If you're a moral sentimentalist, you ought to be a moral pluralist. If you’re a moral pluralist, you ought to be a moral sentimentalist. And there are excellent reasons to be a pluralist and to be a sentimentalist.

In what follows I won’t attempt to do anything close to argue for all of those claims. But I will try to lay the groundwork for that larger view by showing how well sentimentalism and pluralism combine in the moral theory of David Hume. The morally pluralist view of the content of morality has often been closely associated with the non-naturalist meta-ethics of W.D. Ross. The meta-ethical view of moral sentimentalism has often been closely associated with the Utilitarian view of the content of morality. Through an examination of Hume’s theory and its historical antecedents, I hope to give you reason to believe that it is sentimentalism and pluralism that are most compellingly paired.

My presentation has three parts. In the first, I elucidate the historical antecedents of Hume’s sentimentalist-pluralist position — namely, the non-sentimentalist pluralism of Samuel Clarke and Joseph Butler, and the non-pluralist sentimentalism of Francis Hutcheson. In the second, I examine Hume’s own development of a sentimentalist-pluralist position. In the third, I show how the Humean position captures aspects of our moral experience that are often taken to be the province of Rossian non-naturalism. To make a full case for the superiority of Humean pluralism over Rossian pluralism, I would need to argue for the weakness of Rossian meta-ethical non-naturalism and the strength of Humean meta-ethical sentimentalism. But that is something I will not be able to attempt here. What I will do is try to show that a Humean meta-ethics can explain important moral phenomena.
at least as well as a Rossian meta-ethics. Showing the independent merits of a Humean meta-ethics is something that will have to be done elsewhere.

1. Historical antecedents of Hume’s moral pluralism

A. Clarke’s rationalist pluralism

Here is a simple way to draw the distinction between moral monism and moral pluralism: moral monists hold that there is only one ultimate moral end while moral pluralists hold that there is more than one. According to this way of drawing the distinction, most of the early modern British moralists were pluralists.

Samuel Clarke is typical in this regard. Clarke affirms a number of basic, underived moral principles. He writes, “[I]n Mens dealing and conversing one with another; ‘tis undeniably more Fit, absolutely and in the Nature of the thing itself, that all Men should endeavour to promote the universal good and welfare of All, than that all Men should be continually contriving the ruin and destruction of All. ‘Tis evidently more Fit, even before all positive Bargains and Compacts, that Men should deal one with another according to the known Rules of Justice and Equity; than that every Man for his own present Advantage, should without scruple disappoint the most reasonable and equitable Expectations of his Neighbours, and cheat and defraud, or spoil by violence, all others, without restraint. Lastly, ‘tis without dispute more Fit and reasonable in itself, that I should preserve the Life of an innocent Man, that happens at any time to be in my Power; or deliver him from any imminent danger, tho’ I have never made any promise so to do; than that I should suffer him to perish, or take away his Life, without any reason or provocation at all” (Clarke 609). Here Clarke affirms
three ultimate moral ends: [1] promoting the welfare of humanity, [2] dealing with others according to the rules of justice and equity, [3] refraining from killing innocent humans. This is not a complete list. Clarke highlights those three ultimate moral ends because they serve his anti-Hobbesian purpose, but he acknowledges other ones besides, such as those that apply to persons’ relationships with God and with their families (Clarke 605, 608-9, 618-24). For our purposes, however, the important point is just that Clarke affirms a plurality of ultimate moral ends — i.e., more than one.³

It might be objected that, despite the quotation of the previous paragraph, Clarke has a monistic moral view after all because he holds that there is one principle underlying all ultimate moral ends: the principle of fittingness or reasonableness. He writes, “The same necessary and eternal different Relations, that different Things bear one to another; and the same consequent Fitness or Unfitness of the Application of different things or different Relations one to another; with regard to which, the Will of God always and necessarily does determine it self, to choose to act only what is agreeable to Justice, Equity, Goodness and Truth, in order to the Welfare of the whole Universe; ought likewise constantly to determine the Wills of all subordinate rational Beings, to govern all Their Actions by the same Rules, for the Good of the Publick, in their respective Stations. That is; these eternal and necessary differences of things make it fit and reasonable for Creatures so to act; they cause it to be their Duty, or lay an Obligation upon them, so to do” (Clarke 608).⁴ Now Clarke does think that all ultimate moral ends are “fitting.” But this does not make Clarke a monist, and that’s because he does not think those moral ends are reducible to or derivable from the principle of fittingness. Fittingness is for Clarke that which characterizes all necessary truth, not only moral principles but also those of math, logic, and geometry. The point he seeks to make when talking about fittingness is that moral principles are necessarily true in the same way
those other principles are. But that is just to say that it’s necessarily true that certain moral principles have basic normative force, not to say that there is only one ultimate moral principle. Fittingness, for Clarke, is what characterizes all self-evident rightness, not a normative feature or property that serves as a basis for deriving further ends. Each of Clarke’s moral ends is self-evidently right in its own regard. Each is itself an independent, basic reason for action, not a secondary or derived one. Fittingness is a property that moral ends possess, but it is not itself a moral end (let alone the only moral end).  

I said at the beginning of this section that one way to distinguish moral pluralism from moral monism is to hold that the former but not the latter affirms more than one ultimate moral end. But there is an important border to be drawn within the territory of pluralism so defined: the border between what I’ll call non-conflict pluralism and conflict pluralism. Non-conflict pluralism is the view that there is a plurality of ultimate moral ends but that no ultimate moral end will ever require an action that is incompatible with the action required by a different ultimate moral end — or as I’ll put it (in somewhat oversimplified fashion), that ultimate ends will never come into conflict with each other. Conflict pluralism is the view that not only is there a plurality of ultimate moral ends but also that those ends will sometimes come into conflict with each other.

On which side of this distinction does Clarke’s view fall? I believe it’s on the non-conflict side, and that’s because the non-conflict view fits best with the surface of his texts as well as with his moral rationalism. Clarke never explicitly denies that conflict between ultimate ends can occur, but there are so far as I can see no passages in which he grapples with the possibility of such conflict’s occurring. And I suggest that Clarke does not discuss situations in which ultimate moral ends conflict because he does not think such situations
can arise — because he thinks any action truly implied by one ultimate end would be compatible with the actions truly implied by every other ultimate moral end.

The absence of discussion of moral conflict would be conspicuous in a work of pluralist moral philosophy written today. One of the first things a philosophical reader of today would want to know, after being told that there are several different ultimate moral ends, is how we should deal with those cases in which different ultimate moral ends imply incompatible actions. Is there a lexical ordering of ultimate ends? Do some ends have normative trumping power over others? Do the moral ends include complex specifications that, when fully spelled out, reveal that they can never actually come into conflict? Are there some moral dilemmas that are finally irresolvable? These are the sorts of questions twenty-first century readers expect moral pluralists to address. Why don’t we find them raised in Clarke?

It’s possible that conflict between individuals’ moral commitments simply was not common enough in Clarke’s time and place to be salient to him. Maybe the moral life was simpler then, external circumstances being such as to greatly dampen the eruption of morally difficult situations. Rather than pursue that idea however (which seems to me to raise more questions than it answers), I want to suggest that deep philosophical commitments shielded Clarke from a confrontation with the possibility of conflict between ultimate moral ends.

Clarke held that all ultimate moral ends are purely rational — rational in the same way the axioms of geometry, logic, and arithmetic are. As he puts it in one typical passage, the truths that constitute ultimate moral ends “are so notoriously plain and self-evident, that nothing but the extremest stupidity of Mind, corruption of Manners, or perverseness of Spirit, can possibly make any man entertain the least doubt concerning them. For a Man endued with Reason, to deny the Truth of these Things; is the very same thing … as if a Man
that understand *Geometry* or *Arithmetick*, should deny the most obvious and known *Proportions of Lines or Numbers*, and perversely contend that the *Whole is not equal to all its parts*, or that a *Square is not equal to all its parts*, or that a *Square is not double to a triangle* of equal base and height” (Clarke 609). For Clarke, ultimate moral ends are self-evident necessary truths of which we have a priori certainty, and our duties can be demonstrably derived from them. Now we do not expect first principles of geometry, logic, or arithmetic to come into conflict with each other. Indeed, we take such conflict to be impossible. The realm of the purely rational to which such principles belong is thoroughly harmonious. One necessary a priori truth cannot imply something that another necessary a priori truth implies the negation of. According to Clarke, however, the first principles of morality are necessary a priori truths and thus belong to the same thoroughly harmonious realm. Those principles, therefore, must not have conflicting implications, as allowing conflicting implications of true moral principles would be akin to affirming the truth of a contradiction. It must not be possible to demonstrably derive from self-evident principles that one has a duty to X and a duty not to X.⁷

There are three different forms non-conflict pluralism can take. First, a non-conflict pluralist can hold merely that the ultimate moral ends are all simple and non-conflicting. Second, a non-conflict pluralist can hold that the ultimate moral ends are all simple, non-conflicting, and negative. This view is the same as the first in that it holds that ultimate moral ends are all simple and that none of them will ever require a course of action that another forbids. But this view is different from the first in that it holds that the ultimate moral ends are all prohibitions. The second view would take to be ultimate moral ends prohibitions such as: do not lie, do not commit suicide, do not kill an innocent person. But it would not take to be ultimate moral ends positive duties such as: promote the welfare of
humanity, or take active measures to save an innocent person’s life. This view can, then, allow that the positive aim of, say, promoting human welfare may conflict with the prohibition on lying. But it will not allow that such a conflict is a conflict of ultimate moral ends because it will hold that of these two only the prohibition on lying is an ultimate moral end. Third, a non-conflict pluralist can hold that at least some of the (non-conflicting) ultimate moral ends are complex, including more or less detailed specifications and qualifications. This view can hold, for instance, that there is no ultimate moral end simply to promote human welfare but rather an ultimate end to promote human welfare unless doing so requires injustice or the breaking of a promise or the telling of a lie. So this view can hold that while the simple aim of promoting human welfare might conflict with the simple aim of not telling a lie, that incompatibility is not an instance of a conflict of ultimate moral ends because ultimate moral ends are not all that simple. When we truly understand ultimate moral ends with all their specifications and qualifications, we will see that they never require incompatible courses of action.

To which of these three versions of non-conflict pluralism does Clarke adhere? At one point, Clarke notes the difficulty of ascertaining the “bounds of right and wrong” in “some nice and perplex Cases” (Clarke 611), and this might suggest the third view insofar as the difficulty in question could be equated to the difficulty of determining the full specifications and qualifications of different moral ends. But Clarke never explicitly says that moral duties have specifications or qualifications. He also maintains that the moral ends are as obvious to the human mind as the most basic truths of geometry and arithmetic, which suggests that we ought not attribute to him the third view insofar as that view takes the moral ends to involve complications that may fail to be “plain and self-evident.” This can push us to take Clarke’s comments about its sometimes being difficult to ascertain the
bounds of right and wrong to be an acknowledgement not of the difficulty of determining
the specifications and qualifications of ultimate moral ends but rather of the difficulty of
applying perfectly clear ultimate ends to murky real-world situations. Then again, at another
point Clarke makes some comments that could be taken to assert that what morality
demands is not that we promote human welfare but rather only that we refrain from lying,
breaking our promises and the like, and this may suggest that he holds the second view,
according to which all the ultimate moral ends are prohibitions (Clarke 630). But at still
another point Clarke includes among his ultimate moral ends the positive requirement to
promote the welfare of humanity, which he describes as “not only the doing barely what is
just and right, in our dealings with every man; but also a constant indeavouring to promote
in general, to the utmost of our power, the welfare and happiness of all men” (Clarke 621),
and this seems incompatible with a view that takes all ultimate moral ends to be prohibitions.

The fact is, Clarke does not treat these topics in an expansive or coherent enough
way to give us conclusive reasons to attribute to him one of the versions of moral pluralism
rather than another. Perhaps some interpretative principle of charity would lead us to offer
to Clarke one of the three versions of non-conflict pluralism rather than the other two, but
that is not an issue I will address any further. The point I wish to make is that Clarke
thought both that there is a plurality of ultimate moral ends and that those ultimate moral
ends could never come into conflict with each other. Indeed, the fact that Clarke does not
himself advance any developed view on why such conflict will not occur seems to me a
strong indication that he had deep philosophical commitments that shielded him from
confronting the issue of moral conflict.

When merging his rationalist view of morals with his anti-voluntarist theology,
Clarke writes, “As these eternal moral Obligations [note the plural] are really in perpetual
Force merely from their own Nature and the abstract Reason of things; so also they are moreover the express and unalterable Will, Command, and Law of God to his Creatures, which he cannot but expect should in Obedience to his Supreme Authority, as well as in compliance with the Nature Reason of Things, be regularly and constantly observed through the whole Creation” (Clarke 597). It may be possible to construe “perpetual force” and “constantly observed” in a manner that allows for the possibility that conflict between ultimate moral ends can sometimes make it right to act contrary to one ultimate moral end. But the fact that Clarke himself never provides any such gloss — and his deep commitment to the geometric-arithmetic-logic-like nature of ultimate moral ends — gives us good reason to stick to the more natural, on-the-surface reading, which takes Clarke to hold that ultimate moral ends can never truly come into conflict. Clarke is a moral pluralist in only the non-conflict sense of affirming a plurality of ultimate moral ends. There is nothing in his work that warrants our attributing to him a version of pluralism that affirms the possibility of conflict between the requirements of ultimate moral ends. And it’s likely that it was his version of moral rationalism that helped shield him from a view of such conflict.

Of course it was just the contention that moral principles are akin to geometry, arithmetic, and logic that Hutcheson and Hume would soon submit to blistering attack. But the wide currency of non-conflict pluralism in the early 18th century was not driven only by Clarke-style rationalism. We can see this by turning to Butler, who also affirmed non-conflict moral pluralism while eschewing Clarke’s rationalist commitments.

B. Butler’s theological pluralism

Butler begins his “Dissertation upon the Nature of Virtue” by noting that all humans make moral judgments. He then raises the question of whether those moral judgments originate in
sentiment or reason alone — only to drop it. The goal of his “Dissertation,” Butler tells us, is to chart which sorts of things we approve of and which sorts of things we disapprove of, not to try to determine the meta-ethical origin of those judgments. Butler’s claims about the content of our moral judgments are neutral on the questions separating rationalists from sentimentalists. The picture of morality he develops is not supposed to depend on either Clarkean rationalism or Hutchesonian sentimentalism. As Butler famously puts it, “It is manifest great part of common language, and of common behaviour over the world, is formed upon supposition of such a moral faculty; whether called conscience, moral reason, moral sense, or divine reason; whether considered as a sentiment of the understanding, or as a perception of the heart, or, which seems the truth, as including both” (Butler 69).

