A Neo-Humean Account of Intellectual Virtue

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> The Corporation of Trinity Church Has erected this Monument In Testimony of their Respect For The Patriot of incorruptible Integrity; The Soldier of approved Valour; The Statesman of consummate Wisdom; Whose Talents and Virtues will be admired By Grateful Posterity Long after this Marble shall have mouldered into Dust.
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> — Monument to Alexander Hamilton, Trinity Church, New York City

I shall sketch a neo-Humean account of intellectual virtue, which is an alternative both to account favored by many contemporary epistemologists, on which intellectual virtues are personal qualities conducive to epistemic goods, and to the account suggested by many contemporary virtue ethicists, on which intellectual virtues are intellectual character traits conducive to the flourishing of the possessor. (Both of these alternatives have some claim to being "Aristotelian.") I'll begin by articulating a neo-Humean account of virtue attribution (§1), before criticizing two accounts of virtue (§2), to which my preferred account is a competitor (§3). I'll then articulate my account of *intellectual* virtue, and argue against some alternatives to it (§4).[1]

1 A neo-Humean account of virtue attribution

Among the reasons that my account of virtue (§3) deserves to be called "neo-Humean" is the fact that it is motivated in the first instance by an antecedently articulated account of virtue attribution. On the present approach, we begin by figuring out what we are doing when we say or think that something a virtue, and then, using our account of virtue attribution as a guide, try to figure out what a virtue is. We first provide an account of virtue attribution (which tells us what it is to say or think that something is a virtue), and then use this to motivate our account of virtue (which tells us what it is to be a virtue). This direction of inquiry – where theorizing about our thought and talk comes before theorizing about that which we think and talk about – in a familiar theme of Hume's philosophy, and a consequence of his emphasis on the fundamentality of a "science of man." (*Treatise of Human Nature*, Introduction, pp. xv-xvi)[2]

So I begin with the question: what are we doing when we say or think that something a virtue? My answer to this question is a version of Hume's answer, as

[1] I focus throughout on virtue, rather than vice, but everything I say about virtue could be said about vice, mutatis mutandis.

[2] Page references for the *Treatise* are from Hume 1978; page references for the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* are from Hume 1975.

articulated in the following passages, in which he describes what we are doing when we *say* that something is a virtue:

> [W]hen you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. (*Treatise*, III.i.1, p. 469)

> An action, or sentiment, or character is virtuous or vicious; why? because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind. (Ibid. p. 471)

> [V]irtue is distinguished by the pleasure, and vice by the pain, that any action, sentiment or character gives us by the mere view and contemplation. (*Treatise*, III.i.2, p. 475)

> [W]hen any action, or quality of the mind, pleases us *after a certain manner*, we say it is virtuous; and when the neglect, or non-performance of it, displeases us *after a like manner*, we say that we lie under an obligation to perform it. (*Treatise*, III.ii.v, p. 517)

> [We] pronounce any *quality* of the mind virtuous, which causes love or pride; and any one vicious, which causes hatred or humility. (*Treatise*, III.iii.1, p. 575)

> Every quality of the mind is denominated virtuous, which gives pleasure by the mere survey; as every quality, which produces pain, is call'd vicious. (Ibid. p. 591)

> [W]e shall analyse … Personal Merit: we shall consider every attribute of the mind, which renders a man an object either of esteem and affection, or of hatred and contempt; every habit or sentiment or faculty, which, if ascribed to any person, implies either praise or blame. (*Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, §I, p. 174)

> It is the nature and, indeed, the definition of virtue, that it is *a quality of the mind agreeable or approved of by every one who considers or contemplates it*. (*Enquiry*, §VIII, p. 261n)

> The hypothesis which we embrace … defines virtue to be *whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation;* and vice the contrary. (*Enquiry*, Appendix I, p. 289)

Although he never settled on one preferred formulation of it, Hume's basic idea is clear enough: to say that something is a virtue is, first, to describe it as a particular kind of thing (a quality of mind, a mental action, a character, a habit, a

faculty) and, second, to express a distinctive pro-attitude towards it (pleasure, agreement, approval, approbation, love, pride, praise, esteem, affection). Virtue attribution, on this picture, has both a descriptive and a prescriptive aspect, and our account must explain both of these aspects.

When it comes the descriptive aspect, on my proposed account, saying that *x* is a virtue expresses the belief that *x* is a **character trait**. A character trait is a systematically connected set of practical, emotional, and cognitive dispositions of a person. And when it comes to the prescriptive aspect, on my proposed account, saying that *x* is a virtue expresses either (a) **admiration** for *x* or (b) **desire** for x. To desire a character trait is to desire to possess it; to admire a character trait is to admire its instances, which (it seems to me) is at least paradigmatically to admire people who possess it because they possess it. Putting these two ideas together, then, the proposed account says:

> To say that *x* is a virtue is to express both (i) the belief that *x* is a character trait and (ii) either (a) admiration for *x* (because they possess *x*) or (b) desire for *x*.

