly, an insect, is able to destroy this mighty being"²⁹, it is therefore "...equally criminal to act for preservation of life as for its destruction"³⁰. Furthermore, Hume contends that nature holds no favoritism; each and every living thing is subjected to the determinations of nature—beyond the possibility of altering these determinations.

The life of man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster: and were it ever of so great importance, the order of human nature has actually submitted it to human prudence, and reduced us to a necessity, in every incident, of determining concerning it³¹

In retrospect to the discussion on liberty and necessity, man is necessarily subjected to the determinations of nature; from all our mental to our physical operations. Pondering on the entirety of Hume's philosophy, his philosophical investigation is fundamentally operating within the parameters of Causality. Hence, in the entirety of things, suicide cannot be a transgression of one's duty towards God. Man cannot derive a divine moral ought from scrupulous scrutiny of suicide, because suicide in itself does not contain such moral ought. Furthermore, the grounds maintained by theists, i.e. divine providence (Aquinas, Descartes,

Spinoza, and Leibniz), are by no means transgressive towards the providence of God as all actions including suicide is grounded by divine providence; thus it is absurd for a theist that man possess such liberty. Frey understands that Hume intends to establish two fundamental points: (1) negatively, man is invariably subjected within the determinism of nature, and (2) positively, there is no transgression towards God on suicide. Therefore, the evils of suicide cannot be derived through theological deontology³², and that natural religion is rendered impaired in establishing a moral ought beyond the confines and availability of secular reason.

The primary focus of Hume's critique of theological claims on the impermissibility of suicide would be the expendable idea of God within the discourse of suicide and ethics itself; either mentioning or not mentioning God, the fundamental necessities of nature and the subjective autonomy of man is maintained as these are pre-established in nature without any real contradiction. Furthermore, by acknowledging Hume's irreligious disposition, deliberating on the permissibility and impermissibility of suicide within the confines of ultimate principles are ridiculous. Ultimate principles lack substantial grounds as these abstract perfections derived from reasoning bear no real resemblance from our experiences. Man observes no ultimate deontological principles from our actions; rather, Hume contends that actions are deliberated depending on its tendency for approbation and disapprobation—of *virtue* and *vice*.

Upon these criticisms on Hume's argument on suicide, it is equally necessary to scrutinize on the relation between the proportionality of suicide with the theistic doctrine of eternal life. Hume observes that moral philosophies, ranging from Aquinas towards Leibniz are

constrained within the idea of eternal reward and punishment. Understanding the initial criticism that suicide, in the logic of theistic reasoning cannot be transgressive towards God. But to temporarily suspend the application of Hume's criticism on suicide, it is necessary to inquire on the theistic repercussions of suicide, i.e. eternal punishment. Discourses on eternal punishment necessarily revolve within the parameters of metaphysics, i.e. the immortality of the soul.

Hume understands that analogy between the present life and eternal life is vastly disproportioned—the fragility of the physical and the indestructibility of the metaphysical.³³ The contention towards an eternal existence presupposes the absurdity of the present existence, precisely because of the supposition that present existence is merely a transitory and preparatory existence towards eternal salvation or damnation; in this case, the promulgation of eternal salvation as the primary doctrine of existence demerits the significance of the present life, i.e. asceticism and religious zealotry as negations of the present for the fulfillment of the eternal. Hume understands that man's natural capacities are appropriated towards pragmatic application in his present condition, drastically contrasting the absurdly venture on absolutely perfect beings, ideas, and principles.³⁴ If man's natural propensities were directed to the present affairs of life, it would be absurd then to direct our natural capacities to eternal life. Hume further examines the contentions of theistic moral duties that transgressions against God subsequently merit man eternal damnation. The disproportionality between the present and the eternal is also present on the moral aspects of theism; Hume contends, "Punishment, according to our conception, should bear some proportion to the offence. Why then eternal punishment for the temporary offences of so frail a creature as man?"³⁵ Morality therefore

should serve human affairs and interests towards the promotion of *benevolence* and *sympathy* towards our fellow men.