What sorts of moral judgments do humans make? According to Butler, we make moral judgments based on general ultimate ends that have been “universally acknowledged” in “all ages and countries” (Butler 70). And what is crucial for our purposes is that he maintains that there is a plurality of these ultimate ends — not just one.

Butler is particularly concerned to argue against the view that virtue is nothing but benevolence toward humanity as a whole. He thus warns against the idea “of imagining the whole of virtue to consist in singly aiming, according to the best of [one’s] judgment, at promoting the happiness of mankind in the present state; and the whole of vice, in doing what [one] foresee[s], or might foresee, is likely to produce an overbalance of unhappiness in it: than which mistakes, none can be conceived more terrible” (Butler 74). Taking general benevolence to be the entirety of virtue is a terrible mistake, Butler explains, because it leads us to ignore other principles that are rightly taken to be ultimate moral ends. These other principles include “veracity” and “justice,” as well as the “gratitude” and “friendship” that motivate us to benefit those near and dear to us (our benefactors and friends) rather than
promote the welfare of people in general (Butler 72-4). As Butler writes, “The fact then appears to be, that we are constituted so as to condemn falsehood, unprovoked violence, injustice, and to approve of benevolence to some preferably to others, abstracted from all consideration, which conduct is likeliest to produce an overbalance of happiness or misery… [S]ince this is our constitution; falsehood, violence, injustice, must be vice in us, and benevolence to some preferably to others, virtue; abstracted from all consideration of the overbalance of evil or good, which they may appear likely to produce” (Butler 73-4). Butler thinks we should take there to be a plurality of independent ultimate moral ends — justice, veracity, and the partial benevolence of friendship and gratitude among them. We ought to be morally concerned with each of these for its own sake, as an independent reason for action, and not take their normative force to be reducible to or derivable from a single benevolent foundation.

Butler is, therefore, a pluralist in the sense of affirming a plurality of ultimate moral ends. But does he think that ultimate moral ends can or will ever come into conflict with each other?

As with Clarke’s, a conspicuous feature of Butler’s pluralism is that it leaves issues about the possibility of conflict between ultimate moral ends largely unaddressed. Butler does say that we should not allow considerations of what will promote the happiness of humanity as a whole to override considerations of justice, veracity, friendship, or gratitude. He seems to think that when those other principles conflict with what we think will best promote general happiness, we should take the former to have normative trumping power. But Butler does not discuss the possibility of those other principles — justice, veracity, gratitude, friendship — coming into conflict with each other. I think he doesn’t discuss conflict between these ultimate moral ends because he assumes such conflict will never
occur. And the reason Butler would make such an assumption is not hard to find: he thinks that God has arranged things so that we will never face conflict between our ultimate moral ends. Butler thinks that God has designed us and the world in such a way that we can and should take morality to be pluralist in the non-conflict sense.\textsuperscript{11}

Butler gives his theological reasons for non-conflict pluralism in a long footnote to the sermon “Upon the Love of our Neighbor.” He writes, “[A]s we are not competent judges, what is upon the whole for the good of the world; there may be other immediate ends appointed us to pursue, besides that one of doing good or producing happiness. Though the good of the creation be the only end of the Author of it, yet he may have laid us under particular obligations, which we may discern and feel ourselves under, quite distinct from a perception, that the observance or violation of them is for the happiness or misery of our fellow-creatures. And this is in fact the case. For there are certain dispositions of mind, and certain actions, which are in themselves approved or disapproved by mankind, abstracted from the consideration of their tendency to the happiness or misery of the world; approved or disapproved by reflection, by that principle within, which is the guide of life, the judge of right and wrong. Numberless instances of this kind might be mentioned … [of things that] are approved or disapproved by mankind in general, in quite another view than as conducive to the happiness or misery of the world” (Butler 66). God is a monist, having as His single ultimate end the good or happiness of all. But God realizes that humans are incapable of accurately discerning what promotes the good or happiness of all. So He has made us moral pluralists, putting us under several different obligations, while at the same time structuring the world so that when we fulfill those obligations we will serve His larger purpose. He has given us a moral faculty that approves of certain action-types directly, a faculty that leads us to approve of the action-types for their own sakes and not merely as
means to some single ultimate end. It is thus crucial for us to take our moral job to be to live in accord with the principles of veracity, justice, friendship, gratitude, and the like.

We could say that Butler’s view is that the ultimate structure of morality is monistic but that human morality (because of human limitations) is pluralist, or that there is really only one criterion of morality but that (limited) humans should use a pluralist moral decision-making procedure. Such a view would be similar to what Williams called Government House Utilitarianism” (Williams 166), with God’s being the only person residing in the Government House.

On this view, our ultimate moral ends will come into conflict only if God makes a mistake. For God intends for us to live by a plurality of different ultimate moral ends. He intends for us to take each of these ends to be an independent and inviolable reason for action. He does not intend for us to calculate when it would be right to act in accord with one moral end rather than another. But of course God does not make mistakes. God has successfully arranged things so that we need only always follow our moral ends in order to act as we ought, and so that we are never required to calculate when it is right to act contrary to (at least one) moral end. God has seen to it that our moral ends will never come into conflict.

As I mentioned in my discussion of Clarke, belief in a plurality of non-conflicting ultimate moral ends can be combined with several different views about the nature of those ends: a non-conflict pluralist can hold that the ultimate moral ends are all simple, that they are all negative, or that at least some of them include complex specifications and qualifications. I also said that Clarke does not consider the matter in an expansive or coherent enough way to warrant our conclusively attributing to him any one of these views rather than the others. I think the same is true of Butler. Because he held deep theological
commitments that led him to assume moral conflict would never erupt, he did not expend his energy arguing for one of the three versions of non-conflict pluralism over the other two.

Let me underscore the nature of the historical claim I have been trying to make in this and the preceding section. I have not meant to claim that Clarke and Butler explicitly considered the idea of conflict between ultimate moral ends and then concluded, on the basis of consciously-developed arguments grounded in rationalism and theology, that such conflict would never occur. My claim, rather, is that Clarke and Butler never thought much or at all about the idea of such conflict. It wasn’t on their philosophical radar. They didn’t seem to think the idea of such conflict was salient to moral theorizing. And my contention is that they didn’t take the possibility of such conflict seriously because they held deep — virtually non-negotiable — rationalist and theistic commitments that narrowed their philosophical vision to those conceptual spaces in which such conflict would not occur.

Hume, of course, rejects both the rationalism of Clarke and the theology of Butler. For Hume, morality is based on our sentiments, and there are no grounds for thinking that an omnibenevolent divine mind has given us those sentiments and designed the world in which they operate. But if morality rests on a non-theological sentimental base, the stage is set for conflict moral pluralism — for the view that not only is there a plurality of ultimate moral ends but also that those ultimate moral ends can and sometimes will come into conflict with each other. For as just about everyone eventually learns, we cannot rely on all of our sentiments’ always perfectly harmonizing. Our sentimental constitution and the world at large are not set up to ensure that we will never have to choose between different things we care about. Virtually everyone can count on having to face, at some point, a situation in which the only way to attain one thing she cares about is to forgo another thing she cares about. But if morals are based on what we care about, and if we don’t have prior
rationalist or theological reasons for thinking that all of our moral concerns will always harmonize with each other, then it should come as no surprise to find ourselves sometimes facing situations in which one of our ultimate moral ends conflicts with another.

This, then, is the recipe for Humean conflict moral pluralism. Start with observations of what people take to be of ultimate moral importance. Find, like Clarke and Butler, that people take to be of ultimate moral importance a plurality of different things. Remove the rationalist and theological blinders that prevented Clarke and Butler from squarely considering whether those ultimate moral ends can come into conflict. Find that in fact those ends can and do come into conflict.

Before expanding on this Humean position, however, we should note that sentimentalist moral foundations are nothing like a straight shot to conflict pluralism. To see this, we need only consider Hutcheson’s view of morality.

C. Hutcheson’s sentimentalist monism

Like Hume, Hutcheson soundly rejects Clarkean rationalism, maintaining that morality is grounded in approvals and disapprovals of a moral sense (Hutcheson 1728, 137-160). And Hutcheson presents his account of morality as prior to his theology (Hutcheson 1726, 109, 195-7; Hutcheson 1728, 23). Hutcheson does affirm the existence of a provident God, but his account of the content of morality is supposed to be evidence for that affirmation; he presents his claims about God as being supported by his account of morality, not the other way around.

But far from being a pluralist, Hutcheson maintains that we have one and only one ultimate moral end — benevolence toward human beings. All of our moral judgments, Hutcheson tells us, have “one general Foundation,” and that is our approval of the motive
to promote the welfare of humanity in general (Hutcheson 1726, 116). “[T]hat we may see how Love, or Benevolence, is the Foundation of all apprehended Excellence in social Virtues, let us only observe, That amidst the diversity of Sentiments on this Head among various Sects, this is still allow’d to be the only way of deciding the Controversy about any disputed Practice, viz. to enquire whether this Conduct, or the contrary, will most effectually promote the publick Good. The morality is immediately adjusted, when the natural Tendency, or Influence of the Action upon the universal natural Good of Mankind is agreed upon. That which produces more Good than Evil in the Whole, is acknowledg’d Good; and what does not, is counted Evil” (Hutcheson 1726, 118). According to Hutcheson, a careful observation of our moral responses reveals that we approve of people just to the extent that we think they are motivated to promote human welfare (Hutcheson 1726, 116-146).14

I thus think Hutcheson is rightly taken to be an early Utilitarian. But he would be a motive-utilitarian, not an act- or rule-utilitarian. That is to say, his view implies that our moral judgments are attuned to the motives we think people act on, and that we approve of a motive to the extent that we think the motive is generally benevolent. Darwall [1994] argues that Hutcheson is not a meta-ethical Utilitarian in that he doesn’t think that moral ideas can be reduced to ideas about non-moral states of affairs. Darwall is right about this, but Hutcheson is still fairly thought of as a normatively monistic Utilitarian (i.e., a motive-Utilitarian about the content of morality) insofar as he thinks morality is based on approval only of one kind of motive — namely, motives to promote happiness. All our approvals, according to Hutcheson, are responsive to the same benevolent quality. (It’s also worth mentioning that Hutcheson’s monistic commitments extend to his Inquiry concerning Beauty, where he insists that all of our judgments of beauty are based on our positive response to a single quality — namely, uniformity amidst variety.)
Hutcheson does acknowledge that we often approve of a person when she intends to promote the welfare of only a few people and not humanity as a whole. We approve of parents’ love for their children, of friends’ mutual concern for each other, of patriots’ commitment to their country. But what makes these cases of “partial benevolence” virtuous is their goal of promoting human welfare, and it is always morally better to promote more human welfare rather than less. Partial benevolence is a morally lesser version of general benevolence. “[O]ur moral Sense would most recommend to our Election, as the most perfectly Virtuous [those actions that] appear to have the most universal unlimited Tendency to the greatest and most extensive Happiness of all the rational Agents, to whom our Influence can reach. All Benevolence, even toward a Part, is amiable, when not inconsistent with the Good of the Whole: But this is a smaller Degree of Virtue, unless our Beneficence be restrain’d by want of Power, and not want of Love to the Whole… This Increase of the moral Beauty of Actions, or Dispositions, according to the Number of Persons to whom the good Effects of them extend, may shew us the Reason why Actions which flow from the nearer Attachments of Nature, such as that between the Sexes, and the Love of our Offspring, are not so amiable, nor do they appear so virtuous as Actions of equal Moment of Good towards Persons less attach’d to us. The Reason is plainly this. These strong Instincts are by Nature limited to small Numbers of Mankind, such as our Wives or Children; whereas a Disposition, which would produce a like moment of Good to others, upon no special Attachment, if it was accompany’d with natural Power to accomplish its Intention, would be incredibly more fruitful of great and good Effects to the Whole” (Hutcheson 1726, 126-7; see also Hutcheson 1726, 231-3 and Hutcheson 1728, 8).

According to Hutcheson, we recognize “different Degrees of Moral Beauty” (Hutcheson 1726, 231), and the highest degree is a benevolence toward all humans that “controuls our
kind particular Passions … or counteracts them” (Hutcheson 1726, 231). The morally best thing is to try to promote the welfare of all, even in those cases in which it means sacrificing the “Happiness of certain smaller Systems of Individuals,” such as those composed of one’s countrymen, one’s friends, and one’s children (Hutcheson 1726, 231).

We can now see that Butler’s attack on the idea that all virtue is founded on general benevolence is fairly directed at Hutcheson. There may be some passages in Hutcheson that it is possible to interpret, on their own, as not committed to a monistic view. But sections III and IV of the Inquiry are much more naturally read as propounding the kind of exclusively benevolence-based view that Butler attacked. Perhaps Hutcheson’s emphasis on universal benevolence can be partly explained by his great concern to combat Hobbesian/Mandevillean egoism: zeal to deny that self-interest is our only end may have pushed him to magnify the importance of disinterested benevolence or love for humanity in general. But however that may be, a monistic moral view is what Hutcheson — at least in certain very prominent passages — advances.

And it seems to me reasonably clear that Butler’s criticisms of this view are apt. Both Hutcheson and Butler aim to describe commonsense, everyday moral judgments. Both take themselves to be charting persons’ actual moral responses, to be presenting data gleaned from a cautious observation of human life. But I think Butler is right to claim that our moral judgments do not track only our thoughts about benevolence. Commonsense everyday moral judgments of justice, veracity, friendship, gratitude, promise-keeping, and the like are not all reducible to or derived from thoughts about motivations to promote the welfare of humanity. Our approvals of such things, according to Butler, reveal vectors of moral concern that are independent of approval of the goal of promoting the “Good of the Whole.”
2. Hume’s sentimentalist pluralism

A. Hume’s conflict pluralism

Hume endorses the Butlerian criticism of Hutcheson’s benevolence-monism. In a letter to Hutcheson, Hume writes, “I always thought you limited too much your Ideas of Virtue” (Letters 47), and in the Treatise and Second Enquiry he develops a much more expansive account, one that includes a rich plurality of different ultimate moral ends. In this section, we will see how Hume’s pluralism differs from Hutcheson’s monism by, first, examining the “four different sources” or “principles” of what Hume calls the natural virtues, and by, second, examining what Hume calls the artificial virtues.