In other words, expressing both the belief that *x* is a character trait and either admiration or desire for *x* is both necessary and sufficient for saying that *x* is a virtue.

The notion of expressing an attitude is fundamental relative to my account. We could just as well speak of representing oneself as having a particular attitude. You can express attitudes that you do not have, at the price of sincerity, but sincere virtue attribution requires both the relevant belief and the relevant pro-attitude.

If that is our account of *saying* that something is a virtue, what should we say about *thinking* that something is a virtue? If saying that something is a virtue is *expressing* certain attitudes, then it seems natural to conclude that thinking that something is a virtue is *having* those attitudes. Here's Hume again:

> To have a sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration. [...] We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. (*Treatise*, III.i.2, p. 471)

On the proposed account, then:

> To think that *x* is a virtue is to both (i) believe that *x* is a character trait and (ii) either (a) admire *x* or (b) desire *x*.

In other words, both believing that *x* is a character trait and either admiring or desiring *x* is both necessary and sufficient for thinking that *x* is a virtue. My

proposed **neo-Humean account of virtue attribution** is just the conjunction of this account of thinking that something is a virtue and the proposed account (above) of saying that something is a virtue.

How similar to Hume's own view is the proposed account? When it comes to the descriptive aspect of virtue attribution, Hume allows that "natural abilities" (*Treatise*, III.iii.4) and "talents" (*Enquiry*, Appendix IV) can be virtues. In as much as these are not species of character trait, the proposed account suggests that they cannot be virtues. However, Hume's principal concern, when it comes to including natural abilities and talents as potential virtues, is with disputing the relevance of responsibility for virtue status. Aristotle and his followers argue (roughly) that virtues must be acquired through habituation, in such a way as to render the virtuous person responsible for her possession of the virtues. Hume was keen to reject this argument. But the proposed account doesn't imply that Hume was wrong: the proposed account suggests that virtues are character traits, not that they must be acquired through habituation or that their possessors must be responsible for possessing them. It is consistent with my understanding of the notion of a character trait (above), that someone could have a character trait through no fault or effort of her own. Indeed, this strikes me as the norm; as Hume argues, it seems "almost impossible for the mind to change its character in any considerable article." (*Treatise*, III.iii.4, p. 608) In any event, Hume's rejection of the relevance of responsibility for virtue status is consistent with the proposed account of virtue attribution.

The proposed account jibes with Hume's insistence that inanimate things cannot be virtuous or vicious (*Treatise*, III.i.1-2, pp. 464-8, pp. 471-3), despite the fact that "[t]he beneficial qualities of herbs and minerals are … sometimes called their *virtues*." (*Enquiry*, §V.i, p. 213n) The proposed account suggests that only persons can be virtuous. And it also jibes with Hume's claim that actions are morally evaluable only when they manifest "durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character." (*Treatise*, III.iii.1, p. 575)

When it comes to the prescriptive aspect of virtue attribution, the proposed account appears at first glance to offer something quite different from what Hume offers: where he speaks of pleasure at the mere survey, I speak of admiration and desire. However, from the passages cited at the outset, it is clear that Hume has in mind pleasure of a specific sort, which explains why he speaks alternatively of pride, love, esteem, approbation, and the like. My talk of "admiration" can be understood as a catch-all for many of the pro-attitudes Hume describes, and in particular pride can be understood as self-admiration and love as admiration of someone else (cf. *Treatise*, III.i.2, p. 473).

You might wonder whether merely desiring (something you believe to be) a character trait is sufficient for thinking that it is a virtue. For his part, Hume suggests as much, arguing that it is sufficient for a person to come up with a catalog of virtues "to consider whether or not he should desire to have this or that

quality ascribed to him." (*Enquiry*, §1, p. 174) And he elsewhere distinguishes between love and esteem.

> The characters of Caesar and Cato … are both of them virtuous … but in a different way: nor are the sentiments entirely the same which arise from them. The one produces love, the other esteem: the one is amiable, the other awful: we should wish to meet the one character in a friend; the other we should be ambitious of in ourselves. (*Treatise*, III.iii.4, p. 607-8, *Enquiry*, Appendix IV, p. 316-7)

Desiring (something you believe to be) a character trait does not seem to be *necessary* for thinking that it is a virtue. Constructing a case that supports this conclusion, however, is tricky. We should not imagine someone who says she does not want to acquire some virtue, because it would require too much hard work, for she does not really *not want* to acquire said virtue: she just chooses not to try to acquire it, on account of other desires that she has. And we should not imagine someone who says that she does not want to acquire some virtue, because this would conflict with her possession of some other virtue, for she does not really *not want* to acquire the former virtue: she just wants to keep the latter virtue more. What we need here is the idea that character traits can be virtues only relative to a particular kind of entity, creature, or form of human life. Thus we might say, for example, that loyalty is a virtue for a dog, but not for a human being, thus allowing us to imagine someone saying that loyalty is a virtue (for a dog), but that she does not want to be loyal (since she is a human being). In any event, this is no problem for the proposed account, since the proposed account only says that desiring (something you believe to be) a character trait is *sufficient* for thinking that it is a virtue

