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Hume and the Limits of Benevolence

RICO VITZ

What is Hume's position on the limits of benevolence, and why is benevolence limited (if, in fact, it is)? For instance, if a person's benevolence is limited, is it because the nature of human psychology is such that one is not capable of feeling benevolence for those with whom he or she has no "connexion," or is human psychology such that one could feel benevolence for any person, but given the circumstances of human life, one rarely comes in contact with people other than family, friends, and fellow-citizens? Hume's commentators have yet to reach a consensus on these questions.¹

The purpose of this paper is to explain Hume's account of the way both the scope and the degree of benevolent motivation is limited.² As I use the terms in this paper, the scope of benevolence is *narrow*, just in case the set of beings that can be the object of benevolent motivation is limited to a person's family, friends, and (perhaps) fellow citizens (cf. Capaldi, *David Hume and Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy*; and Penelhum, *Hume*, "Hume and Butler," and *David Hume*); the scope of benevolence is *broad*, just in case the set of beings that can be the object of benevolent motivation includes, but is not limited to, one's family, friends, and fellow citizens (cf. Árdal, *Passion and Value*; Bricke, *Mind and Morality*). I argue that according to Hume the *scope* of benevolent motivation is very broad, such that it includes any creature that is conscious and capable of thought, but that the *degree* of benevolent motivation is limited such that a person is naturally inclined to feel benevolence more strongly for one with whom he or she has a "connexion" (e.g., a family member or a friend).

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My principal goal is to elucidate interpretive puzzles about Hume's position on the limits of benevolence that are presented in the *Treatise*. The first two sections of the paper are devoted to this end. In the first section, I argue that there is strong textual evidence that, on Hume's account, benevolence can extend beyond a person's family, friends, and fellow citizens, and even beyond human beings to any thinking conscious being, including animals (see, e.g., T 2.2.5.14–5, 2.2.6.4, 3.2.1.12; SBN 362–3, 367, 481).³ In the second section, I examine two passages that might seem to be evidence against my reading, and I contend that neither passage commits Hume to affirming that benevolence is narrow in scope. In the third section, I turn briefly to the second *Enquiry* for two reasons—(i) to show that, in his later work, Hume reaffirms the position on the limits of benevolence that he articulates in the *Treatise*, and (ii) to clarify a helpful distinction between two kinds of benevolence that Hume makes in the second *Enquiry*, which is implicit, but not articulated, in the *Treatise*. I conclude that Hume consistently affirms, both in the *Treatise* and in the second *Enquiry*, that any thinking conscious being can be the object of benevolence.

1. Evidence for the Broad Scope of Benevolence in the *Treatise*

One of the challenges to providing an accurate interpretation of Hume's account of benevolence is to clarify his use of terms in the *Treatise*. I will begin by elucidating his use of the term “benevolence.”

1.1 “Benevolence”

In Book 2 of the *Treatise*, Hume states, “Benevolence or the appetite, which attends love, is a desire of the happiness of the person below'd, and an aversion to his misery” (T 2.2.9.3; SBN 382).⁴ Let me note three points in relation to this claim. First, benevolence is a psychological state—namely, a desire.⁵ On Hume's account, a desire is a “direct passion,” which is an impression that arises either from pleasure or pain, or “from a natural impulse or instinct, which is perfectly unaccountable.” Insofar as benevolence is the desire “of happiness to our friends,” Hume suggests that it arises from a natural impulse (T 2.3.9.9; SBN 439).

Second, according to Hume, benevolence, like love, has both a cause, which is composed of “the *quality* that operates, and the *subject* on which it is plac'd” (T 2.2.1.5; SBN 330), and “an *object*, to which [it is] directed, *viz*, a person or thinking being” (T 2.2.6.4; SBN 367; cf. T 2.2.5.14; SBN 362). For instance, the object of a person's love for his or her spouse is the spouse. The cause of this love is composed of certain qualities, such as beauty and kindness, which have

been “plac’d” in the beloved. Similarly, the *cause of benevolence* is another person’s pleasure or pain, which is communicated by sympathy. This cause is composed of the qualities that operate and the subjects on which they are “plac’d.” The *object of benevolence* is another person or thinking being. For instance, seeing evidence of pain on the faces of the victims of a natural disaster may cause one to feel benevolence for the victims (cf. T 2.2.9.17; SBN 388).