According to Hume, the four principles underlying our judgments of the natural virtues are approval of personal qualities that are: useful to others, useful to the agent herself, immediately agreeable to others, and immediately agreeable to the agent herself (T 3.3.1.24-27; 3.3.5.1, 3.3.2.16; E 9.1; D 37). The first of these four principles — approval of qualities that are useful to others — might look to be similar to Hutchesonian approval of general benevolence. But Hume’s other three principles are clearly responsive to different kinds of things. We approve of qualities that are agreeable not because we think their agreeability is a small piece of usefulness. We approve of their agreeability for its own sake. The value we place on that which is agreeable cannot be reduced to, or placed on the same scale as, the value we place on what is useful. We may believe that the useful quality of, say, discretion produces more long-term benefit for humanity than the immediately agreeable quality of wit. But we don’t value wit because we think it does the same job as discretion,
only not as well. The value we place on wit is not merely an inferior version of the value we place on discretion. Indeed, what we value about wit (its agreeability) is something concerning which discretion is inferior. We value discretion because it is “naturally fitted” to do one job, and we value wit because it does very well at a different job (T 3.3.1.30). And just as the value of agreeability to others and the value of usefulness to others can be distinguished in this way, so too can the value of usefulness to self and the value of usefulness to others, as well as the value of agreeability to self and the value of usefulness to self. We approve of perseverance because we think it is very useful to its possessor, not merely because we think it is mildly useful to humanity as a whole. We approve of cheerfulness because it makes its possessor’s life more agreeable, not merely because it might be a little bit useful to people in general.

Earlier, I explained that while Clarke seems to think there is a single explanation of the grounds of all of our moral duties (i.e., fittingness), he should not be taken to hold that that explanation is itself a deeper justificatory ground. Similarly, we can say of Hume’s view that while approval (from the general point of view) is the unifying explanation of all of the grounds of our moral judgments, that explanation is not itself a justifying ground of our moral judgments. That I approve of X will always be a Humean explanation of my judging X to be virtuous, but that is not to say that my approving of X is the justificatory reason for my judgment that its virtuous. The justificatory reasons will be that X is agreeable and/or useful to self and/or others.

Baier, Sayre-McCord, Dees, Abramson, and Swanton have all incisively elucidated aspects of Hume’s development of this idea that the principles of natural virtue constitute four independent vectors of moral thought. And indeed, Hume himself takes great pains to highlight this aspect of his view (most likely with an eye toward distancing himself from the
Hutchesonian monism that Butler attacked). He goes out of his way to make it perfectly clear that the four different principles of natural virtue cannot be reduced to or derived from each other. Here are just a few quotations that indicate that Hume had this pluralist purpose in mind.19

**We take some qualities to be meritorious because they are useful to others:**

We may observe, that, in displaying the praises of any humane, beneficent man, there is one circumstance which never fails to be amply insisted on, namely, the happiness and satisfaction, derived to society from his intercourse and good offices… As these topics of praise never fail to be employed, and with success, where we would inspire esteem for any one; may it not thence be concluded, that the Utility, resulting from the social virtues, forms, at least, a *part* of their merit, and is one source of that approbation and regard so universally paid to them. (E 2.6-8)

**We take some qualities to be meritorious because they are useful to their possessors:**

[Q]ualities, which tend only to the utility of their possessor, without any reference to us, or to the community, are yet esteemed and valued. (E 6.22)

There are many other qualities of the mind, whose merit is deriv’d from the same origin. *Industry, perseverance, patience, activity, vigilance, application, constancy,* with other virtues of that kind, which ‘twill be easy to recollect, are esteem’d valuable upon no other account, than their advantage in the conduct of life… As on the other hand,
prodigality, luxury, irresolution, uncertainty, are vicious, merely because they draw ruin upon us, and incapacitate us for business and action. (T 3.3.4.7-8)

We take some qualities to be meritorious even though they are not useful:

“All this seems to me a proof, that our approbation has, in those cases, an origin different from the prospect of utility and advantage, either to ourselves or others” (T 3.3.3.4)

We take some qualities to be meritorious because they are agreeable to others:

These attentions and regards are immediately agreeable to others, abstracted from any consideration of utility or beneficial tendencies: They conciliate affection, promote esteem, and extremely enhance the merit of the person, who regulates his behaviour by them. (E 8.2)

We take some qualities to be meritorious because they are agreeable to their possessors:

As some qualities acquire their merit from their being immediately agreeable to others, without any tendency to public interest; so some are denominated virtuous from their being immediately agreeable to the person himself, who possessses them. (T 3.3.1.28)

Hume’s catalogue of the natural virtues is thus closer to Clarke and Butler’s pluralist picture of the content of morality than to Hutcheson’s monistic picture. Hutcheson and Hume are
alike in holding to a sentimentalist meta-ethical explanation of our moral judgments. But Hume’s description of the content of those judgments is more like Clarke and Butler’s in that he insists that they are based on a plurality of basic principles.

We’ve seen, though, that Butler and Clarke never say that different ultimate moral ends will ever come into conflict with each other. And they held deep theological and rationalist commitments that explain their belief that such conflict would not occur. What does Hume, who rejects those theological and rationalist commitments, say about such matters?

In a number of places, Hume stresses the convergence of the different kinds of approval, pointing out that different principles will lead us to approve of one and the same quality for different reasons. We approve of benevolence because it is useful to others, but usefulness is only “a part … of its merit” (E 2.22; Hume’s italics). We also approve of benevolence because it is immediately agreeable to others, where that immediate agreeability is not reducible to usefulness (E 7.19-22; T 3.3.2-4). There are two different reasons we approve of honesty and promise-keeping: both because such qualities are useful to others and because they are useful to their possessors (E 6.13). Courage, too, is useful to others and to its possessor; courage is also immediately agreeable, thus laying claim to approval from all four principles of virtue (T 3.3.2.14.1; E 7.11). A good body can lay similar claim, being useful and agreeable to its possessor and to others (T 3.3.5.2.2-4). All of these findings of moral convergence would fit comfortably within the non-conflict pluralism of Butler and Clarke.

But Hume also clearly differs from Butler and Clarke in affirming conflict pluralism, acknowledging unabashedly that the different kinds of approval can and sometimes do diverge. Hume tells us, for instance, that pride is immediately agreeable and useful to its
possessor (T 3.3.2.1; 3.3.2.8) but also that it is disagreeable and disadvantageous to others (T 3.3.2.6-10). Anger is disagreeable to its possessor and to others, but it is useful to its possessor (T 3.3.2.7). “Heroism, or military glory” is disadvantageous to others and perhaps even to its possessor, but it is immediately agreeable to its possessor and perhaps to others (T 3.3.2.15).20

Hume is particularly forthcoming about the potential for conflict between moral principles in A Dialogue.21 There he writes, “It is needless to dissemble… We must sacrifice somewhat of the useful, if we be very anxious to obtain all of the agreeable qualities; and cannot pretend to reach alike every kind of advantage” (D 47). Hume points to “luxury” and “free commerce between the sexes” as examples of things that are agreeable and yet also disadvantageous: treating these things in accord with one of the principles of morality can be incompatible with treating them in accord with another of the principles. Conflict between agreeability and usefulness can also erupt in the forming of judgments of certain political leaders who possess qualities that are agreeable but disadvantageous (E 7.22-4).

But perhaps the most important cases of moral conflict Hume describes are between natural virtues, on the one hand, and the demands of artificial virtues, on the other. Hume’s leading example of an artificial virtue is justice, and he makes a special effort to explain our approvals of just conduct.22 But he is also perfectly clear that in some situations the just course of action will be incompatible with the course of action favored by one or more of the four principles of natural virtue. Justice can demand that we give money to someone even if he is “a vicious man, and deserves the hatred of all mankind,” or a miser who “can make no use of” it or “a profligate debauche” who “wou’d rather receive harm than benefit” from it (T 3.2.1.13; 11 and 14; see also T 3.2.6.9 and App. 3.6). Meanwhile, there may be other people who are wonderful in every way and who have urgent needs that can
only be met if they receive the money instead. It may even be the case that the matter has been conducted in “secret” so that the public will not be harmed by the “example” set by giving the money to those in great need rather than to the vicious, miserly, or debauched (T 3.2.1.11). In such situations, to do what is just will be incompatible with doing what is agreeable and useful; in such situations, the demands of justice will conflict with natural virtue.

The other artificial virtues Hume examines are promise-keeping, allegiance to government, and chastity. And each of these can conflict with natural virtue in that each can obligate us to do what is disadvantageous or disagreeable. Hume highlights in particular the disadvantageousness of some acts of allegiance (T 3.3.9.3) and the disagreeability and uselessness of some cases of chastity (T 3.2.12.3-7).

The different artificial virtues, moreover, can come into conflict with each other. That’s because the different artificial virtues have different jobs — they’re fitted to different ends — and those different jobs or ends may not always harmonize. Hume makes this point when stressing the independence of promise-keeping and allegiance (which is crucial to his attack on contractarian accounts of the origins of government). He writes, “[S]ince there is a separate interest in the obedience to government, from that in the performance of promises, we must also allow of a separate obligation. To obey the civil magistrate is requisite to preserve order and concord in society. To perform promises is requisite to beget mutual trust and confidence in the common offices of life. The ends, as well as the means, are perfectly distinct; nor is the one subordinate to the other” (T 3.2.8.5). He goes on, “But ’tis not only the natural obligations of interest, which are distinct in promises and allegiance; but also the moral obligations of honour and conscience: Nor does the merit or demerit of the one depend in the least upon that of the other… As there are here two interests entirely
distinct from each other, they must give rise to two moral obligations, equally separate and independent” (T 3.2.8.7). But given this independence of promise-keeping and allegiance, it is entirely possible that a course of action required by one of these moral ends will be incompatible with the course of action required by the other. And the moral end of chastity is different again from those of allegiance and promise-keeping; Hume accounts for our approval of chastity with considerations that there is no reason to think could be derived from the ends of the other artificial virtues (T 3.2.12.3). But the independence of chastity makes it possible for its requirements to conflict with the requirements of justice, promise-keeping, and the like.23

So. Hume maintains that we have a plurality of different ultimate moral ends. Some of those ends ground natural virtues and some ground artificial virtues. And different kinds of conflict can arise between all of these different moral ends — between one natural virtue and another natural virtue, between a natural virtue and an artificial virtue, and between one artificial virtue and another artificial virtue. This is a conflict pluralism that is deep and broad.

B. Hume’s sentimentalist explanations of his conflict pluralism

What is Hume’s explanation for humans’ having these various, potentially-conflicting moral ends? Obviously, he will not rely on Clarke-style rationalism or Butler-style theology. Nor does he rely on an explanatorily basic moral sense, as Hutcheson does. Hume’s account of our moral responses depends, rather, on two mental mechanisms quite different from his predecessors’ meta-ethical foundations: [1] sympathy and [2] the addiction to general rules.

Humean sympathy is not an internal sense that has as its only role the issuing of approvals and disapprovals (which is what the Hutchesonian moral sense is). Its operations
are more pervasive than that. Humean sympathy is what underlies our general tendency to identify with others and thus to feel the same kind of thing we believe they are feeling. It is the mental mechanism by which the feelings of others are transmitted to us. Because of sympathy, when I consider someone who I think is angry, I tend to feel angry. When I consider someone who I think is sad or excited or envious, I tend to feel sad or excited or envious.

And because of sympathy, when I consider someone who I think is happy, I tend to feel happy. If the person’s happiness has been caused by the personal quality of someone, and if I am considering the situation from a general point of view, the feeling of happiness I experience will be a sentiment of approval directed to the bearer of that personal quality. And the point of importance for our purposes is that sympathy is exceedingly ecumenical about the kinds of happiness it will transmute into approval in this way (T 3.3.1.7-10 and 29; T 3.3.6.1).\(^{24}\) A quality of someone can cause happiness by causing other people to have an immediately agreeable experience. A quality of someone can cause happiness by causing the person herself to have an immediately agreeable experience. A quality of someone can cause happiness by promoting the long-term welfare of others. A quality of someone can cause happiness by promoting the long-term welfare of the person herself. In each of these cases, when we consider the person or persons who have been made happy, sympathy transmits the happiness to us, and thus, if we are considering the situation from the general point of view, we will feel approval toward the quality that caused the happiness.

The phenomenological feel of these approvals toward different kinds of qualities might differ from each other to some extent.\(^{25}\) Approval of that which is agreeable to self might feel a bit different from approval of that which is useful to others, which might differ again from approval of that which is agreeable to others, and so on. But these responses are
close enough to rightly be taken to all be morally significant nonetheless. The sentiment of approbation that agreeability elicits may be “somewhat different from that, which attends the other virtues. But this, in my opinion, is not a sufficient reason for excluding them from the catalogue of virtues. Each of the virtues, even benevolence, justice, gratitude, integrity, excites a different sentiment or feeling in the spectator. The character of *Caesar* and *Cato*, as drawn by *Sallust*, are both of them virtuous, in the strictest sense of the word; but in a different way: Nor are the sentiments entirely the same, which arise from them” (T 3.3.4.2; see also E 7.29 and App 4.3-6 and 21-2). If we experience a positive feeling when considering a certain quality from a general point of view, then we will take it to be approval, even if it feels somewhat different from other positive feelings we have had when considering other qualities from a general point of view. Each of these feelings will have the kind of salience to our thinking about how we ought to interact with people that is distinctive of morality. And this explains the existence of different principles underlying our judgments of virtue: we feel fully fledged approval toward different kinds of happiness-producing qualities.²⁶

But as we saw in our earlier discussion of justice and the artificial virtues, we sometimes approve of particular instances of conduct (such as returning money to a miser or certain cases of chastity) that do not make people happy — instances of conduct that are neither useful nor agreeable to self or others. Hume cannot rely solely on happiness-transmitting sympathy to explain such moral responses. In order to account for the full range of our approvals, Hume needs to deploy his second crucial mental mechanism: our addiction to general rules.²⁷

Our addiction to general rules is our associative tendency to think or feel the same thing about two objects that resemble each other but differ in some crucial respect. Hume
explains how this mechanism works in moral contexts when he writes, “As to [moral obligations], we may observe, that the maxim wou’d here be false, that when the cause ceases, the effect must cease also. For there is a principle of human nature, which we have frequently taken notice of, that men are mightily addicted to general rules, and that we often carry our maxims beyond those reasons, which first induc’d us to establish them. Where cases are similar in many circumstances, we are apt to put them on the same footing, without considering, that they differ in the most material circumstances, and that the resemblance is more apparent than real” (T 3.2.9.3). Our addiction to general rules is our tendency to overgeneralize. It (along with sympathy) accounts for our approval of “virtue in rags,” which is an instantiation of a quality that typically brings happiness to people but fails to do so in a particular case because of unusual, unfortunate circumstances (T 3.3.1.19). We originally approve of discretion, for instance, because it is useful and because sympathy leads us to approve of what is useful. And discretion is useful in so many cases that we eventually come to associate discretion with approval; we develop the powerful habit or disposition to feel approval whenever we consider discretion. Now there are some atypical situations in which a person’s discretion will serve no purpose whatsoever, when it is not useful at all. But the association we have formed between discretion and approval is strong enough that it will lead us to feel approval when we consider discretion even in those cases in which it is not useful. Our reactions follow the general rule of approving of discretion, and they follow that rule even in those unusual cases in which discretion does not have the useful effects that originally caused us to approve of it.