You might argue that condition (b), in the proposed account, is superfluous, on the grounds that admiration for (something you believe to be) a character trait is both sufficient and *necessary* for thinking that it is a virtue. But this will not work if you can sincerely think that something is a virtue without admiring it. Consider: I want to become prudent, to avoid financial ruin, but I do not particularly admire prudence. Do I think prudence is a virtue? If I do, then condition (b) is not superfluous.

The appeal of my disjunctive account, including both condition (a) and condition (b), is down to the fact that the concept of virtue serves two distinct functions. First, virtue attribution is sometimes *laudatory*: we use the concept of virtue to commend the virtuous, as when we enumerate the virtues of saints and heroes, as in the case (for example) of the Monument to Hamilton (above). Second, virtue attribution is sometimes *aspirational*: we use the concept of virtue to articulate our ideals, as when we enumerate the virtues of the person we hope to become, as in the case (for example) of Benjamin Franklin's list of thirteen virtues, in his *Autobiography*, which was accompanied by a chart whereby he kept a record of his successes and failures vis-à-vis his "bold and arduous Project of arriving at

moral Perfection."[3] But it seems like virtue attribution is neither always laudatory nor always aspirational.

The proposed account seems to differ from Hume's when it comes to his idea that the pleasure and pain that are the criteria of virtue and vice must be sufficiently impartial (*Treatise*, III.iii.1, pp. 581-4, *Enquiry*, §V.ii, pp. 228-9). We don't feel the same "lively pleasure from the virtues of a person, who liv'd in *Greece* two thousand years ago, that [we] feel from the virtues of a familiar friend and acquaintance." (*Treatise*, III.iii1., p. 581) And yet both possess virtues, and, so we can easily imagine, the same virtues, and to the same degrees. Thus, in our attributions to virtue, in order to "arrive at a more *stable* judgment of things, we fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation." (Ibid.) So Hume's considered view is best understood as the view that virtues and vices are those qualities of mind that give pleasure and pain, respectively, by the mere survey *from the general point of view*. Does my proposed account likewise need an amendment that makes reference to the "general point view"? Perhaps, but this amendment wouldn't matter for what follows, and so we can imagine that it has been made. However, my appeal to admiration for a character trait may handle this problem. I like my magnanimous friend more than some magnanimous Greek, but do I admire my friend's magnanimity more than that of the Greek? We might say that, when it comes to admiring them *because they are magnanimous*, I admire them equally. In any event, this won't matter in what follows.

The proposed account of virtue attribution is a species of *expressivism*[4], and, like other species, rules out the possibility of someone who lacks the relevant pro-attitudes sincerely attributing the relevant prescriptive properties. However, it seems like a depressed person might sincerely say that modesty is a virtue, and yet, on account of her depression, find herself neither admiring nor desiring modesty. All species of expressivism face some version of this problem, and it's beyond the scope of this paper to attempt a solution.

Although I've responded to a few objections, I've said little in defense of the proposed account. The main reason I see for adopting this account is the same as the reason Hume offers in defense of his view: only the proposed account can explain how virtue attribution alone can engage our emotions and motivate action (*Treatise*, III.i.1, Enquiry, Appendix I). But my main goals here are to articulate a neo-Humean account of virtue attribution, then of virtue (§3), and then of intellectual virtue (§4). Some of the appeal of these accounts will emerge as we proceed, but a satisfying defense is a task for another day.

2 Against two alternative accounts of virtue

[3] Franklin 1993, p. 84; cf. pp. 84-93.
[4] Cf. Gibbard 1990, Ridge 2014.

We can appeal to our account of virtue attribution to motivate our account of virtue. I have already suggested one version of this strategy (§1): saying that *x* is a virtue expresses belief that *x* is a character trait; it is natural to conclude from this that virtues are character traits. Before continuing with the strategy, however, I'll criticize two accounts of virtue that are alternatives to the account that I'll propose (§3).

Consider, first, a **eudaemonist account of virtue**, on which virtues are character traits conducive to the flourishing of the possessor.[5] I do not mean the view that contingently, as a matter of fact, or even as a matter of non-conceptual biological, psychological, or sociological necessity, virtues are character traits conducive to the flourishing of the possessor. I mean the view that being character traits conducive to the flourishing of the possessor is what *defines* the virtues, on which the fact that virtues are character traits conducive to the flourishing of the possessor is a matter of *conceptual* necessity. That's why this is an *account* of virtue, which tells us what it is to be a virtue, rather than merely a *claim* about virtue. Note well that, on the eudaemonist account, being a character trait conducive to the flourishing of the possessor is both sufficient and necessary for being a virtue.