Therefore, man should emancipate himself from the restraints of theistic deontology towards a reformation of man's moral standards directed to society and one's self. Deliberations on the subject of suicide should revolve within the affairs of man. Hume proceeds with his criticisms on social constraints of suicide, examining whether it would be detrimental towards society and one's self to extinguish one's life. Hume provides three examples:³⁶ (1) supposing that man abstains from societal matters, man only ceases to contribute for the welfare of society. Obligations concerning societal matters entail pre-requisites, which is the reciprocal disposition of society. If man withdraws from his social responsibility, can man then be bounded by responsibility towards society and suppose suicide as transgressive? (2) Supposing that society is unable to benefit from man's continued existence, and that man's existence is proven detrimental to the welfares of society, can it not be ascertained that suicide is a laudable act? (3) Supposing that a malefactor foresees his inevitable and shameful death, and by waiting for his execution or voluntarily taking his life are both equally beneficial to society, can it not then be ascertained that suicide is a plausible act for the welfare of society? In these examples, Hume contends that the socio-deontological arguments on suicide because to be logically consistent in deontology, suicide can equally be detrimental or beneficial to society; thus making the advancements of secular reason insufficient accounts on justifying conclusively that suicide is invariably detrimental. Provided that there are no sound deontological restrains that conclusively repudiates the permissibility of suicide, it is now necessary to inquire whether it would be transgressive towards one's self.

Hume argues that suicide is neither transgressive nor soundly bounded by deontological reasons, as impositions of duty towards one's self are no longer established when there are no deontological principles imposed by an external authority.

Provided that there are indeed no sound deontological principles that invariably deem suicide as transgressive, it is necessary to proceed on the question "should we commit suicide?" without restraints. In this case, the question shifts from a question of transgression to a question of happiness; hence the following section of the paper deals on the subject of human happiness amidst his anxieties in life.

On Happiness

In retrospect of the previous sections of the paper, it has been established that the urge for suicide is invariably related with human misery or existential anxiety. Understanding that anxiety, frustration and discontent increases man's tendency to commit suicide; hence, suicide in this case is not entirely a question of man's anxiety, frustration, and discontent, but also the question of human happiness, satisfaction, and contentment. The contentions in Hume's essay *Of Suicide* and *On the Immortality of the Soul* should be understood as a critique on the implicit contradictions of the epistemological foundations in the theism's deontological conception of suicide. In Hume's *Treatise*, his philosophical investigation of human nature ventured to criticize and reform the ideas of his predecessors through an empirical and experimental approach. Upon systematizing the psychological operations of man, Hume understands that metaphysical certainties, i.e. God, are fictions of human imagination. Following this would be his historical investigation of the origins of religion,

later concluding that religious beliefs are created to alleviate humanity of anxiety and fear in life.

In order to proceed with Hume's response on suicide, one must recall Hume's moral philosophy presents that the passions are the motivational forces of action and are the cause human actions. Strictly referring to the assertions exhibited in the treatise, it would be difficult to ascertain a conclusive response on the subject. Hume's philosophical project sought to return man from the metaphysical abyss of contemplations back to the affairs of common life. Hume contends that religion is detrimental to man, as its impositions require the practice of *Monkish Virtues* that are self-negations or anti-nature. Hume writes in his conclusion in *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*:

Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of **monkish virtues**; for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends; stupefy the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper. We justly, therefore, transfer them to the opposite column, and place them in the catalogue of vices; nor has any superstition force sufficient among men of the world, to pervert entirely these natural sentiments.³⁷

Concerning matters of happiness, Hume composed four essays that examine different styles of human life and happiness, i.e. *The Epicurean*, *The Stoic*, *The Platonist*, and *The Sceptic*. Contrasting the *Treatise's* argumentative writing, the essay exhibits literary style designed to

entreat readers to cultivate: *taste, perspective, and understanding*.³⁸

Hume begins with the *Epicurean*, a style of life whose practice is to focus on the natural and simple pleasures of life. *Nature* for this style of life shatters the possibility of obtaining happiness through artificial means. For instance, Hume cured himself from his philosophical melancholy through the practice of the *Epicurean* style of life towards happiness³⁹. Although, Hume has some disagreement on this matter, specifically on *Epicureanism's* ignorance over man's inventive capacities, yet agrees entirely that man should embrace the simple pleasures of the present than to wait for "*eternal salvation*". Understanding that man also is an "inventive species"⁴⁰, Hume now presents his agreements on the *Stoic* form of happiness. According to Hume, *Stoic* style of happiness includes the artificial refinement of one's capabilities, i.e. Inventiveness has a great contribution to happiness. But Hume understands that strictly making artificial refinements man's sole objective towards happiness, man consequently denies himself of the *natural* and making man subjected to pursue human perfection. Compromising one's self within the strict idea of self-refinement makes the products of man's labor empty. Hence, man should balance his natural and artificial pleasures as both are indeed for man. Proceeding on the subject, Hume explains the *Platonist* style of happiness, i.e. a man of contemplation. Philosophical devotion seeks to enhance man's understanding of the world; but if taken strictly, contemplation lacks any real relation with the affairs of common life.⁴¹ Thus, to remedy the extremities of the three styles of life, Hume places the final archetype of happiness, the *Sceptic*. For the *Sceptic*: "Objects have absolutely no worth or value in themselves"⁴² and the passions dictate whether objects cause approbation or disapprobation in man. Hume although agrees