Similarly, our addiction to general rules plays a crucial role in our approvals of artificial virtues in situations in which they are not useful (T 3.2.2.24). Most of the time, justice, promise-keeping, allegiance, and chastity are useful, and in each of those useful cases
we will (as a result of the mechanism of sympathy) feel approval for the instantiations of those artificial virtues.\textsuperscript{28} We will thus develop the associative habit of feeling approval when considering justice and the other artificial virtues. And once this associative habit becomes strongly ingrained enough, it will outrun the precise conditions that originally gave rise to it. We will thus be disposed to feel approval toward an instantiation of an artificial virtue even in those atypical cases in which it is not beneficial. And the point of great importance here is that the approval that results from this associative habit is fully fledged. This is why we take the positive feeling we experience when considering even disadvantageous cases of discretion and justice (so long as we are considering matters from the general point of view) to be morally significant. Hume thus has a principled sentimentalist explanation of our approvals of some things that are neither useful nor agreeable (even if he also thinks that our approval in those cases is due to an associative habit that developed only because in most other cases those objects have been useful or agreeable).\textsuperscript{29}

It’s worth noting that Hume’s uses of sympathy and the addiction to general rules to explain the plurality of our moral ends coheres tightly with his theory of human nature as a whole. It’s not as though he whipped up these two mental mechanisms, ad hoc, to account for the plurality of moral ends he claims to have observed in human moral thought. Both of these mechanisms also play powerful and pervasive roles in Hume’s explanations of a plethora of other (non-moral) phenomena. Sympathy plays a central role in his explanation of (among other things) beauty, pride, ambition, avarice, curiosity, revenge, and lust (T 2.2.5.15). The addiction to general rules plays a central role in his explanation of (among other things) prejudice and racial stereotyping, our distinguishing between “poetical enthusiasm, and a serious conviction” (T 1.3.10.11) and the embarrassment we feel for people who act foolishly but are not themselves aware of their own foolishness (T 2.2.7.5).
Hume’s general theory of human nature predicts that we will have a plurality of moral ends, and his observations of the pluralism of commonsense morality constitute confirmatory evidence of that general theory (T 3.3.1.25-31; T 3.3.2.16).30

3. Humean sentimentalist explanations

A. Moral ambivalence

W.D. Ross is rightly celebrated for his nuanced description of central aspects of commonsense morality — aspects that fit squarely into what I have been calling conflict pluralism (Ross 17-27; 34-39). But Ross accounts for those aspects with a non-naturalist meta-ethics that many (including all Humeans) have found untenable (Ross 14-5, 29-33).31 In this section, I will try to explain how Humean foundations — i.e., the sentimentalist pluralism I’ve sketched in the previous two sections — can provide a fitting explanation of the phenomena Ross does such an excellent job of describing. If you find Ross’s descriptions of commonsense morality compelling, and if you find the Humean meta-ethical foundations metaphysically and epistemologically superior to Rossian non-naturalism, you will then have strong reasons to adopt the sentimentalist-pluralist position I want to advance.

The phenomena that are central to conflict pluralism are cases of moral ambivalence — the experience of moral considerations both in favor of and opposed to one and the same thing.32 Ross focuses his attention in chapter 2 of The Right and the Good on these sorts of cases, and Hume is also conspicuously sensitive to them.

One way in which I can be morally ambivalent is by having a positive moral reaction to one quality of a person (say, her kindness) while having a negative moral reaction to another quality of hers (say, her immoderation).33 In a letter, Hume pointed out that if, as
Hutcheson claimed, all virtue were based on benevolence, “no Characters could be mixt” (Letters 34). But, according to Hume, we plainly do have mixed moral responses to people. In the *History* and the *Essays*, Hume gives numerous examples of this kind of ambivalence. Henry I was brave, moderate, and a good friend, but he was also ambitious in a way that pushed him “into measures which were both criminal in themselves, and were the cause of further crimes” (History 1.370-1). The Gunpowder Conspirators exhibited “intrepid firmness” and “courage” but also “bigoted zeal” and prejudice (History 5.30-1). Sir Robert Walpole is “constant, not magnanimous; moderate, not equitable” (Essays 575). About Charles I Hume writes, “The character of this prince, as that of most men, if not of all men, was mixed” (History 5.542).

I want to spend more time, however, on a second kind of moral ambivalence, as it elucidates particularly well the distinctive strengths of the Humean account — namely, the moral ambivalence we can experience towards a single quality, how a single quality can be favored by one principle of morality and disfavored by another. Consider military glory. Military glory is both agreeable and disadvantageous. Will we, then, approve or disapprove of it? One could hold that there must be a simple answer to that question — that the mental machinery that produces approval and disapproval in us can issue only one product per item of evaluation. Hutcheson’s monistic moral sense seems to be like that. But while some people may have a single univocal moral response to military glory, that doesn’t seem to be true of everyone. It seems that many people have both morally favorable and morally unfavorable reactions towards it. Some instances of military glory they may approve of. Other instances they may disapprove of. And about still others they may be ambivalent. The conduct of heroes such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon may occasion this third, synchronic type of ambivalence. One may find oneself both admiring
and condemning the conduct of such men — and not because one admires one of their qualities and condemns another. Rather, one may find oneself feeling a kind of admiration toward their militaristic drive and feeling a kind of condemnation toward it at the same time.

Baier [1993] 210-12 has suggested that Hume does not endorse approval of military glory — that he disagrees with the admiration of glory that “the generality of mankind” evince and agrees with the condemnation of glory that “men of cool reflexion” evince. (Although I don’t think Hume says that men of cool reflection fail to see anything at all of worth in military glory; it’s just that they also see more clearly than others that there is something morally significant to be said against it as well.) But it’s worth noting that Baier doesn’t think we should prefer utility to agreeability in all other cases in which they conflict. Indeed, she is particularly eloquent in her descriptions of how agreeability is something that matters to us independently of utility. And I think it’s undeniable that many people do find the astounding military success of someone like Caesar to be, well, glorious. No doubt, Hume thinks admiration for military brilliance ought to be tempered by consideration of the devastation it can cause. But his pluralism does imply that there are real values on both sides.

Or consider extensive public-spiritedness, the drive to benefit humanity even if it means sacrificing the good of specific individuals. I’m thinking here of persons who are so focused on doing something for the public good that they end up acting in ways that detract from the happiness of those near and dear to them. In some cases, we might approve of this kind of devotion to the public good: think of a committed scientist whose quest to cure cancer leads her merely to botch some day-to-day matters (such as missing a dentist’s appointment or forgetting a wedding anniversary). In other cases, we might disapprove of it:
think of a scientist whose commitment to work makes her neglectful of her children. And towards still others we might have both positive and negative responses at the same time.

Or consider intensely driven artists and athletes. Their accomplishments might be very agreeable. But the single-mindedness that enables them to achieve their goals might be disadvantageous, leading them to act in ways that detract from the long-term interests of not only themselves but also their parents, spouses, and children. Of some instances of such single-minded artistic and athletic pursuit we may approve, of some we may disapprove, and about still others we may be (synchronically) ambivalent.

The same kind of ambivalence can arise in cases involving injustice. Consider a husband who steals medicine for his wife, or a father who steals bread for his children. (See T 3.2.1.13; 3.2.6.9). It doesn’t take much imagination to fill in details in ways that will lead us to approve of some of these cases of injustice, to disapprove of other cases, and to have mixed moral responses in still others.

Hume’s sentimentalist conflict pluralism explains all of this beautifully. It explains how one and the same quality can produce different feelings of approval or disapproval in us. These feelings might not have exactly the same phenomenological feel as each other, but they may well be similar enough for us to take both of them to have moral significance (T 3.3.4.2; see also E 7.29, App 4.3-6 and 21-2). Hume thus has an explanation not only for how it is that we can come to have mixed moral feelings about a person’s character as a whole but also for how it is that we can come to have mixed moral feelings about a single quality — both in the sense of approving of some instantiations of it and disapproving of other instantiations of it, and in the sense of approving and disapproving at the same time of some individual instantiations of it. There is for a sentimentalist like Hume nothing at all mysterious about such mixed moral feelings. There are many other things in life about
which have mixed feelings, many other things towards which we have both positive and negative responses. So why shouldn’t we have mixed feelings about morally significant features as well, given that our moral responses are sentiments that are sensitive to a number of different dimensions of human welfare and rule-following?

This Humean view can and needs to include a distinction between feelings of approval and disapproval about something and a final all-in moral judgment of that thing.34 There has been much written about how on Hume’s view our moral judgments need not track precisely our occurrent feelings — about how our moral judgments can align to our dispositions to feel approval and disapproval toward qualities from a general point of view, regardless of whether we are actually (occurrently) responding to those qualities from the general point of view at the moment we make the judgment.35 This dispositional aspect of the Humean view of moral judgment is very important, but it is not what I mean to focus on here. What I mean to focus on is the idea that we can have a feeling of disapproval toward something (whether we take that in an occurrent or dispositional sense) and still refrain from making a final all-in judgment that it is vicious.36 And that’s because we may also have a feeling of approval toward it (in either the occurrent or dispositional sense). One and the same thing can elicit from us a feeling of disapproval and a feeling of approval, since one and the same thing can be favored by one principle of virtue and disfavored by another. We can thus see how the Humean can explain well what Ross is rightly celebrated for acutely describing: our experience of recognizing morally significant considerations both in favor of something and in opposition to it, and of our coming to make a single final all-in judgment about that thing. Ross explains these experiences as resulting from our recognition of mind-independent *prima facie* and actual duties (Ross 17-20; 23-4; 28-31). But Hume can account for them equally well as being the result of our mixed moral feelings.37
Once we have this distinction on board, moreover, we can see the error of criticisms of Hume such as that advanced by Rosalind Hursthouse. Hursthouse claims that Hume’s view fails because it implies that many more things are virtues than are in fact virtues, and because it implies that one and the same thing can be both a virtue and a vice. As Hursthouse writes when discussing Hume’s four-fold disjunctive view, “But, as we all know, it is all too easy for something to meet a disjunctive condition, let alone one with four disjuncts… [I]t is disastrously obvious that the four causes of pleasure are bound to yield many inconsistent or inconclusive results” (Hursthouse 70-1).

Abramson has tried to defend Hume from Hursthouse’s criticism by claiming that the four-fold distinction is not Hume’s ultimate ground of virtue after all. Abramson writes, “[T]he ultimate test of Humean virtue is not the infamous four-fold disjunct of qualities agreeable or useful to oneself or others. Rather the criterion of Humean virtues is whether a trait makes one well or ill suited for a particular sphere or spheres of interpersonal interaction” (Abramson 2008). This is not how Hume should be defended, however. For first of all, as I’ve already tried to show, the textual evidence is strongly on the side of a disjunctive reading of Hume. But secondly, when we are clear about what Hume’s philosophical project is, we see that disjunctive aspect is a strength of his view, not a weakness.

Hursthouse believes that Hume fails to identify correctly what the virtues are. But what she seems concerned about is that Hume doesn’t tell us what the correct moral judgments are — that he doesn’t give us an account of virtue that we can use as a guidance or a goal in our lives. But Hume is not trying to defend a normative account of how we ought to live. His project, rather, is to explain the things people actually happen to do. Now the particular phenomena Hume seeks to explain in Book 3 of the Treatise and in much
of the *Second Enquiry* are people’s praisings and blamings. It’s a plainly observable fact that people praise and blame many sorts of things, and Hume sets out to explain the psychological mechanisms that underlie that activity. Hume’s claim is that people praise and blame based on what they think is useful or agreeable to self or others — that a person’s praisings and blamings are responsive to her beliefs about usefulness and agreeability. Of course a person could have false beliefs about whether something is useful or agreeable, and to the extent that her beliefs are false her moral judgments which are responsive to those beliefs will be incorrect. But Hume’s concern is to show that a person’s moral judgments are responsive to her beliefs about such things, not to give a normative account of the one and only set of correct moral judgments. Most people, for instance, don’t praise celibacy and self-mortification because most people think (correctly, according to Hume) that such practices are disagreeable and fail to produce any benefit (E 9.3). But that’s consistent with Hume’s also holding that someone who thinks that those practices are useful will praise them. Hume’s view will be falsified only if we find that people praise things that they think are neither useful nor agreeable (contra Hursthouse at pp. 75-6). It will not be falsified by — indeed, it will gain confirmation from — people’s praising things that they think are useful, even if we (and Hume himself) happen to think those people are factually mistaken about the usefulness of such things.