Third, according to Hume, benevolence, unlike love, necessarily has a goal.⁶ To be benevolently motivated is to have a desire for the well-being of the object of one’s benevolence (cf. T 2.2.6.1–6, 2.2.9.1–20; SBN 366–8, 381–9). The content of this desire (i.e., the well-being of a person or thinking being) is the *goal of benevolence*. Regarding love, however, Hume says,

[T]ho ’tis certain we never love any person without desiring his happiness, nor hate any without wishing his misery, yet these desires arise only upon the ideas of happiness or misery of our friend or enemy being presented by the imagination, and are not absolutely essential to love and hatred. They are the most obvious and natural sentiments of these affections, but not the only ones. The passions may express themselves in a hundred ways, and may subsist a considerable time, without our reflecting on the happiness or misery of their objects. (T 2.2.6.5; SBN 367–8)

Thus, on Hume’s account, love does not necessarily have a goal. Hence, although love and benevolence are always conjoined in human experience (T 2.2.6.5; SBN 367–8; cf. T 2.2.9.3, 3.3.1.31; SBN 382, 591), they are not the same passion. Therefore, benevolence is neither identical with nor essential to love.⁷

1.2 Benevolence and “Belov’d”

The scope of benevolence consists of those who can be the object(s) of benevolence. According to Hume, the set of people who can be the object(s) of benevolence is limited to those who are “belov’d.” Thus, to clarify Hume’s position on the limits of benevolence, I will now turn my attention to clarifying Hume’s use of the term “belov’d.”

There are two ways in which Hume may be using the term “belov’d.” He may be using it in a narrow sense (i.e., to refer to an agent’s family, friends, and fellow citizens) or in a broad sense (i.e., in a sense that includes, but is not limited to, an agent’s family, friends, and fellow citizens). Hume’s interpreters are faced with the task of determining the sense in which he is using the term in his account of benevolence.

Those who can be rightly identified as “belov’d” might seem, *prima facie*, to be limited to those with whom an agent has a loving relationship. Consequently, those who could be rightly identified as “belov’d” would seem to be limited to an agent’s family and friends and, perhaps, the agent’s fellow-citizens. Thus, the passage at T 2.2.9.3 (SBN 382) might seem to be evidence that supports the more narrow interpretations of the scope of benevolence—e.g., those propounded by Capaldi (*Hume’s Place in Moral Philosophy*, 204–5) and by Penelhum (“Hume and Butler,” 258).

At T 2.2.9.5, however, Hume says that benevolence “arise[s] when our happiness . . . [has] any dependance on the happiness . . . of another person, *without any farther relation*” to oneself (SBN 382–3, emphasis mine). To elucidate his point, he introduces the example of two merchants who, though they live in different parts of the world, enter into a business partnership such that the advantage or loss of one of the partners becomes immediately the advantage or loss of the other. On Hume’s account, “[t]his love of a partner cannot proceed from the relation or connexion betwixt [the merchants]; in the same manner as [one] love[s] a brother or countryman” (T 2.2.9.8; SBN 383). Love for a brother or countryman arises from what Hume calls a “*double relation of impressions and ideas*.” One has an idea of his brother and an idea of his brother’s pleasure. These ideas are accompanied by an impression of pleasure and, consequently, an impression of love (T 2.2.4.1–8; SBN 351–5; cf. T 2.1.9.6, 2.2.1.1–9; SBN 306, 329–32). Consequently, benevolence arises for the brother or countryman because it is always conjoined with love by an original constitution of the human mind (cf. T 2.2.6.5–6, 3.3.1.31; SBN 367–8, 591). Love and benevolence for a business partner do not arise from a “double relation of impressions and ideas” but from what Hume calls a *parallel direction of desires* (or a “*parallel direction of affections*”), which can occur whenever the happiness of one person has any dependence on the happiness of another “without any farther relation” (T 2.2.9.1–12; SBN 381–5). Thus, since benevolence can extend to a business partner with whom one has no other relation, or “connexion,” Hume seems to use the term “belov’d” at T 2.2.9.3 (SBN 382) in a broad sense. Therefore, one’s benevolence seems to extend beyond the narrow scope of one’s family, friends, and fellow citizens.