Consider, second, a **utilitarian account of virtue**, on which virtues are character traits conducive to happiness in general.[6] On this view, the connection between virtue and happiness is conceptual. Note well that, on the utilitarian account, being a character trait conducive to happiness in general is both sufficient and necessary for being a virtue.

It seems like Hume defends a utilitarian account of virtue.[7] He writes that:

> This pleasure and pain [that are the criteria of virtue and vice] may arise from four different sources. For we reap a pleasure from the view of a character, which is naturally fitted to be useful to others, or to the person himself, or which is agreeable to others, or to the person himself. (*Treatise* III.iii.1, p. 591)
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> Personal Merit consists altogether in the possession of mental qualities, *useful* or *agreeable* to the *person himself* or to *others*. [...] Whatever is valuable in any kind, so naturally classes itself under the division of *useful* or *agreeable*. (*Enquiry* §IX.i, p. 268)

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[5] Cf. Foot 1958/9. But consider the idea that the connection between virtue and flourishing is non-conceptual (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.7, Hursthouse 1999, Chapter 8).

[6] Cf. Driver 2001.

[7] Note well that "qualities agreeable to others" does not mean the same as "qualities that give pleasure by the mere survey" (cf. §1), and so does not subsume virtue in general. See *Enquiry*, §VIII, p. 261n.

In his discussions of virtues that benefit other people, Hume is mainly concerned to argue (cf. *Treatise*, III.iii.1, *Enquiry*, §V) that sympathy is a fundamental moral emotion, distinct from self-love. He is mainly concerned to show, therefore, that being a character trait conducive to other people's happiness is per se *sufficient* for being a virtue (cf. *Treatise*, III.iii.1, p. 580, *Enquiry*, §IX.i, p. 277). But some passages suggest that being a character trait conducive to someone's happiness is *necessary* for being a virtue, e.g. the classification of the "monkish virtues" as vices, on account of their being useless and unpleasant (ibid. p. 270), although he says elsewhere that that the virtues "have, *for the most part*, a tendency to the good of society, or to that of the person possess'd of them." (*Treatise*, III.iii.vi, p. 618) In any event, I shall not assume here that Hume maintained a utilitarian account of virtue, although he may well have.

Given the neo-Humean account of virtue attribution (§1), there are two distinct problems with both the eudaemonist account and the utilitarian account.

First, both are threatened by a version of G.E. Moore's "open question argument," which is a challenge to the *sufficiency* of the proposed definens (conduciveness to the flourishing of the possessor, conduciveness to happiness in general) for our definiendum (virtue). Thinking that *x* is a virtue requires either admiring or desiring *x* (§1). But it is perfectly possible for someone to think that *x* is conducive to the flourishing of those who possess *x* or that *x* is conducive to happiness in general, and yet neither admire nor desire *x*. Since there is an extensive literature discussing the "open question argument," it is beyond the scope of this paper to defend it as applied to these accounts of virtue, and so I'll bracket the topic here.

Second, both the eudaemonist account and the utilitarian account draw the boundaries of virtue too narrowly – the proposed definens (conduciveness to the flourishing of the possesor, conduciveness to happiness in general) is not *necessary* for our definiendum (virtue). There are character traits that we either admire or desire, and that we therefore think are virtues (§1), but which are neither conducive to the flourishing of the possessor nor to happiness in general. This is because there are things that matter other than human flourishing and happiness. I have in mind the flourishing of living things that are neither happy nor unhappy, the preservation of ecosystems, the value of particular places and times, the creation and preservation of artworks, the preservation of landscapes and landforms, and athletic excellence. If these things matter, and are distinct from human flourishing and happiness, then we should expect there to be character traits that we admire or desire, but which are excluded by both the eudaemonist account and the utilitarian account.

Consider Jones, a hermetic environmental saint: she lives off the grid, alone in the wilderness, killing plant poachers and sabotaging industrial logging machinery. But she does not relish her vocation; she was drawn to activism by a sober sense of duty; she yearns for the comforts of society; living in the woods, for her, is a hard and miserable existence; and, finally, she has no success in her projects: the plants are eventually poached and the loggers eventually raze the

forest to the ground. Consider, in particular, her love of plants – a character trait consisting (among other things) of dispositions to protect and defend the welfare of plants.[8] I want to say: we may admire Jones' love of plants, but this character trait is conducive neither to her flourishing nor to happiness in general.

You might object (on behalf of the eudaemonist) that the love of plants *is* conducive to Jones' flourishing, on the grounds that flourishing does not require (as I seemed to suggest) enjoying oneself or being successful in one's projects. We must bracket our distinctively Modern conception of flourishing, so the argument goes, on which flourishing is a matter of pleasure or success, in favor of a more Ancient conception, on which flourishing is a matter of excellence or being a good person. This is fine as far as it goes, although we now want an account of excellence or of being a good person, at least if we are to appeal to these in giving an account of virtue.[9] As well, the present proposal may very well be consistent with the neo-Humean account of virtue (§3), so I will bracket the present objection.