Moreover, once we realize that something’s being useful or agreeable to self or others can be for a person an *initial* but not necessarily a *conclusive* reason to praise it — once we distinguish between a feeling of approval and a final all-in judgment — we see that far from being disastrous, the expansiveness of Hume’s disjunctive view is a great virtue. A moral monist might think that on reflection all of our evaluative reasons will always line up on the same side of every question. But that’s not the way things work out for most of us.
Most of us consistently face situations in which there are value considerations that pull in opposite directions. The military courage of a general in wartime is one such example that we’ve already examined. The frugality of a friend might be another example: we might approve of our friend’s financial discipline while at the same time disapproving of his refusal to use his money in a way that will provide him with what we take to be legitimate pleasure. Another example might be someone’s powerful commitment never to break the rules: we might respect the principledness of such a person’s conduct while at the same time thinking it would be good if she lightened up a bit. Hursthouse argues that Hume’s view is a failure because it can’t tell us whether these things — military courage, frugality, punctiliousness about the rules — are virtues or vice. But the fact is that we have mixed moral feelings about many instantiations of such things; we don’t have a single positive or negative response to all of them all of the time; we can and do have both positive and negative responses to them. And Hume’s four-fold account explains why we experience this kind of evaluative ambivalence. It’s those views that cannot account for this sort of ambivalence — those views that affirm only a single ultimate end, or only a single set of completely harmonious ends — that fail to capture crucial evaluative phenomena. It’s Hume’s view — with its expansive account of the different bases of our evaluative responses — that captures the contours of values as we actually experience them.

What do we do when we find ourselves in a situation in which we recognize both a consideration that morally favors something and a consideration that morally disfavors it? The Humean and the Rossian will both say that in some situations in which we see conflicting moral considerations we come to think that the considerations on one side of the question clearly and decisively override those on the other. In those situations, we will quickly arrive at a final all-in judgment that the object of evaluation is, say, vicious. But
while the Russian account will revert to our apprehension of mind-independent _prima facie_ and actual duties to explain this situation, the Humean account will take this situation to be akin to one in which we have both a desire for and aversion to one and the same thing, and in which the aversion massively outweighs the desire. The strawberry pie looks tasty, but because I know that I am severely allergic to strawberries I am not at all tempted to try it. Loyalty to one’s fellows is something we generally approve of, but when it leads the gang member to commit terrible crimes we have no hesitation at all in judging him to be vicious.

In other situations, however, the conflicting moral considerations may seem to us to be more evenly matched. And the Humean will hold that those kinds of cases are akin to one in which (I’m not allergic to strawberries, but) my desire for the strawberry pie is in conflict with my close-in-strength aversion to putting on weight or feeling overly full. In such a case, I might waver, hesitate, be at least uncertain about what to do. Similarly, in some morally significant cases the conflicting considerations might be evenly enough matched to make it initially unclear to me what final all-in judgment to make.

In some of these difficult cases we may refrain from fixing on a single moral verdict. Do we judge Alexander’s military drive to be virtuous or vicious? How about the zeal to cure cancer that leads a scientist to be careless about matters pertaining to her loved ones? Or the competitiveness that leads an athlete to sacrifice her long-term welfare? The artistic commitment that led Gauguin to leave his family and go to Tahiti? Perhaps some might have single up-or-down moral responses to cases like these, but the Humean can also accommodate responses that are less simple and decisive. A person might approve and disapprove of Alexander and Gauguin (because she is responsive to different Humean principles of virtue), which is to say that she might recognize considerations both for judging them to be virtuous and for judging them not to be virtuous. She might not find either of
the conflicting considerations to be powerful enough to completely override the other. And there might be no feature of her situation that compels her to come down decisively on side or the other. She thus might remain ambivalent, in equipoise, finding it more fitting to recognize both the good and bad aspects of such persons’ qualities rather than commit to univocal positive or negative verdicts.

Evaluations of Gauguin and the cancer-scientist may very well be influenced by moral luck (see Nagal). Assessment of Gauguin would then be higher because his paintings are masterpieces than they would be if his paintings were dross. And if the scientist fails to discover anything at all of medical value our assessment of her will be lower than if she discovers a miracle cure. But a nice feature of Humean pluralism is that it explains why those luck-sensitive assessments need not constitute the entirety of our moral evaluations of such people. Learning that Gauguin and a familially neglectful scientist have succeeded in their endeavors may positively affect our assessment of them without making our mixed moral feelings about them go completely away; we may still recognize a moral reason to criticize their conduct even while appreciating the significance of what they have accomplished. And Humean pluralism tells us that that is because while their successes give them a higher score on one dimension of moral importance they may still continue to score low on a different dimension of moral importance.

These mixed moral response are closely analogous to a type of aesthetic response that (it seems to me) is far from uncommon. Consider our reactions to authors whose writing style is appealing in one sense and unappealing in another. I find the florid expansiveness of Thomas Wolfe’s prose to be both beautifully poetic and annoyingly indulgent. I think there are reasons to praise Wolfe’s writing style and also reasons to criticize it. But what is my final aesthetic judgment of Wolfe? Well, there is no compelling
need to commit to a single up-or-down verdict, and so I don’t. About the quality of Wolfe’s writing — as about the moral status of Alexander and Gauguin’s leading characteristics — I can remain poised between two judgments, recognizing considerations on both sides of the question without taking either to be decisive. I feel the same ambivalence about the painter Rene Magritte and the writer Jorge Borges: I find the idea-centeredness of their paintings and writings intellectually thrilling but lacking in a kind of aesthetically important emotional power. Evaluative ambivalence can, in these cases, be a point of equilibrium.

Hume is one of the few historical moral philosophers I can think of who has paid close attention to this kind of evaluative ambivalence, probably because his theory is particularly well-suited to explain it. He points out that the “amours and attachments of Harry the IVth of France” and the “excessive bravery and resolute inflexibility of Charles the XIth” were disadvantageous (E 7.22-24). But these very qualities of Harry and Charles were also agreeable. So what is our final moral verdict of Harry and Charles? Hume does not seem to think that there must be a simple up-or-down answer. What he seeks to do, rather, is explain the mixed moral feelings Harry and Charles evoke, without giving any indication that a single definitive verdict is called for. In the Treatise, Hume describes the similarly mixed moral feelings we may have toward those who are friendly but indolent (T 3.3.1.24) and those who are extravagantly proud and ambitious (T 3.3.2.14). As Dees has done a wonderful job of showing, Hume’s History contains a number of character sketches that reveal the same kind of moral ambivalence. And “A Character of Sir Robert Walpole” is virtually a case study in it, with Hume concluding, “As I am a man, I love him; as I am a scholar, I hate him” (Essays 576).

Hume does not have to say that this kind of evaluative ambivalence always results from epistemic uncertainty. For the Humean, it need not be the case that there is some
determinate fact of the matter as to whether Harry, Charles, Alexander, or Gauguin was virtuous or vicious — any more than there must be some determinate fact as to whether or not Thomas Wolfe’s writing is a great writer. We may have mixed evaluative feelings about all such things even after we are fully informed, and there may be no single up-or-down verdict out there (or in us) to discern. (Can the Rossian also say that evaluative ambivalence is sometimes a point of equilibrium not due to epistemic limitations? This is a question I find interesting but do not know the answer to. See Ross 30-34 for comments that might bear on this question.)

There are, however, some situations in which we recognize conflicting moral considerations but are compelled to come to some kind of univocal moral judgment — when remaining indefinitely poised between two verdicts is simply not an option. The clearest examples of such situations are those in which we have to make a decision about what to do — when we recognize moral considerations in favor of two incompatible courses of action and yet must make a choice about which course to take. Hume directs his attention more toward third-personal evaluations of character than first-personal deliberations about what to do, but his conflict pluralism also applies well to the latter. For as Hume points out, our moral judgments of others affect how we decide to treat them (T 3.3.1.25). And if a person’s company is pleasantly agreeable, that will give us reason to treat him in one way; if a person’s behavior is deleterious, that will give us a reason to treat him in another way; and if one and the same person’s conduct is both agreeable and deleterious, we may be faced with situations in which we recognize competing considerations for treating him in incompatible ways. A wonderful literary example of someone who is agreeable but disutilile is Mr Skimpole from Dickens’ Bleak House. And indeed Skimpole does evoke in Esther and John Jarndyce an evaluative ambivalence that leads them to be uncertain about
how they ought to treat and interact with him. Should he be allowed to visit the house? Should he be invited to the wedding?

Similarly, in *A Dialogue*, Hume shows how the four principles of morality explain conflicting views about how to construct social arrangements: “luxury” and “free commerce between the sexes” are both agreeable and disadvantageous, and we might be forced to make a decision to follow either a restrictive or permissive policy about such practices (D 46-7).

But perhaps the most important kinds of cases Hume discusses in which we are compelled to opt for one side or the other of conflicting moral considerations are those involving conflicts between justice and the other virtues. Hume makes it clear that we can end up in situations in which we have no choice but to choose to do either the just thing or the thing that is agreeable or beneficial, but not both. Hume can explain how the same kind of conflict can occur in cases in which one can keep a promise or do what is useful but not both. It is just this sort of phenomena — moral conflicts between, for instance, keeping promises and making others happy — that Ross uses his concepts of *prima facie* and actual duties to account for (Ross 34-9). We see now that Humean sentimentalist pluralism can account for them equally as well.

But what do we do when faced with conflict between ultimate moral ends? What should we do? This is a question anyone who affirms conflict pluralism should face. And there are two main lines of response that a conflict pluralist can take to it: the lexical and the non-lexical. Let us turn now to the question of which of these responses a Humean pluralist should make.

B. Lexical ordering?
In my discussion of Clarke and Butler I said that there were three ways of being a non-conflict pluralist. Well, there are two main branches of conflict pluralism: lexical conflict pluralism and non-lexical conflict pluralism.

Lexical conflict pluralists hold that whenever different ultimate moral ends come into conflict there is a strict, invariable normative hierarchy or ordering that gives determinate guidance about which moral end ought to be obeyed. A lexical view could thus hold that truth-telling, promise-keeping, and promoting human happiness are all ultimate moral ends and that these three ends can require incompatible actions. But it will also hold that whenever two of the ends conflict, one of them will have lexical priority or normative trumping power over the other. So a lexical conflict pluralist might hold, for instance, that truth-telling always trumps promise-keeping and the promoting of human happiness, and that promise-keeping always trumps the promoting of human happiness.

The other kind of conflict pluralist denies that there is any invariable normative hierarchy for resolving conflict of ultimate moral ends. Non-lexical conflict pluralists will not deny that in specific cases one ultimate moral end will override another. But they will deny that there is a normative order or über-principle that tells us that every instantiation of one ultimate moral end will always override every instantiation of another ultimate moral end. So non-lexical conflict pluralists will hold that in some cases in which truth-telling, promise-keeping, and human happiness come into conflict, truth-telling will override the other two. But they can also hold that in other cases, promise-keeping may be the overriding end. And in still other cases, human happiness may override the other two.42

Thomas Reid is a good example of a lexical conflict pluralist. Reid maintains there is a plurality of “first or self-evident principles, on which all moral reasoning is grounded,” and he makes it very clear that each of these principles is fundamental or basic, not derived from
anything else (Reid 321). Reid also thinks that the first moral principles considered as
general propositions fit together harmoniously, in effect denying modally strong conflict
pluralism, which holds that moral ends are in inherent conflict with each other. But Reid
does affirm modally weak conflict pluralism, in that he allows that one of the first moral
principles can require an action that is incompatible with what another of the first moral
principles requires. He writes, “Between the several virtues, as they are dispositions of mind,
or determinations of will, to act according to a certain general rule, there can be no
opposition. They dwell together most amicably, and give mutual aid and ornament, without
the possibility of hostility or opposition, and, taken altogether, make one uniform and
consistent rule of conduct. But, between particular external actions, which different virtues
would lead to, there may be an opposition… [I]t may happen, that an external action which
generosity or gratitude solicits, justice may forbid” (Ross 357-8). Reid also maintains,
however, that it is self-evident that certain moral principles have invariable lexical priority
over others. As he puts it, “that unmerited generosity should yield to gratitude, and both to justice, is
self-evident. Nor is it less so, that unmerited beneficence to those who are at ease should yield
to compassion to the miserable, and external acts of piety to works of mercy, because God loves mercy
more than sacrifice” (Ross 358). And while Reid does not provide a complete lexical
ordering of all moral ends, it seems pretty clear that he thought such an ordering did exist.

Ross is a good example of a non-lexical conflict pluralist, as he denies there are any
invariable general rules that tell us what to do in every case in which one prima facie duty
conflicts with another. As Ross writes, “Every act … viewed in some aspects, will be prima
facie right, and viewed in others, prima facie wrong, and right acts can be distinguished from
wrong acts only as being those which, of all those possible for the agent in the
circumstances, have the greatest balance of prima facie rightness… For the estimation of the
comparative stringency of these *prima facie* obligations no general rules can, so far as I can see, be laid down. We can only say that a great deal of stringency belongs to the duties of ‘perfect obligation’ — the duties of keeping our promises, or repairing wrongs we have done, and of returning the equivalent of services we have received. For the rest, ‘the decision rests with perception.’ This sense of our particular duty in particular circumstances, preceded and informed by the fullest reflection we can bestow on the act in all its bearings, is highly fallible, but it is the only guide we have to our duty” (Ross 42-3; see also 23). Ross does say here that there is a general sense in which obligations to keep promises and repay debts have greater “stringency” than duties to promote the good. But that “stringency” is not so strong as to amount to an invariable lexical priority, as Ross also thinks that there are cases in which the utility produced by breaking a promise will justify doing so (Ross 28, 38-9).

Which kind of conflict pluralist is Hume? I want to avoid giving a simple answer to that question because I think Hume’s texts are indeterminate on the matter — or maybe inconsistent. Hume does make a few comments that seem to suggest at least a partial lexical ordering of moral ends. But at the same time, trenchant aspects of his view fit better with a denial of any invariable lexical ordering. Let us explore these issues now.

Here is a passage that suggests that Hume thought, as a descriptive matter, that commonsense morality takes usefulness to others to have lexical priority over the other kinds of natural virtue: “In all determinations of morality, this circumstance of public utility is ever principally in view; and wherever disputes arise, either in philosophy or common life, concerning the bounds of duty, the question cannot, by any means, be decided with greater certainty, than by ascertaining, on any side, the true interests of mankind. If any false opinion, embraced from appearances, has been found to prevail; as soon as farther
experience and sounder reasoning have given us juster notions of human affairs; we retract our first sentiment and adjust anew the boundaries of moral good and evil” (E 81; see also 78, 82). It seems here that Hume is saying that “public utility” is morally dominant in commonsense moral judgments — that whenever any vexing moral questions arise, people generally think the answer boils down to what will best promote “the true interests of mankind.”