that man should not demerit the fruits of philosophical contemplation, as through as reflection and study can sometimes tranquilize the passions, but they must work with nature, not independent of it.⁴³ Hume's *mitigated scepticism* makes its pragmatic application present on the subject of happiness. Hume's footnote in the *Sceptic* writes:

the philosopher is lost in the man, and he seeks in vain for that persuasion which seemed so firm and unshaken... by habit and study acquire that philosophical temper which both gives force to reflection, and rendering a great part of your happiness independent, takes off the edge from all disorderly passions, an tranquilizes the mind.⁴⁴

Hume therefore believes that there should be equal space for man's natural, inventive, and contemplative capacities as the moderation of the *Epicurean*, *Stoic*, and *Platonist* makes a happy man who is able to perceive pleasure in all his natural capacities. Happiness exists within the temperance over the practice of the styles of happiness, accepting man's limitations with respect to natural, inventive, and contemplative pleasure enables man to counter-act his *Violent Passions*. Suicide, as a cause of unhappiness is remedied through the temperance of one's *violent passions*, the cultivation of man's mind, body, and heart. It is evident that plunging to far, making our *Violent Passions* of anxiety, frustration, and discontent the causes of unhappiness; hence, through cultivation of man, despite the ills of life, one may find happiness through and embrace of the present life. The exhibition of *Pride* here should be taken as *self-esteem*, the preservation of one's self amidst discontent and the confrontation of life's ills without the extreme pretention makes the presentation of pride a moderate and refined one.

Hume on his four essays on happiness presents that from temperance and refinement of man's natural, inventive, and contemplative capacities, man would be able embrace and appreciate the present pleasures of life (*Epicurean*), refinement of man's capacities to a virtuous life (*Stoic*), and enhancing man's contemplative capacities to "counter-act" and temper man's *violent passions* (*Platonist*), i.e. the cultivation of heart, body, and mind. Hume's life is testament to this; throughout his life towards his death, he displayed a cheerful disposition and savored the company of his friends⁴⁵, and persisted living without recourse to the comforts of religion, i.e. Hume attesting during his correspondence with James Boswell⁴⁶ that the expectation of an eternal life is the "most unreasonable fancy"⁴⁷. Hume's life affirmation is made explicit by his *revolt* against rationalism and religious dogmatism and zealotry through his philosophical polemics (*Treatises* and *Enquiries*) against both rational and irrational religion. In relation to the testaments of his friend Adam Smith, the "magnanimity and frugality"⁴⁸ of David Hume presents the actuality of his moral philosophy, in which he places the importance of man's social affairs over philosophical contemplation. It is therefore observable that Hume's philosophical writings are merely springboards that enable man to return back from the abyss of metaphysical contemplation to the affairs of common life. In Hume's magnanimity, he extends benevolent disposition towards his friends—a compassionate disposition towards his neighbors that enables Hume to relish the simple pleasures of life despite being unable to ascertain any ultimate purpose and meaning from even the most scrupulous scrutiny. Through the practice of compassion towards others, man extends the possibility of happiness, i.e. Solidarity through *Benevolence*. Therefore for Hume, to temper our natural propensities through the cultivation of

our *mind, body, and passions*, man can practice a life that seeks enjoyment in the present affairs and repudiate seeking the insatiable desires of the mind, body, and passions. Furthermore, through extending man's temperance to others, he practices *benevolence* towards his family, friends, and society.

Hume provides great emphasis on the importance of benevolence, as real happiness is felt from the preservation of one's self, embrace of the present affairs, the cultivation of one's self, the habit of study, and the merry of being with one's friends.⁴⁹ Reason cannot construct a method for happiness; for Hume, life and experience is man's greatest teacher. Philosophy perhaps suffices in broadening understanding; but between life and philosophy, Hume would choose to life and man over abstract philosophy. Life therefore must not be one-dimensional—but a flourishing of man capacities and broadening his sphere of understanding that may contribute to the possibility of better life.