You might object (on behalf of the utilitarian) that the love of plants *is* conducive to happiness in general, on the grounds that the plants that she protects have utility vis-à-vis human happiness. But this is a red herring. It is too easy to imagine cases in which the interests of plants conflict with the interests of human beings, in which an intuitively virtuous person might side with the plants. You might object (again on behalf of the utilitarian) that the love of plants *is* conducive to happiness in general, on the grounds that this includes the happiness of non-human organisms, e.g. plants. But is implausible that plants are happy or unhappy, much less ecosystems, landforms, artworks, and the like. Might we abandon the language of happiness in favor of some more inclusive language? Perhaps, so the argument might go, what matters is flourishing in general, where not only organisms but also ecosystems and landforms can flourish. This is fine as far as it goes, but "flourishing" has just become a placeholder for "whatever intuitively matters." The present proposal amounts to the view that virtues are character traits conducive to whatever intuitively matters – which isn't far from the neo-Humean account that I will propose, below (§3), but which doesn't deserve to be called "utilitarian."

The fact that Jones' love of plants doesn't *lead* to her flourishing doesn't entail that the love of plants isn't *conducive* to the flourishing the possessor: to say that one thing is conducive to another isn't to say that the one always leads to the other; it is just to say that the one generally or normally leads to the other. But, in this case, it would not be plausible to maintain that the reason we admire Jones' love of plants is that the love of plants is conducive to her flourishing. This

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[8] Is this somehow an ad hoc construction, and not really a character trait, whatever exactly that would mean? It seems no less ad hoc than benevolence or sympathy, i.e. "a generous concern for our kind and species." (*Enquiry*, §II.ii, p. 178)

[9] See the discussion of some possible accounts of excellence, below (§4).

mislocates the explanation of our admiration: we admire Jones' dedication and connection to the environment, not any connection between her love of plants and her own flourishing. There are some character traits that we might admire in someone like Jones where our admiration does seem to be a matter of our appreciation of their utility vis-à-vis flourishing in more normal situations: we might admire Jones' patience, for example, because we see how it would normally lead to a person flourishing. But this is not plausible when it comes to the love of plants.

I have argued that there are things that matter other than human flourishing and happiness. But even if this were not so, even if human flourishing (for example) were all that mattered, it would not be a *conceptual* truth that this was all that mattered. And so, even if I am wrong, and human flourishing is all that matters, we should not build this evaluative truth into our definition of virtue, as the eudaemonist account does. The problem, therefore, is not that the eudaemonist account implies that nothing matters but human flourishing, but that it makes this flow from the definition of virtue, whereas, if this were true, it would surely be a non-conceptual truth.

3 A neo-Humean account of virtue

I have argued, by appeal to the neo-Humean account of virtue attribution (§1), that the eudaemonist account of virtue and the utilitarian account of virtue are threatened by the existence of things that matter other than human flourishing and happiness (§2). We should resist any attempt to reduce or explain the value of everything by appeal to the value of human flourishing or happiness. Moreover, it seems to me, the prospects for a unified account of the value of everything are dim: the things that matter are too heterogeneous for that. Hume, despite his utilitarian leanings, has the right idea on this point:

> [W]henever we survey the actions and characters of men, without any particular interest in them, the pleasure or pain, which arises from the survey (with some minute differences) is, in the main, of the sane kind, tho' perhaps there be a great diversity of the causes, from which it is deriv'd. (*Treatise*, III.iii.v, p. 517)

The problem with the eudaemonist account and the utilitarian account wasn't that we don't admire people because they possess character traits that are conducive to their own flourishing or to happiness in general. It's that our admiration has a greater diversity of causes than that: we sometimes admire people for reasons other than those two.

With that in mind, and given the neo-Humean account of virtue attribution (§1), I propose the following **neo-Humean account of virtue**:

> Virtues are character traits that are either admirable or desirable.

In other words, being either admirable or desirable is both necessary and sufficient for being a virtue.

What do I mean by "admirable" and "desirable"? What we say here will depend on our sympathies in meta-ethics. I mean for the proposed account to be neutral as between various meta-ethical accounts of the admirable and the desirable. A **realist** about the admirable, for example, who thinks that we admire the admirable because it is admirable, will understand "admirable" as referring to a property of (people who posess) certain character traits to which our admiration is a response. An **anti-realist** about the admirable, who rejects realism, might opt for some form of relativism about the admirable, on which a character trait is admirable *for a person* if and only if she admires said trait. Or she might opt for something like Hume's view (cf. §1), on which a character trait is admirable if and only if it inspires admiration from the general point of view.