Here is a second passage that suggests that Hume thought that usefulness to others has lexical priority over the other three principles of natural virtue: “Moral good and evil are certainly distinguish’d by our sentiments, not by reason. But these sentiments may arise either from the mere species or appearance of characters and passions, or from reflexions on their tendency to the happiness of mankind, and of particular persons. My opinion is, that both these causes are intermix’d in our judgments of morals; after the same manner as they are in our decisions concerning most kinds of external beauty: Tho’ I am also of opinion, that reflexions on the tendencies of actions have by far the greatest influence, and determine all the great lines of our duty” (T 3.3.1.27). Hume points out here that usefulness to others (“their tendency to the happiness of mankind, and of particular persons”) and agreeability (“the mere species or appearance of characters ad passions”) both influence our moral judgments, but it is usefulness to others that has the “greatest influence” and determines “all the great lines of our duty.” It is hard to say whether we should take the last part of this passage to be descriptive (to be about what people as a matter of fact generally do) or to be prescriptive (to be about what people ought to do). But it doesn’t seem unreasonable to take Hume here to be making some kind of claim about the priority of usefulness to others.

Here is a third passage that seems to support a lexical reading of Hume. “Heroism, or military glory, is much admir’d by the generality of mankind. They consider it as the most
sublime kind of merit. Men of cool reflexion are not so sanguine in their praises of it. The infinite confusions and disorder, which it has caus’d in the world, diminish much of its merit in their eyes. When they wou’d oppose the popular notions on this head, they always paint out the evils, which this suppos’d virtue has produc’d in human society; the subversion of empires, the devastation of provinces, the sack of cities. As long as these are present to us, we are more inclin’d to hate than admire the ambition of heroes. But when we fix our view on the person himself, who is the author of all this mischief, there is something so dazling in his character, the mere contemplation of it so elevates the mind, that we cannot refuse it our admiration. The pain, which we receive from its tendency to the prejudice of society, is over-power’d by a stronger and more immediate sympathy” (T 3.3.2.15). Hume says here that heroism scores well on the principles of agreeability but scores badly on the principle of usefulness to others. And one plausible reading of this passage has Hume going on to say the following: descriptively-speaking, many people form moral judgments of heroism that are more influenced by approval of agreeability, but prescriptively-speaking, we ought to give normative priority to approval of usefulness, as the “men of cool reflexion” do.

None of these passages constitutes conclusive evidence that Hume thinks that in each and every case in which usefulness to others conflicts with any other moral ends we do or should take the former to have exceptionless normative trumping power. But they do suggest that Hume was drawn to the idea, in both its descriptive and prescriptive forms, that usefulness to others has some kind of overridingness vis-à-vis usefulness to self and agreeability to self and others. These passages are also historically important in the development of monistic moral theorizing, as they played a crucial role in Bentham’s development of Utilitarianism.
A different picture emerges, however, when we turn to one of Hume’s most explicit statements about conflict between usefulness and agreeability. As we’ve seen, Hume says in *A Dialogue*: “It is needless to dissemble… We must sacrifice somewhat of the useful, if we be very anxious to obtain all of the agreeable qualities; and cannot pretend to reach alike every kind of advantage” (D 47). But he certainly doesn’t imply that, as a descriptive matter, commonsense morality always sides with the useful in such cases. Indeed, the entire point of *A Dialogue* is that different cultures take to be correct different resolutions of this type of conflict. Now that point is on its own compatible with the prescriptive claim that we ought to resolve conflicts between agreeability and usefulness in favor of usefulness. But it seems to me that the structure of *A Dialogue* resists that prescriptive claim. Hume means to argue that the moral differences between cultures can be explained by showing that virtually everyone’s moral judgments are based on the same principles of morality; almost everyone has the same values at his or her moral justificatory base. But Hume also seems to believe that the differences between the relative priorities different cultures give to the same set of moral principles do not always admit of principled adjudication. Hume does go on, in the last few paragraphs of *A Dialogue*, to maintain that certain kinds of “artificial lives,” such as Diogenes’ and Pascal’s, are morally condemnable. But his discussion of such moral mistakes comes after and in contrast to his discussion of the different ways different cultures have resolved conflicts between usefulness and agreeability. And it seems to me that Hume’s point is that while there is no invariable trans-cultural justificatory ground for preferring the English way (which tends to resolve conflicts between usefulness and agreeability in favor of the former) to the French way (which tends to resolve those conflicts in favor of the latter), there is a trans-cultural justificatory ground (i.e., one constituted by the set of all four principles of virtue) for condemning the artificial lives of Diogenes and Pascal.44
A non-lexical reading is also consonant with the view of aesthetic merit Hume advances in “Of the Standard of Taste.” Hume argues that there are universal aesthetic standards, principles for judging works of art that are rightly acknowledged by all. But he also thinks that there is no way of adjudicating between different emphases on these various principles. “Mirth or passion, sentiment or reflection; whichever of these most predominate in our temper, it gives us a peculiar sympathy with the writer who resembles us… The ear of this man is entirely turned towards conciseness and energy; that man is delighted with a copious, rich, and harmonious expression. Simplicity is affected by one; ornament by another… Such preferences are innocent and unavoidable, and can never reasonably be the object of dispute, because there is no standard, by which they can be decided” (Essays 244). If a literary work fails miserably to live up to certain aesthetic principles, it is rightly disdained. But there is no uber-standard that implies that one legitimate aesthetic principle has invariable trumping power over another.

Moreover, Hume never suggests a lexical ordering that will resolve all types of intrapersonal moral conflict. One type of potential conflict Hume doesn’t give any indication there is a lexical order to resolve is between promising and obedience to the law. As he explains, “[S]ince there is a separate interest in the obedience to government, from that in the performance of promises, we must allow of a separate obligation… The ends, as well as the means, are perfectly distinct; nor is the one subordinate to the other” (T 3.2.8.5).

Another kind of potential conflict Hume does not seem to think there is any lexical priority to resolve is between general benevolence and particular benevolence (E 2.6-7; App 2.5 [footnote]). General benevolence is the motive to benefit very large swaths of humanity — communities, countries, perhaps people as a whole. Particular benevolence is the motive to benefit much smaller groups — those few with whom one has direct contact, the near
and dear (such as the kinds of acts Butler thinks are required by gratitude and friendship). There are passages in the *Treatise* that suggest that the principle of usefulness to others is sensitive only to cases of particular benevolence, that the principle of usefulness to others leads us to judge a person based only on how her conduct affects the welfare of those in her immediate sphere of influence (T 3.3.1.18; T 3.3.3.2). But there are passages in the *Enquiry* that suggest that the principle of usefulness to others is also sensitive to general benevolence, that this principle also leads us to judge a person based on how her conduct affects the welfare of much larger groups of people (E 5.39; E 9.5). Now it seems to me that commonsense takes into moral account both particular and general benevolence — both a person’s concern for those near and dear to her and her concern for humanity more generally. And Hume himself notes our sensitivity to these two different dimensions of benevolence when he says that our moral sentiments “arise … from reflexions on [passions’] tendency to the happiness of mankind, and of particular persons” (T 3.3.1.27; italics added).

But these two tendencies — [1] to approve of what benefits humanity generally, and [2] to approve of what benefits those few who are near and dear — can come into conflict. The conduct that benefits one’s friends or family (gratitude, friendship) can be incompatible with the conduct that benefits one’s community, country, or humanity as a whole. What is the right thing to do in such cases? Mill manages to avoid this question by maintaining, implausibly, that whatever most benefits my friends and family will almost always end up most benefiting humanity as a whole (Mill 18–19). Some recent consequentialists do squarely address the question, and then go on to maintain that the right thing to do is always promote the happiness of humanity as a whole, even if it means sacrificing the happiness of those near and dear (Singer, Kagan, Unger). But such a strict maximizing consequentialism conflicts with a great deal of commonsense, as those contemporary consequentialists
themselves readily acknowledge. So it’s no surprise that Hume does not say, as a descriptive matter, that commonsense morality gives lexical priority to general benevolence over particular benevolence. Nor does he say, as a prescriptive matter, that general benevolence ought always to override particular benevolence. At the same time, he never says (what Butler seems to) that people always take, or ought always to take, particular benevolence to override general benevolence. What he says, rather, is this: “[W]e may observe in our common judgments concerning actions [that] we blame a person who either centers all his affections in his family, or is so regardless of them, as in any opposition of interest, to give the preference to a stranger or mere chance acquaintance” (T 3.2.2.8). It seems to me that what fits best both with what Hume says and doesn’t say is a view that resists a lexical ordering of general and particular benevolence, a view that grants neither invariable trumping power. In some situations one will override the other and in other situations the other will override the one.

Hume’s discussions of the relationship between justice and usefulness also resist a strict lexical reading. As we’ve seen, Humean justice can demand that money or property go to someone even if it would be more useful for it go to someone else. Hume makes it clear that in some of these circumstances justice ought to be followed even though it is disadvantageous — even though the just act is “productive of pernicious consequences” (App 3.3; see also T 3.2.1.11-14). But he also makes it clear that there are some circumstances in which the usefulness of injustice makes it right to do the unjust thing. It is acceptable, for instance, to violate property law “after a shipwreck” or when a besieged city is “perishing with hunger” (E 3.8). We thus find Hume telling us that when justice and usefulness conflict, justice will sometimes override usefulness and usefulness will sometimes override justice. But such a view implies non-lexical pluralism, not lexical.
Confirmation of this interpretation comes from the section of the *Treatise* entitled “Of the Laws of Nation.” In that section, Hume contends that the laws of justice (“the three fundamental rules of justice, the stability of possession, its transference by consent, and the performance of promises”) do apply to princes (T 3.2.11.2). But he also maintains that it is sometimes legitimate for princes to violate the rules of justice — indeed, that it is legitimate for princes to violate the laws of justice more often than it is for a private person to do so. We are, Hume writes, “more easily reconciled” to “any transgression of justice among princes and republics, than in the private commerce of one subject with another” (T 3.2.11.5). We “give a greater indulgence to a prince or minister, who deceives another, than to a private gentleman, who breaks his word” (T 3.2.11.4). Hume does believe that the laws of justice have force on princes. There truly is, Hume says, a “moral obligation” for princes to be just (T 3.2.9.4). But when considerations of state are strong enough, it is legitimate for the prince to breach justice. In the prince’s case, the obligations of justice “may lawfully be transgress’d from a more trivial motive” (T 3.2.11.2). This, then, is a clear instance in which Hume expresses the idea that justice may sometimes be overridden. He is not saying here that the laws of justice do not apply in these cases; he is saying that they apply but that it is legitimate for the prince to transgress them. And while his point is that such lawful transgressions of justice are more common in the case of princes than private people, he puts the point in a way that strongly suggests that a private person can at times lawfully transgress justice, although that it requires a less “trivial motive” for him to do so.⁴⁶

In the final paragraph of “Of the Laws of Nations,” moreover, Hume makes comments that fit very well with the non-lexical idea that conflicts between different moral ends must be decided on a case-by-case basis and not on an invariable lexical ordering. He writes, “Shou’d it be ask’d, what proportion these two species of morality bear to each other? I wou’d
answer, that this is a question, to which we can never give any precise answer; nor is it possible to reduce to numbers the proportion, which we ought to fix betwixt them” (T 3.2.11.5). It should be noted that Hume is not here discussing the relationship between two different ultimate moral ends, such as justice and benevolence, which has been our topic. He is, rather, comparing the morality of a prince to the morality of a private person.

Nonetheless, this passage does reveal his “non-prioritarian” view of our moral thinking (to use Gaut’s useful terminology\(^{17}\)) — his view that our moral thinking does not include any strict prioritizing of our different moral ends.

Hume does certainly believe that justice and the other artificial virtues would never have developed as they have if they hadn’t been useful to society (T 3.3.1.9; E 3). The virtue of justice as a whole can only be explained by referring to its societal usefulness. But the fact that societal usefulness plays an essential role in the genetic development of the virtue of justice does not mean that we approve of each and every just act because we think it is socially useful. Indeed, as we’ve seen, Hume is perfectly clear that we approve of some instances of justice even while thinking they are not socially useful. But that does not mean that we will necessarily not approve of all socially useful acts that are unjust. We may feel approval toward an act that is socially useful while at the same time feel disapproval toward it because it is unjust. And Hume does not think there is any invariable lexical ordering that will tell us that one of those sorts of approvals always overrides the other.

There are, as well, elements deep within Hume’s sentimentalist pluralism that militate against joining his view to a lexical ordering of ultimate moral ends. The Humean view will not be able to fund a lexical ordering by reason alone. Reason provides information that enables us to see in particular situations what a moral end requires and what failing to fulfill the moral end will lead to (T 2.3.3 and 3.1.1; E 1.9; App 1.2). Reason may show us how we
can bring moral ends that initially seemed in conflict into harmony. But conflict between Humean moral ends will sometimes be unavoidable even after reason has done everything it can do. In such cases of sentimental conflict — conflict between sentimentally-grounded ultimate ends — reason alone cannot gain traction. Hume explains, “[U]ltimate ends of human actions can never … be accounted for by reason, but recommend themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of mankind, without any dependence on the intellectual faculties” (App 1.18). We have a plurality of ultimate ends. And if reason cannot justify one ultimate end, neither will it be able to justify giving one ultimate end invariable normative priority over another. If reason can’t tell me to prefer the scratching of my finger to the destruction of the whole world, it certainly won’t be able to tell me to prefer, say, agreeability to others to usefulness to self, or usefulness to others to justice.

Hume points out that we typically engage in more reasoning when trying to determine what serves the ends of utility than when trying to determine what serves the ends of agreeability (App 1.2-3). But our needing to engage in more reasoning to serve the ends of utility than to serve the ends of agreeability does not imply that the ends of utility are normatively superior to the ends of agreeability. The greater cognitive activity involved in promoting utility is morally important only because of the end it serves; that that end has ultimate moral significance is due to our sentimental make-up; and the ends of agreeability have the same kind of sentimental origin as the ends of utility (i.e., both are based on approvals experienced from general points of view). This point is one that Joshua Greene fails to appreciate, for Greene acknowledges that all of our moral ends are based in Humean sentiment, but he then goes on to try to justify privileging the end of utility over other moral ends on the grounds that judgments based on the former typically require more cognitive activity than judgments based on the latter (Greene).
So if the Humean view were to include a comprehensive invariable moral lexical ordering, it would have to be funded by sentiment. But what sentiment could fit this bill? Humean moral considerations are based on approvals and disapprovals we feel when we consider matters from general points of view. There are situations in which we can feel for one and the same thing both Humean approval and Humean disapproval. So there can be Humean moral considerations both for and against the same thing. If there were an invariable comprehensive ordering of such considerations, that ordering itself would be a kind of über-moral consideration — a moral consideration that tells us how to rank other moral considerations, a second-order moral consideration. Such a consideration would have to be based on a special sentiment, a sentiment that is moral and yet differs from all the other moral sentiments in that it possesses a ranking authority the others lack. But Hume himself doesn’t include such a lexically ordering meta-moral sentiment in his account, and it’s very difficult to see how he could.