¹ Hume, David. "Section I", *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Millican, Peter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 6 [Hereafter, this shall be cited as EHU]

² It is necessary to examine briefly why the prevailing reception on Hume's philosophy prevalently pertains to his epistemological contentions. Later in this essay, my endeavor is to relate Hume to existential problems, such as suicide, and provide an avenue through which Hume's philosophy is understood as a "guide of life" or response against absurdities of existence.

³ An enlightenment philosopher born and died in 1711-1779, who is popular through religious stance implicit in his philosophical writings and being part of the triumvirate of British Empiricism along with John Locke and George Berkley. He wrote the books *Treatise of Human Nature*, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Principles of Morals*, and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. His philosophy are primarily influenced by minds such as Isaac Newton, Cicero, Sextus Empiricus, etc. which some remnants of their thoughts are used by David Hume in

his works. Most of his philosophical writings pertain to religious superstitions being abhorrent practices for they are merely illusions and sophistry and concerning the dynamics of human consciousness. Hume's philosophy is not limited to his epistemological criticisms, but also his contributions such as: *Theory of Causality*, *Theory of Passions*, *Theory of Virtue*, etc.

⁴ Beam, Craig "Hume and Nietzsche: Naturalists, Ethicists, Anti-Christians", in *Hume Studies*, Vol. XXII, No. 2 (1996) pp. 299

⁵ Immerwahr, John. "Hume's Essays on Happiness", in *Hume Studies*, Vol. XV, No. 2 (1989) pp. 313

⁶ *Violent Passions* are explained in Hume's *Treatise* as crude, inexperienced, or raw passions; these passions arise from the lack of experience, such as the tendency to touch candle-flame out of novelty. This pertains to the absence of *custom* or *habit* that causes *violent* passions over something. These would be explained in the following pages.

⁷ Hume, David. "The Natural History of Religion", in *Dialogues and The Natural History and Religion*. Edited by Gaskin, J.C.A. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 140

⁸ Hume's predecessors include, *Rene Descartes*, *Baruch Spinoza*, *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, *John Locke*, and *George Berkeley*.

⁹ EHU, pp. 120

¹⁰ See *Section III of An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 16 - 17

¹¹ It is evident that within Hume's *psychologism* that the mind associates ideas with one another, consequently producing various networks which excite passions or broadens understanding. Understanding Hume's critique of metaphysics pertains essentially to the idea of God lacking any *real* relation to external impressions. Analogy produces imaginary networks of understanding, which consequently lead to an evident misappropriation between those compared.

¹² EHU, pp. 18 - 19

¹³ Hume, David. "Conclusion of this Book", *Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by Selby-Bigge, L.A. and Nidditch, P.H. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) pp. 271 - 272 [Hereafter, this shall be cited as T]

¹⁴ EHU, pp. 15 Hume distinguishes impressions from ideas; impressions are the immediate, forceful, and lively perceptions of the mind, while ideas are the mediate, and less lively perceptions of the mind.

¹⁵ "Perfect" qualities ascribed to God: Omni-potent, Omni-present, Omniscient, etc.

¹⁶ For Hume, this pertains to the mind's sovereignty over its ideas—in its abuse, creates radically fictitious

things that may no longer bear any proportioned resemblance and continuity in experience.

¹⁷ T, pp. 415

¹⁸ Magri, Tito. "Hume on the Direct Passions and Motivation", *A Companion to Hume*. Edited by Radcliffe, Elizabeth (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) pp. 186 – 194 Magri explicates on the motivational force of direct passions, specifically its capacity to "... impart to the mind a first impulse to internal and external action", and as these enable man towards an action, it also merits itself to be a mental state as it is perfectly understood that Joy and Sorrow, Hope and Fear, and Desire and Aversion are all mental states. *Indirect Passions* are not mental states, but are conjunctions towards an object related to the self or other.