What consequences does the present account have for the enumeration of the virtues? There is a complication here, due the fact that the names of the would-be virtues are ambiguous, admitting of both a **prescriptive disambiguation**, on which they are by definition the names of virtues (and so function as **virtue terms**), and a **descriptive disambiguation**, on which they are not by definition the names of virtues, but merely the names of character traits that may, as matter of fact, be virtues (and so function as **trait terms**). Too see what I mean, consider "courage." On a descriptive disambiguation, you might define courage as consisting of a disposition to put oneself in danger, or as a lack of fear, or as a willingness to take risks. It would thus be an open question whether courage is a virtue. By contrast, on a prescriptive disambiguation, you might define courage as consisting of excellence when it comes to putting oneself in danger, or when it comes to dealing with fear, or when it comes to taking risks, where *excellence* when it comes to φing consists of a disposition to φ at the *right* time and in the *right* way. Here it is not an open question whether courage is a virtue – courage is *obviously* admirable and desirable, because it is an excellence, consisting in a disposition to do the relevant things at the right time and in the right way.[10] Thus, when it comes to any individual would-be virtue, *x*, we have the option of a **prescription-first approach**, on which we first define *x* as excellence when it comes to φing, and then must provide a descriptive account of what such excellence is like, or a **description-first approach**, on which we first define *x* as such-and-such character trait, and then must make a case that said trait is admirable or desirable. Both of these approaches seem to have their uses, depending on the theoretical project at hand.

Given that the proposed account is designed to be more inclusive than both the eudaemonist account and the utilitarian account (§2), when it comes to enumerating the virtues we should expect some unfamiliar faces. Just as the

[10] Other accounts of virtue might avoid this consequence, e.g. by requiring that virtues must be excellences when it comes to φing, where φing is central or fundamental to the human condition.

value of enjoyable social interaction leads Hume to classify wit and cleanliness as virtues, environmental values should lead us to classify the love of plants as a virtue (§2), aesthetic values should lead us to classify creativity and openness to aesthetic experience as virtues, and athletic values should lead us to classify competitiveness and sportsmanship as virtues. And we should be prepared for the possibility of virtues whose appeal does not derive from being conducive to some value or set of values; perhaps there are some character traits that we *just like*: think of humility, authenticity, or sincerity – we may simply admire or desire these traits, for no further reason. The proposed account requires a shift in our thinking when it comes to the enumeration of the virtues. If a virtue is proposed, our question cannot be merely whether it contributes to the flourishing of the possessor, nor merely whether it contributes to happiness in general, but rather whether it is admirable or desirable *in any way whatsoever*. That, on in the proposed account, is the criterion of virtue.

You might object that the proposed account conflates the *moral* virtues with various *non-moral* virtues. But it does no such thing: it *unites* the various species of virtue, if there are any, into the category of *virtue*, full stop. Perhaps it ought to be conceded that *moral* virtues must be conducive to happiness in general, thus vindicating Hume's claims that "*moral* distinctions arise, in a great measure, from the tendency of qualities and characters to the interest of society" (*Treatise*, III.iii.1, p. 579, my emphasis) and that "[i]n all determinations of *morality*, this circumstances of public utility is ever principally in view." (*Enquiry*, §II.ii, p. 180, my emphasis) Recall Mill's discussion of the renunciation of happiness that does not promote the happiness of others: someone who does this "is no more deserving of admiration than the ascetic mounted on his pillar." (*Utilitarianism*, II, p. 16)[11] But we *do* admire the acetic on his pillar: it's impressive what he has done, as Mill himself points out (ibid.), he is "an inspiring proof" of what is possible for creatures like us. Perhaps the same should be said of the "monkish virtues" (Enquiry, §IX, I, p. 270). Let us concede that acetics and monks do not manifest *moral* virtue, but they may manifest virtue, nonetheless.

4 Intellectual virtue

Virtues are character traits that are admirable or desirable (§3). What then are *intellectual* virtues? The expression "intellectual virtue" is ambiguous.[12] On a **predicative disambiguation of "intellectual virtue,"** intellectual virtues are things that are both virtues and (in a sense that needs to be articulated) intellectual. On this disambiguation, that something is an intellectual virtue entails that it is a virtue. On an **attributive disambiguation of "intellectual virtue,"** intellectual virtues are things that are virtues in an intellectual sense of "virtue" (which needs to be articulated). On this disambiguation, that something is an intellectual virtue does not entail that it is a virtue, and is consistent with it not being a virtue. We can illustrate this distinction with a silly example.

[11] Page reference from Mill 2001.
[12] Cf. Geach 1957.