If all of our ultimate moral ends aimed at the very same goal, then we could rank them based on how effective they are at achieving it. But to say that they are distinct ultimate ends is just to say that they do not aim at the same goal. We care about agreeability to self not because we think agreeability to self is a little bit of usefulness to humanity in general. We care about agreeability to self for its own sake. We disapprove of individual instantiations of promise-breaking not because we think each of them on its own detracts from the public good. We disapprove of individual instantiations of promise-breaking in and of themselves. Our sentimental make-up leads us to experience the production of immediately agreeable experiences as intrinsically worthy and to experience promise-breaking as intrinsically unworthy — just as it leads us to experience the promotion of the
public good as intrinsically worthy and the detraction from the public good as intrinsically unworthy. Each of these things serves a different end.

Our approval of what is beneficial, of what is agreeable, of promise-keeping, of justice: each of these is a fully fledged moral sentiment. Each is itself the basis of an ultimate moral consideration. Each is the sort of thing that gives rise to moral status itself. And it is hard to see how, on a Humean view, there can be any moral ground beneath them from which they can all be (morally) ranked. If you hold that a plurality of sentiments is at the very bottom level of moral justification, how can you also hold that there is some moral justificatory principle that funds a comprehensive invariable ordering of morally justificatory considerations?

That is not to say that Humean pluralism implies that it is impossible for us to make justified decisions in cases in which moral principles come into conflict. In non-moral cases in which my desires come into conflict, I can make decisions about how to act and can give sensible reasons for doing so even though there is no lexical ordering of types of desires for me to rely on. There are times, for instance, when I want to go to a music show and when I want to exercise at the gym and when it is impossible for me to do both. Sometimes I decide to exercise and can sensibly justify my decision by saying that in this case exercising is more important to me than going to the show (let us say that I have not done any exercise for a while and that the performer is relatively undistinguished). Other times I decide to go to the show and can sensibly justify my decision by saying that in that case going to hear the music is more important to me than exercising (let us say that it is a really fantastic performer whom I will not get the chance to see again). This kind of justification for acting on one desire over another makes good sense to us. And Humeans can make the same kind of sense out of our justifications for giving priority to one moral principle over another in
particular cases. In some cases I can decide to neglect to do something useful in order to keep a promise, and it can be legitimate for me to justify my action by saying that (in this case) the promise overrides the usefulness. But in other cases I can decide to break a promise in order to do something useful, and it can be legitimate for me to justify my action by saying that (in that case) the usefulness overrides the promise. Ross’s view and the Humean position I’m describing are both alive to the fact that we sometimes have to decide between two options that both have something morally in their favor. Ross’s view and the Humean position will both deny that promising invariably overrides usefulness, or vice versa. But while Ross says that what’s at issue here are mind-independent prima facie and actual duties, the Humean position tells us that these situations are akin to cases in which we have to decide between satisfying one of two conflicting desires.

In her criticism of Hume, Hursthouse considers whether Hume’s account of moral judgment incorporates a conception of practical reason. (She seems to think that he vacillates.) As I’ve already mentioned, I think Hume’s concern is to explain the judgments people actually make rather than advance his own view of correct moral judgments. But I don’t see any reason his account cannot be conjoined with a view about how we ought to come to our moral decisions. But Hume’s descriptive account will imply that commonsense moral thinking does not comport with a notion of practical wisdom that can dissolve all moral conflict. It comports, rather, with the idea that even the most practically wise may sometimes face situations in which they will have to act in conflict with some ultimate moral end. On the Humean account, someone who holds that true practical wisdom will enable us to tie up all our justificatory loose ends is advancing a view that’s profoundly revisionary.

On the Humean view, moreover, all moral reasons will give out at a point well short of necessity. Given that Humeanism is sentimentalist, it must hold that our ultimate moral
ends depend on our contingent sentimental make-up. Our ultimate moral ends are things that have moral importance for us, but we will not be able to give a justificatory reason for why they have that moral importance. They are the spots at which our moral justifications end. And given that Humeanism is a conflict pluralism, it must hold that there is a plurality of such basic moral end-points. Our sentimental make-up is such that it leads us to morally care about a plurality of potentially-conflicting things for their own sakes.

It didn’t have to be that way. We could have been built to morally care about only one thing (as Hutcheson thought). We could have been built to morally care about a plurality of things that never conflict with each other (as Clarke and Butler thought). But if Hume is right, we care morally about a plurality of potentially-conflicting things for their own sakes. And if that’s the way it is, we might very well face situations in which we can give no moral reason for taking one moral reason to override another moral reason — which is not, it’s important to note, the same as having no moral reasons at all.

Some have thought that the view of morality that results from non-lexical conflict pluralism is unacceptably arbitrary — that moral justification must not give out where I am saying the Humean view leaves it. That’s because non-lexical conflict pluralism gives us no principled way out of some cases of moral perplexity, but, according to such objectors, there must always be a principled moral way out. Our concept of morality, committed as it is to non-arbitrariness, demands it. Now the grand monistic moral theories of Utilitarianism and Kantianism do promise us that principled way out. By allowing the existence of only one ultimate moral end, such monistic theories claim to give us principled guidance that will, in any circumstance no matter how morally fraught, lead all the way to a complete justification. And it’s no coincidence, I think, that such theories arose shortly after Hume. For it was the non-theological sentimentalism of Hume, the only pluralist of his period to eschew the
assurance of moral harmony, that shed first light on the possibility of our being landed in real moral perplexity.
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appended to the end of the Enquiry is referred to as “D” with the numeral following denoting paragraph number.


Mason


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1 For a contemporary defense of sentimentalist pluralist based on recent work in moral psychology, see [reference deleted].

2 In this paper, I explore the issues separating pluralists from monists. But there is also a third position: moral particularism, which denies the existence of any general ultimate moral values. I will not be able to discuss the issues separating pluralism from particularism here, but they do need to be discussed. For defense of particularism, see Dancy (2004). For criticism of particularism, see McKeever and Ridge (2006).

3 For further discussion of views of moral duties in the eighteenth century, see Heydt.

4 In this passage, Clarke moves from an *is* to an *ought* in a way that could very well have been in Hume’s mind when he wrote the *is*-ought paragraph of T 3.1.1.27.

5 A distinction can be drawn between “conceptual pluralism” and “normative pluralism.” (I base this distinction on the distinction between “foundational” and “normative” pluralism in Mason, although I am not sure if my distinction is exactly the same as hers.) Conceptual
monism is the view that there is a single property that constitutes being a moral end.

Normative monism is the view that there is only one thing (or only one type of thing) that possesses that property. My claim in this section is that Clarke is a normative pluralist, but he could also reasonably be taken to be a conceptual monist. This is because Clarke holds that to be an ultimate moral end is to be fitting (conceptual monism) while also holding that there is a plurality of things that are fitting (normative pluralism). In this, Clarke is much like Ross, who holds that all prima facie duties are a priori and self-evident and yet also clearly thinks there is a plurality of distinct prima facie duties. Another way of to put this point is to say that Clarke and Ross think there is a single explanation for why all of the grounds of morality are what they are, but they do not think that that single explanation is itself a (further or deeper) justificatory ground.

Non-conflict pluralism can also be subdivided into modally strong and modally weak versions. Modally strong versions hold that it is impossible for ultimate moral ends to come into conflict, while modally weak versions hold that such conflict is possible but will never actually occur. We should attribute a modally strong version of non-conflict pluralism to Clarke since he assimilates moral ends to principles of math and logic and since he would have taken it to be impossible for such principles to come into conflict.

Kant expresses this thought when he writes, “A conflict of duties would be a relation between them in which one would cancel the other (wholly or in part). But since duty and obligation are concepts that express the objective practical necessity of certain actions and two rules opposed to each other cannot be necessary at the same time, if it is a duty to act in accordance with one rule, to act in accordance with the opposite rules is not a duty but even contrary to duty; so a collision of duty and obligations is inconceivable” (Kant 50).
Kant’s distinction between perfect and imperfect duties (Kant 421-424) can be taken to be an example of this kind of specificationist view. Kant thinks that we have an imperfect duty to, for instance, promote the happiness of others, but he does not think we should perform an action that promotes the happiness of others if it requires violating the perfect duty to, say, not lie. But Kant would not say that in such a situation the duty not to lie and the duty to promote the happiness of others are in conflict. He would say, rather, that the (imperfect) duty includes specifications or qualifications that themselves imply that we should only perform actions that promote the happiness of others that do not violate the (perfect) duty not to lie. For contemporary discussion of the specificationist view of moral principles, see Shafer-Landau (1995) and Richardson (1990).

One possible view of this specificationist version of non-conflict pluralism holds that moral ends all include ceteris paribus clauses. To address this view, we need to distinguish between epistemological and metaphysical construals of the ceteris paribus clauses. On the epistemological construal, the ceteris paribus clauses are in principle dischargeable; it’s just that we’re not epistemically situated to figure out the details. Clarke never says that he holds such a view, but I don’t think that it obviously contradicts anything he does say. (I suppose there might be some question about whether the epistemological version is in tension with the rationalist commitment to ought-implies-can insofar as the epistemological version could be taken to suggest that in some cases it will be impossible for us to determine with demonstrable certainty what is morally demanded of us; but it would take some work to make that charge stick.) On the metaphysical construal, the ceteris paribus clauses are not even in principle dischargeable. This view, I think, cannot be consistently combined with Clarke’s position. For this view implies that even God’s apprehension of morality includes
undischarged _ceteris paribus_ clauses, and rationalists like Clarke (who hold to the principle of sufficient reason) believe that God understands everything, including all the moral facts, in the same way we understand basic logical truths.

10 When arguing against the view that benevolence is the entirety of virtue, Butler’s target is a Hutchesonian view. I will discuss Hutcheson’s view in the next section.

11 In a previous footnote I said that non-conflict pluralism can be subdivided into modally strong and modally weak versions, and that Clarke holds to a modally strong version. But we should take Butler (at least in the “Dissertation”) to be neutral on the modal question since he wants to remain neutral on the question separating rationalists and sentimentalists. If Butler’s view is conjoined with a rationalist meta-ethics such as Clarke’s, then the fact that moral ends do not come into conflict would be necessary (and along with this would come Clarke’s anti-voluntarist theology). If Butler’s view of virtue is conjoined with a sentimentalist meta-ethics such as Hutcheson’s, then the fact that moral ends do not come into conflict would be contingent (and along with this would come Hutcheson’s theology, which rationalists like Balguy would later accuse of being voluntarist).

12 Clarke makes a very similar point when he writes: “[Some] have contended, that all _Difference of Good and Evil_, and all _Obligations of Morality_, ought to be founded _originally_ upon Considerations of _Publick Utility_. And true indeed it is, in the whole; that the _Good of the universal Creation_, does always _coincide_ with the _necessary Truth and Reason of Things_. But otherwise, (and separate from _This_ Consideration, that _God will certainly cause Truth and Right to terminate in Happiness_;) _what is for the Good of the whole Creation_, in very many Cases, none but an _infinite Understanding_ can possible judge” (Clarke 630). (It seems plausible that Hume had this sort of passage in mind when he wrote section III of the _Enquiry concerning Morals_.)
Clarke goes on to argue against anyone who “thinks it *Right* and *Just*, upon account of *Publick Utility*” to lie or break faith in a particular isolated case. It might seem as though in isolated particular cases lying or breaking faith will be most conducive to public utility, but (Clarke argues) we should realize that a full appreciation of all the long-term consequences will reveal that such actions will ultimately do more harm than good. I am not sure how to combine Clarke’s comments here about public utility with his earlier comments about the duty to engage in “a constant indeavouring to promote in general, to the utmost of our power, the welfare and happiness of all men” (Clarke 621).

13 For this reason, I don’t think Butler could accept that our apprehension of the moral ends includes *ceteris paribus* clauses (i.e., I don’t think he could accept what I called in a previous footnote the epistemological version of the ceteris paribus view). For Butler believes that God has given us moral ends that are perfectly suited to our epistemic situation. But if our moral ends included *ceteris paribus* clauses that we could not discharge, those moral ends would be insufficient for providing complete moral justification in some cases (since all we would be able to say by way of justification in such cases is that the *ceteris are not paribus*).

14 See Adam Smith 302-4 for a description of Hutcheson’s monism and a pluralist criticism of it. Smith himself seems to opt for a theological pluralism similar to Butler’s (i.e., a view according to which God is a benevolence-monist who has made *human* morality pluralist). Smith writes, “Benevolence may, perhaps, be the sole principle of action in the Deity… But whatever may be the case with the Deity, so imperfect a creature as man, the support of whose existence requires so many things external to him, must often act from many other motives” (Smith 305; see also 166).
Or at least that Butler’s criticism of a monistic account of human morality is fairly directed at Hutcheson. As I noted above, it seems that Butler shares Hutcheson’s view that morality as understood by God involves the single ultimate end of promoting the good or happiness of all.

But it’s an oversimplification to say that Humean usefulness to others is the same as Hutchesonian general benevolence. For Hume maintains in the Treatise that the others whose happiness we are responsive to when making such judgments are only those in the person’s immediate circle, those with whom the person has direct contact, and not humanity in general (T 3.3.1.18; 3.3.3.2). Then again, in the Enquiry, he suggests that we can take into account the effects a person’s conduct has on humanity in general (E 5.39; 9.5). For penetrating discussion of the question of how far Humean benevolence stretches, see Baier (2004).

Swanton has provided an intriguing analysis of the difference between Humean usefulness and agreeability, arguing that Humean usefulness cannot be reduced to Humean agreeability (Swanton 104).