¹⁹ Hume, David. "Section 3", *A Dissertation of the Passions and The Natural History of Religion: Critical Edition*. Edited by Beauchamp, Tom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) pp. 18

²⁰ See Section III of Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

²¹ As I would understand Angst in Hume's sense, I'd infer this to be the mixture of the *Direct Passion* Fear and Sorrow. Angst here is also taken as a direct passion

²² Hume, David. "Of Suicide", *Selected Essays*. Edited by Copley, Stephen and Edgar, Andrew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 315 – 316

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Holden, Thomas. "Religion and Moral Prohibition in Hume's 'Of Suicide'", in *Hume Studies Vol. 31, No. 2* (2005) pp. 191

²⁶ Noon, Gorgia. "On Suicide", in *Journal Of The History of Ideas, Vol. 39, No.3.* (1978) pp. 373 – 375

²⁷ Hume. *Selected Essays*. pp. 317

²⁸ Holden, Thomas. "Religion and Moral Prohibition in Hume's 'Of Suicide'", pp. 194

²⁹ Hume, David. "Of Suicide" *Selected Essays*. pp. 319

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Frey, R. G. "Hume on Suicide", in *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy, Vol. 24, No. 4* (1999) pp. 346

³³ Hume, David. "On the Immortality of the Soul", *Selected Essays*. pp. 329

³⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 326

³⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 327

³⁶ *Ibid.* "Of Suicide", pp. 322 – 323

³⁷ Hume, David. "Conclusion", *Hume's Moral Philosophy*. Edited by Sayre-McCord, Geoffrey

(Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006) pp. 258 [Emphasis is mine]

³⁸ Hume, David. "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion", *Selected Essays*. pp. 11 – 12

³⁹ T, pp. 269 Hume writes in the *Treatise*: "I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends..."

⁴⁰ Immerwahr, John. "Hume's Essays on Happiness" pp. 311

⁴¹ *Ibid.* pp. 314

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.* pp. 317

⁴⁴ Hume. *Selected Essays*, pp. 356 (This is a footnote of Hume in *The Sceptic*)

⁴⁵ *Adam Smith and John Home*, see: *The Life of David Hume* by Ernest Campbell Mossner, pp. 589 – 603

⁴⁶ James Boswell is a diarist who wrote about the lives of important people; in the case of this paper, David Hume. Mossner writes in his book about the conversation between Boswell insisting Hume to have taken recourse on religion, but Hume abruptly denies to take such recourse and understands it to be the "most unreasonable fancy" (pp. 598) to believe such whimsical illusions. Boswell reconciles himself with a dream about Hume being secretly a religious man, which later made his journals on Hume less "rough".

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 598

⁴⁸ Schliesser, Eric. "The Obituary of a Vain Philosopher: Adam Smith's Reflection of Hume's Life", in *Hume Studies, Vol. XXVIX, No. 2* (2003) pp. 336 – 341

⁴⁹ With regards to this, I am not proposing a method for happiness, nor does Hume. These contentions are mere guides, as happiness is lived than analyzed through abstract reasoning.

Bibliography

- Cohon, Rachel. "Hume's Indirect Passions", *A Companion to Hume*. Edited by Radcliffe, Elizabeth (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) pp. 159 - 184
- Frey, R. G. "Hume on Suicide", in *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, Vol. 24, No.4. (1999) pp. 336 - 351
- Garrett, Don. "Hume's Theory of Ideas", *A Companion to Hume*. Edited by Radcliffe, Elizabeth. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) pp. 41 - 57
- Hume, David. *A Dissertation on the Passions and The Natural History of Religion*. Edited by Beauchamp, Tom. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Millican, Peter. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Hume, David. *Dialogues and the Natural History of Religion*. Edited by Gaskin, J.C.A. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Hume, David. *Selected Essays*. Edited by Copley, Stephen and Edgar, Andrew. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Hume, David. *Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by Selby-Bigge, L.A. and Nidditch, P. H. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Holden, Thomas. "Religion and Moral Prohibition of Hume's 'Of Suicide'", in *Hume Studies*, Vol. XXXI, No. 2. (2005) 189 - 210
- Magri, Tito. "Hume on the Direct Passions and Motivation", *A Companion to Hume*. Edited by Radcliffe, Elizabeth (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) pp. 185 - 200
- Mossner, Ernest. *The Life of David Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980)
- Noon, Gorgia. "On Suicide", in *Journal Of The History of Ideas*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1978) pp. 371 - 386
- Schliesser, Eric. "The Obituary of a Vain Philosopher: Adam Smith's Reflection of Hume's Life", in *Hume Studies*, Vol. XXVIX, No. 2 (2003) pp. 327 - 362.