"Burglaic" means "of or concerning burglary," and "burlgaic virtue" is ambiguous. On a predicative disambiguation of "burglaic virtue," burglaic virtues are things that are both virtues and burglaic – e.g. a disposition to steal from the rich and give to the poor. On an attributive disambiguation of "burglaic virtue," burglaic virtues are things that are virtues in a burglaic sense of "virtue." What might that sense be? Consider the abilities and skills needed to successfully burgle – e.g. an ability to pick locks. We could call these the "burglaic virtues." But this does not entail that they are virtues, and is consistent with their not being virtues. In any event, we will need to bear the ambiguity of "intellectual virtue" in mind as we proceed.

Aristotle draws a distinction between *aretes* that are *ethikos* and *aretes* that are *dianoia* (*Nicomachean Ethics,* IV.1-2). In translation, the former are sometimes called "moral virtues" and the latter "intellectual virtues"; a bit more literally, the former are excellences of character and the latter are excellences of the intellect. Looking at what Aristotle says in the surrounding passages, it emerges that he means to distinguish between, on the one hand, excellences of the active or desiring part of the soul, and, on the other, excellences of the thinking part of the soul. In as much as Aristotle himself uses the expression "intellectual virtue," he employs a predicative disambiguation: intellectual virtues are virtues, in as much as they are excellences, and what makes them intellectual is the distinctive part of the soul of which they are excellences. We can think of this as an *organic* division of the intellectual and the non-intellectual virtues, in the sense that they are distinguished by the organs (parts of the soul) of which they are excellences. What exactly is an excellence? We could understand excellences as character traits that are either admirable or desirable, i.e. as virtues, on the neo-Humean account of virtue (§3). Or we could understand excellences as character traits conducive to the flourishing of the possessor.[13] Aristotle's account could thus be rendered as a **eudaemonist account of intellectual virtue**, on which intellectual virtues are virtues, according to the eudaemonist account of virtue (§2), that are intellectual. Again, we are employing a predicative disambiguation of "intellectual virtue."

Hume, by contrast, suggests that the distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual virtues is spurious (*Treatise*, III.iii.iv, *Enquiry*, Appendix IV). He objects both to various ways of drawing the distinction – it doesn't correspond to the distinction between traits for which we are not responsible and traits for which we are responsible; it doesn't correspond to the distinction between traits that don't lead to action and traits that do lead to action – and its moral significance – we are just as proud of our intelligence as we are of our courage, we delight at wit just as much as at modesty. But, again, in as much as Hume uses the expression "intellectual virtue," he uses a predicative disambiguation: intellectual virtues are virtues, in as much as they inspire pride and love, and their status as intellectual, if we can even make sense of it, is beside the point.

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[13] For some alternative understandings of excellence, see Hurka 2001, Adams 2006.

Contemporary epistemologists, by contrast with both Aristotle and Hume, for the most part distinguish intellectual virtues from non-intellectual virtues by appeal to their distinctive *aim*: intellectual virtues aim at true belief (and avoiding false belief), knowledge, understanding, and wisdom – which I'll call (just as a matter of stipulation) **epistemic goods** – whereas non-intellectual virtues aim at other stuff.[14] Now this metaphorical talk of "aims" must eventually be replaced with something more rigorous, and a familiar articulation is the idea that intellectual virtues are traits conducive to the possessor's acquisition of epistemic goods. Call this the **standard account of intellectual virtue**.[15] This formulation employs an attributive disambiguation of "intellectual virtue": intellectual virtues may or may not be virtues, full stop; they are defined as traits conducive to the acquisition of epistemic goods, and it is this distinctive aim that makes them intellectual. They are comparable to the burglaic virtues (above).[16] We can think of this as a *teleological* division of the intellectual and the non-intellectual virtues, in the sense that they are distinguished by their aims.

The eudaemonist account of intellectual virtue is problematic because it is a version of the eudaemonist account of virtue, which I criticized above (§2), on the grounds that it draws the boundaries of virtue too narrowly. But if the eudaemonist account of virtue can be criticized for implying that human flourishing is all that matters, can't we criticize the standard account of intellectual virtue for implying that the acquisition of epistemic goods is all that matters? There is something right about this worry, but the defender of the standard account has a rejoinder: her account has no implications about what matters, since she employs an attributive disambiguation of "intellectual virtue." Above (§2), I appealed to the neo-Humean account of virtue attribution: I said it was implausible that only character traits conducive to human flourishing are admirable or desirable (cf. §3). The standard account doesn't imply anything about which character traits are admirable or desirable. However, this reveals the problem with the standard account, and with any account that employs an attributive disambiguation of "intellectual virtue": on such an account, the intellectual virtues *as such* have no significance. I am inspired here by Hume's insistence that a philosophical discussion should "represent virtue in all her genuine and most engaging charms, and make us approach her with east, familiarity, and affection." (*Enquiry*, §IX, ii, p. 279) Our account of virtue should explain, if not enhance, the appeal of the virtues – and this, I want to suggest, applies to our account of intellectual virtue just as much as to our account of non-

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[14] See, e.g., Sosa 1991. See also Zagzebski 1996, Baehr 2011, but compare the eudaemonist account of intellectual virtue.