1.3 Benevolence and Pity

Thus, the passage at T 2.2.9.3–5 (SBN 382–3) seems to elucidate both Hume’s use of the term “belov’d” and his account of benevolence, but it also presents an interpretive difficulty. Two paragraphs before Hume asserts that benevolence arises when our happiness has “any dependance on the happiness . . . of another person, *without any farther relation*” to oneself (T 2.2.9.5; SBN 382), he

states that pity is “a desire of the happiness to another, and aversion to his misery” (T 2.2.9.3; SBN 382–3) and that such a desire is *similar* to benevolence. In the subsequent paragraph, however, Hume claims that benevolence and pity are *the same desires* (T 2.2.9.4; SBN 382). Hence, Hume’s interpreters are confronted with two questions: why does Hume claim that benevolence and pity are “similar” and that they are “the same desire,” and is he consistent in making these claims? To answer this question, let me clarify Hume’s use of the term “pity” and explain Hume’s account of the relationship between benevolence and pity.

On Hume’s account, any person can be the object of one’s benevolence, provided that one’s happiness has any dependence on the happiness of that person. For instance, if my business partner is suffering from the effects of a depression in the global economy, I can feel benevolence for her due to a parallel direction of desires. “Pity,” according to Hume, “is a concern for . . . the misery of others, without any friendship . . . to occasion this concern,” and “[w]e pity even strangers, and such as are perfectly indifferent to us” (T 2.2.7.1; SBN 369). Thus, for Hume, a person can be the object of one’s pity, provided that the person is suffering. For instance, I can feel pity for my business partner because she is suffering from the effects of a depression in the global economy. Hence, the same person can be the object both of benevolence and of pity. Insofar as an instance of benevolence and an instance of pity can have the same object, they can have the same goal—namely, to bring about the well-being of the same object. On Hume’s account, benevolence and pity are *the same desires* insofar as each has the same goal.

How, then, do they differ? There are two ways. First, Hume says, “[P]ity and benevolence . . . [are] the same desires *arising from different principles*” (T 2.2.9.4; SBN 382, emphasis mine). He uses phrases of the form “principle of *x*” to identify the cause of *x* or the origin of *x* (see, e.g., T 1.3.13.8, 1.3.15.10; SBN 147, 174). He claims that benevolence is an “original pleasure” (T 2.2.9.15; SBN 387) that is caused by a “natural impulse or instinct” (T 2.3.9.8; SBN 439). He identifies pity, however, as a secondary passion that arises from a connection with love and benevolence (T 2.2.7.1, 2.2.9.3–4; SBN 369, 382). Hence, according to Hume, benevolence and pity are different passions insofar as each has a different principle, origin, or cause.

According to Hume, however, the impulse that causes benevolence “is *perfectly unaccountable*” (T 2.3.9.8; SBN 439, emphasis mine). Hence, one might wonder how he can assert that benevolence and pity arise from different principles. One might ask, for instance, how Hume could know that these passions arise from different principles, if it is not possible to provide an account of the cause of benevolence? Although it may not be possible to provide

complete accounts of the principles from which both benevolence and pity arise, it is possible, on Hume's account, to recognize at least one difference in the cause of each. The *cause of benevolence*, unlike the *cause of pity*, may be the condition of any person, regardless of whether he or she is suffering or not (cf. T 2.2.7.1, 2.2.9.3–7; SBN 369, 382–3). Thus, benevolence and pity differ, minimally, insofar as different subjects may function in the cause of each passion. Therefore, one way in which benevolence and pity differ is that they do not necessarily originate from the same causal principle.