Sayre-McCord is particularly clear about the different purposes different Humean moral ends serve. Roger Crisp has claimed that Sayre-McCord’s reading is wrong because Hume believes in a “single overarching standard for evaluating all solutions to problems” — namely, pleasure (Crisp 171). I believe, however, that Swanton has argued convincingly against Crisp and for Sayre-McCord by showing that Hume’s statements about the essential role of pleasure in virtue are metaethical, concerning the pleasures of the moral sense at the heart of his response-dependent view of morality — not about the criteria of virtue (Swanton 106-7).
When discussing pluralists who did not believe ultimate ends conflict, I noted that this view could come in two different modal versions: those who believe that such conflict is impossible, and those who believe that such conflict is possible but will never actually occur. Pluralists who believe that conflict between ultimate ends will occur also come in two modal flavors: those who believe that it is possible that such conflict will never arise but that in fact it does, and those who believe such conflict will necessarily occur. It’s unclear which of these two modal versions we should attribute to Hume. In his description of the perfect son-in-law, Hume seems to affirm the possibility of all the virtues being harmoniously combined (E 9.2), but his discussion of the differences between goodness and greatness seems to fit better with the idea that the virtues cannot all be harmoniously combined (T 3.3.4.2).

I owe much of what I say here to Abramson.

There is a serious puzzle concerning Hume’s claims about our moral approval of justice. Hume says that we approve of motives, not actions or mere rule-following (T 3.2.1.2-7). But it also seems that he says that we approve of just action or the following of the rules of justice (or at least disapprove of unjust action and the disobedience of the rules of justice), distinct from motives (T 3.2.2.23-4). For excellent recent discussion of this puzzle (with a review of past literature), see Garrett, and Harris. I offer an account of this puzzle in [reference deleted]. However this puzzled is resolved, however, it is clear that Hume wants to affirm that we come to approve of instantiations (whether that is taken to include or not
to include motive) of justice that are not useful or agreeable to self or others — and that’s the only point that’s important for my discussion here.

23 For a rich discussion of the differences between the demands of the artificial virtues, see Henley (forthcoming), which adds much to the discussion of Humean conflict pluralism I present here.

24 Annette Baier describes this feature of Hume’s view particularly eloquently in “A Catalogue of the Virtues” (chapter 9 of _A Progress of Sentiments_).

25 For discussion of related issues concerning moral phenomenology, see [reference deleted].

26 One could hold that one moral sentiment includes in its phenomenology an overriding normative authority that the other moral sentiments lack. As I discuss in [reference deleted], Butler makes phenomenological claims that suggest this line of thought (although Butler is concerned to show that morality has authority over other things, not that one moral principle has authority over another, conflicting moral principle). But I do not see any indication that Hume argues for the phenomenologically-grounded authority of any particular moral sentiment over all other moral sentiments.

27 My discussion here of the addiction to general rules is very brief; I go into more detail in [reference deleted].

28 As I noted in an above footnote, there is a puzzle as to whether Hume thinks every instantiation of an artificial virtue must include a certain kind of motive, or whether Hume would allow that some instantiations of artificial virtue are mere action or rule-following. My reading here is neutral on this question.

29 Hume is explicit in the _Treatise_ about how the addiction to general rules plays this explanatory role in our approvals of useless allegiance (_T_ 3.2.9.3) and chastity (_T_ 3.2.12.7).
He is not as explicit about how general rules fill this role in our approvals of useless justice. He does deploy the addiction to general rules in his explanation of our approvals of justice — where he says that the “general rule reaches beyond those instances, from which it arose” — but he isn’t so clearly speaking there precisely about approvals of useless justice (T 3.2.2.23-4). So I am doing a little bit of interpolation when I take Hume’s general rules-explanation of useless allegiance and chastity to also apply to his account of justice that fails to benefit society.

Korsgaard (1996) has argued that when we realize that our approvals of useless justice are due to our addiction to general rules we will no longer have normative confidence in them. I believe this criticism of Humean justice is unfounded, as I argue in [reference deleted].

30 The best psychological explanations for our moral judgments will almost certainly not rely on the same mental mechanisms that Hume proposes. But there is good reason to believe that those explanations will be sentimentalist and pluralist in a way that sides with Hume and against rationalists and monists. For discussion of how recent work in moral psychology supports sentimentalist pluralism, see [reference deleted].

31 For critical discussion of the metaphysics and epistemology of the meta-ethical view associated with Ross, see M. Smith, 19-25, Street, and Bedke. For more sympathetic discussion of this meta-ethical view, see Shafer-Landau, Audi, and Huemer.

32 Dees has done a masterful job of elucidating the kinds of moral ambivalence Hume accounts for, and in this section I mean to endorse and offer additional evidence for Dees’ claims. See also Abramson, who discusses how Hume uses his pluralist account of the
sources of virtue to provide a powerful explanation of the apparent moral differences between different cultures.

33 Hume maintains that moral assessments are of persons’ character (T 3.3.1.30). It is unclear, however, what exactly Hume means by character. I will not enter into debate on that question. But I do think it is clear that Hume thinks we form different moral assessments of different qualities that a single person possesses — i.e., that he thinks we may judge a single person to be virtuous in some respects and not virtuous in other respects. If I am right about this, then Korsgaard [1999] is wrong to attribute to Hume the view that our moral assessments are of agents as a whole — i.e., that our moral judgments are always personally global. But defenders of the unity of the virtues thesis — such as Annas — will say that I haven’t done Hume any favors, for they will claim that it is wrong to hold (as I say Hume does) that we morally assess persons’ qualities piecemeal, on by one. Annas and other unity of the virtues defenders will claim that an accurate understanding of the virtues will reveal their reciprocity — i.e., that a person can possess one virtue only to the extent that she possesses the others. This disagreement between Humean pluralists and defenders of the unity of the virtues raises deep questions about morality that I cannot address here. For similar criticism of Hume, see Hursthouse.

34 I think we can and should offer this distinction to the Humean position, but I do not claim that Hume himself was much alive to it. I take myself in this section to be working out implications of Hume’s position in ways that he himself did not do much to develop. I will be engaged in a similar task in the next section of the paper. To use Rosenberg’s helpful methodological distinction, I am doing here something closer to “Dionysian” history of
philosophy while in earlier sections I was doing something closer to “Apollonian” history of philosophy (Rosenberg 2).

35 For discussion of the dispositional aspect of Hume’s general points of view, see Radcliffe and Cohon.

36 I say that this distinction should be part of the Humean account of moral judgment, and I will presently present reasons for thinking this. But I don’t claim that the distinction is ever made explicitly in Hume’s texts. Hume himself seems to use the words “approval” and “disapproval” to refer both to the different kinds of sentimental responses we might have to a quality (which fill a role in the Humean view similar to what the apprehension of prima facie duties fills in Ross’s view) and to the single response that ends up determining our all-in judgment of it (which fills a Humean role similar to the Rossian apprehension of an actual duty). The distinction I am discussing might be more clearly signaled by calling the first kind of responses “proto-approvals” and “proto-disapprovals,” or by calling the second kinds of responses “dispositive approvals” and “dispositive disapprovals.” But I will stick with calling the former simply “approvals” and “disapprovals” and the latter an “all-in judgment,” which is I think more natural-sounding and closer to Hume’s own language.

37 As I noted in footnote above, the best psychological account of our moral judgments will probably not involve the mental mechanisms of sympathy and the addiction to general rules. But we can put in their place recent findings in moral psychology that are basically Humean, even if they are not exactly what Hume himself proposed.

38 Hume’s programmatic statements about his account of virtue are emphatically disjunctive (see, for instance, T 3.3.1.24, T 3.3.5.1, E 9.1), and he makes it clear that certain traits are approved of “only” or “merely” because of the benefits they provide to the agent herself (T
It’s true that when Hume discusses qualities that are immediately agreeable to their possessors, he mentions the pleasure these qualities transmit to people who are in the company of the person. He tells us, for instance, that cheerfulness “readily communicates itself to all around” (E 7.1). But his point here is that others feel the pleasure of approval when they observe the person who is cheerful — and that others feel that approval because of the quality’s immediate agreeability to its possessor. Abramson argues that the passages I’ve been discussing need to be read in light of what Hume says is the “ultimate test of virtue and merit,” and that the ultimate test is entirely interpersonal. But I fail to see how this text, which is central to Abramson’s argument, supports her interpretation. The passage in question comes at the end of Hume’s section “Of Goodness and Benevolence.” Now goodness and benevolence are Hume’s prime examples of qualities that are useful and agreeable to others. That is to say, in this section, he is concerned primarily to explicate the “to others” part of his account of virtue. But that’s just this section. In the sections immediately prior and immediately following Hume discusses other qualities that are virtues because of their usefulness and agreeability to self. Moreover, the particular passage in question seems to me to be a clear statement of the disjunctive self-or-others view, not a distancing from it. Hume writes, “And ‘tis a most certain rule, that if there be no relation of life, in which I cou’d not wish to stand to a particular person, his character must so far be allow’d to be perfect. If he be as little wanting to himself as to others, his character is entirely perfect. This is the ultimate test of merit and virtue” (T 3.3.4.9; italics added). The crucial bits here are “so far” and “entirely.” In saying that a person whose interpersonal interactions are impeccable is “so far allow’d to be perfect,” Hume is contrasting that person with someone who is “entirely” perfect. In order
to be “entirely” perfect, the person must not only be impeccable in his interpersonal interactions but also be in no way “wanting” in how he affects his own well-being. The “ultimate test” involves both a person’s “relations in life” and his relation “to himself.”

39 I have argued for this explanatory reading of Hume in [xxx].

40 The point I make here raises questions about the distinction between aesthetics and morals. Some might hold that an essential feature of morality — and what essentially distinguishes it from aesthetics — is that it has implications for action that make moral ambivalence inherently unstable. According to this way of thinking, we can remain ambivalent in our aesthetic evaluations because they do not have direct implications for how to conduct ourselves, but our ethical evaluations do have these implications and we have to conduct ourselves in one way or another. I doubt, however, that such a sharp distinction between morals and aesthetics could be sustained in the sentimentalist moral views of Hume, Hutcheson, and Shaftesbury, all of whom draw profound connections between beauty and virtue (a point I discuss in [reference deleted]). I also expect that in the end an insistence on this kind of morals/aesthetics distinction (i.e., an insistence that our mixed moral evaluations of Harry and Charles be labeled aesthetic rather than moral) would be uninterestingly verbal. It seems to me, moreover, that sustained evaluative ambivalence about things and people is (and ought to be) a significant feature of our moral lives. There are, it is true, some who suffer from dichotomous thinking — who hold that everyone must be placed on one side or the other of a strictly bifurcated moral ledger — but I take them to be aberrant and unfortunate. It is salutary that Humean pluralism does such a good job of accounting for (and, I think, vindicating) the experience of evaluative ambivalence, and that it does so without collapsing this experience into epistemic uncertainty.
A conflict pluralist denial of an invariable lexical ordering will raise issues about value comparability that need to be addressed. Two values, x and y, are comparable if either x overrides y or y overrides x. (A different, but less important, question is whether two values are commensurable; it’s less important because even if two values are incommensurable they may still be comparable). Two values are incomparable if neither x overrides y nor y overrides x. To understand the conflict pluralist stand on comparability, we need to distinguish between abstract ultimate moral values and concrete instantiations of ultimate moral values. At the abstract level, conflict pluralists hold to value incomparability. On the conflict pluralist view, the value of promise-keeping (when we are talking not about any particular, concrete promise but rather the abstract notion of promise-keeping) is neither greater nor lesser than the abstract value of pain prevention (when we are talking not about any particular, concrete instance of pain prevention but rather the abstract notion of pain prevention in general). At the specific, concrete level, however, comparisons can be made. In a particular situation, the value of keeping a certain specific promise might override the value of preventing pain of certain specific individuals. But in another particular situation, the value of preventing certain person’s pain might override the value of keeping a certain specific promise. Conflict pluralists believe value-comparisons can be made in concrete situations but deny that every situation will issue in the same ranking. This view can be analogized to how we would respond to the question: which is more valuable, oil or water? In some concrete situations, water is more valuable. In other concrete situations, oil is more valuable. But we cannot meaningfully compare the value of oil and water in the abstract. Abstractly considered, neither is more nor less valuable than the other. Or consider beauty
and usefulness. In some situations beauty is more valuable than usefulness while in other situations the opposite holds. But we cannot meaningfully rank the values of beauty and usefulness when we consider them merely in the abstract.

Ross does offer a tentative lexical ordering of goods to be promoted, with virtue and knowledge being given absolute priority over pleasure (Ross 149-50) and virtue being given priority over knowledge (Ross 152-3). See also Ross 165-6.

See King and Abramson.

It’s not completely clear that Hume’s comments about shipwrecks and starving cities are best taken to be non-lexical pluralist (as I have interpreted them) or specificationist (see footnote above). Hume says that in extreme cases “the strict laws of justice are suspended” (E 3.8), and I am taking that to mean that while justice still tells us to respect property we think it is overridden by considerations of benevolence and self-preservation. But one could also argue that a law of justice itself includes the specification that when there is severe need the law no longer applies; indeed, as Samuel Fleischacker has argued, the main thrust of most of Hume’s arguments in Section III of the Second Enquiry is that under circumstances in which justice would not be useful, the conventions of justice would fail to exist altogether. It is difficult to give principled reasons for holding that any particular case is one in which a rule is being justifiably overridden rather than a case in which an implicit specification of a rule is being followed. But I believe the texts I cite in the paragraphs above provide strong evidence that Hume himself thought that there were cases in which the laws of justice really did hold but nonetheless were acceptable to transgress.

See Garrett.

Gaut reference.
The Humean holds that there is a plurality of things we value intrinsically, where “intrinsic” is taken in the sense of being valued for their own sakes and not merely instrumentally. This is consistent with the Humean claim that all value metaphysically depends on human attitudes and the Humean denial of the existence of intrinsic values, where “intrinsic” is taken in the sense of having a mind-independent, non-relational ontological status. For discussion of these two different sense of “intrinsic value,” see Korsgaard [1983].

Humean “moral reasons” are practical considerations grounded in sentiments — i.e., feelings of approval and disapproval (or, as I mentioned earlier, they might be called, “proto-approvals” and “proto-disapprovals”), where those are distinguished from final all-in moral judgments.

I discuss this point in [reference deleted].