[15] We can also articulate a socio-epistemological variant on this, on which intellectual virtues are traits conducive to people in general acquiring true belief (and avoiding false belief), knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. What I have to say about the standard account would apply to this socio-epistemological variant, mutatis mutandis.

[16] See Sosa 2007, Chapter 4, Ridge 2011, Hazlett 2013, §9.3.

intellectual virtue. The problem with the standard account is that it abandons this criterion.[17]

The standard account would make sense if curiosity were our ruling passion, i.e. if epistemic goods were all that mattered to us. It would then make sense to think of the intellectual virtues as all and only those traits conducive to those things. Even if epistemic goods were all that mattered, we should not built it into the definition of intellectual virtue, for if this were true, it would be a non-conceptual truth.

When then of Hume's skepticism about the distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual virtues? Aristotle's account is flawed by its appeal to the parts of the soul; we need a more plausible psychology than that – and the Modern distinction between the head and the heart (cf. *Enquiry*, Appendix IV, p. 313) is no better. But we can provide a rigorous articulation of the notion of the intellectual, which will enable us to distinguish between intellectual and non-intellectual character traits, and thus between intellectual and non-intellectual virtues. The primitive notion in my articulation is the notion of *information*, by which I mean the content of any *representation* that can be correct or incorrect. The **intellectual domain** comprises the generation and transfer of information, including the practices and institutions that regulate these in a society. Things are **intellectual** just to the extent that they essentially fall within the intellectual domain; thus paradigm intellectual things include belief, conversation, inquiry, deception, heuristics and biases, evidence, arguments, testimony, and education. And so character traits are intellectual just to the extent that they essentially fall within the intellectual domain. Intellectual character traits will include those having essentially to do with a person's dispositions to form beliefs (e.g. intellectual caution, gullibility), those essentially having to do with how a person engage with other people's opinions and arguments (e.g. open-mindedness, intellectual aggression), and those essentially having to do with a person's dispositions to want to form beliefs of a particular kind (e.g. curiosity, fear of uncertainty), among many others.

We are now in a position to articulate a **neo-Humean account of intellectual virtue**: intellectual virtues are virtues, according to the neo-Humean account of virtue (§3), that are intellectual. In other words:

> Intellectual virtues are intellectual character traits that are either admirable or desirable.

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[17] In favor, I think, of an account of intellectual virtue that will serve traditional epistemological purposes, such as the analysis of knowledge and justification. See Montmarquet 1993, p. 99, Sosa 1991, Zagzebski 1996, Part III, Greco 2010. Note that this motivation cuts across the distinction between so-called "reliabilists" and so-called "responsibilists" (cf. Code 1987). For a critical discussion of this use of the notion of intellectual virtue, see Baehr 2011, Chapters 3 – 5.

We can think of this as an *energetic* division of the intellectual and the non-intellectual, since they are distinguished by their domain of activity. The proposed account parts ways with Hume by drawing a distinction between intellectual and non-intellectual virtues, but jibes with Hume's idea that this distinction doesn't amount to much: intellectual and non-intellectual virtues are virtues in exactly the same way, namely, in virtue of being either admirable or desirable.

5 Conclusion

Why accept the neo-Humean account of intellectual virtue (§4)? I have suggested its appeal by criticizing alternative account, but a satisfying defense is a task for another day (cf. §3). However, I'll note an important consequences of the neo-Humean account, which strike me as an advantage.

The proposed account requires a shift in our thinking when it comes to the enumeration of the intellectual virtues. If an intellectual virtue is proposed, our question is not merely whether it is conducive of the acquisition of epistemic goods, nor merely whether it is conducive to the flourishing of the possessor, but rather whether it is admirable or desirable in any way whatsoever. So, on this account, there can be character traits that are intellectual virtues, but not in virtue of being conducive to the acquisition of epistemic goods. This would allow us to argue that *optimism* is an intellectual virtue, on the grounds that it is conducive to confidence and subjective wellbeing.[18] And it would allow us to argue that *intellectual independence* is an intellectual virtue, on the grounds that it is conducive to diversity of opinion.[19] As well, on this account, there can be character traits that are intellectual virtues, but not in virtue of being conducive to the flourishing of the possessor. This would allow us to explain how *honesty* can be a virtue, despite all the trouble it causes for the honest person. All this is the result of admitting any and all species of the admirable and desirable to determine the virtues, which is apt, given the diversity of values that are maintained not only by different human beings, but by most individual human beings as well.[20]

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[18] See Hume, *Treatise*, III.iii.2, Tiberius 2010, Chapter 6, Hazlett 2013, Chapter 2.

[19] See "The Social Value of Intellectual Independence," "Towards Social Accounts of Testimonial Asymmetries," "Testimony, Understanding, and Art Criticism."

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