Second, if my business partner is suffering from the effects of a global depression, she may be the object both of my pity and of my benevolence. If, however, my business partner is well and reaping the benefits of a thriving economy, she may be the object of my benevolence but not the object of my pity since she is not in misery. Hence, the *object of pity*, unlike the *object of benevolence*, is necessarily a person who is suffering. Thus, another way that benevolence and pity are different is that each can have a different object.

1.4 Examples of the Broad Scope of Benevolence in the Treatise

Nonetheless, even though benevolence and pity can have different objects, the scope of each is broad, extending beyond one's family, friends, and fellow citizens. Hume's affirmation of the broad scope of benevolence (and pity) is made particularly clear in a number of examples to which he refers in the *Treatise*.

Although Hume does claim that people are "endow'd only with a confin'd generosity" and "are naturally very limited in [their] kindness and affection" (T 3.2.5.8; SBN 519) and that "the generosity of men is very limited" (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602), he does not deny that people can be selflessly motivated to act for the benefit of strangers. He states that "[w]ere we . . . to follow the natural course of our passions and inclinations, we shou'd perform *but few actions* for the advantage of others, from disinterested views" (T 3.2.5.8; SBN 519, emphasis mine), and that the generosity of people "*seldom* extends beyond their friends and family, or, at most, beyond their native country" (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602, emphasis mine). Hume elucidates this point elsewhere. He states,

[Suppose that] I saw a person perfectly unknown to me, who, while asleep in the fields, was in danger of being trod under foot by horses, I shou'd immediately run to his assistance; and in this I shou'd be actuated by the same principle of sympathy, which makes me concern'd for the present sorrows of a stranger. The bare mention of this is sufficient. Sympathy being nothing but a lively idea converted into an

impression, 'tis evident, that, in considering the future possible or probable condition of any person, we may enter into it with so vivid a conception as to make it our own concern; and by that means be sensible of pains and pleasures, which neither belong to ourselves, nor at the present instant have any real existence. (T 2.2.9.13; SBN 385–6)

Hume uses the example of the man asleep in the field to introduce a brief analysis of sympathy, after which, he concludes, “Benevolence, therefore, arises from a great degree of misery, or any degree strongly sympathiz’d with” (T 2.2.9.15; SBN 387). He, then, offers two clarifying examples. He notes that “[w]e may under-value a peasant or servant; but when the misery of a beggar appears very great, or is painted in lively colours, we sympathize with him in his afflictions, and feel in our heart evident touches of pity and benevolence” (T 2.2.9.16; SBN 387), and that “[t]he view of a city in ashes conveys benevolent sentiments; because we there enter so deep into the interests of the miserable inhabitants, as to wish for their prosperity, as well as feel their adversity” (T 2.2.9.17; SBN 388). Thus, according to the account Hume gives in the *Treatise*, the people who are the objects of benevolence need not be family members, friends, or even fellow-citizens.

1.5 Summary: Evidence for the Broad Scope of Benevolence in the *Treatise*

Therefore, Hume’s account of benevolence in the *Treatise* seems to be closer to the position propounded by Árdal (i.e., that the scope of benevolence may include any person) than to the restrictive interpretations propounded by Capaldi (*Hume’s Place in Moral Philosophy*, 204–5) and Penelhum (“Hume and Butler,” 258) (i.e., that the scope of benevolence is limited to family and friends or to family, friends, and fellow citizens). There are, however, other passages in the *Treatise* in which Hume’s claims might seem to commit him to a more narrow account of the limits of benevolence.

2. Evidence for the Narrow Scope of Benevolence in the *Treatise*?

Two claims, in particular, might seem to be problematic for the thesis that Hume propounds the broad scope of benevolence. The first is Hume’s denial that there is a “love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to oneself” (T 3.2.1.12; SBN 481). The second is his discussion of people’s limited generosity and the “narrow circle” in which people move (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602). I will begin by elucidating Hume’s account of the “love of mankind.”

2.1 The “Love of Mankind” and the Limits of Benevolence

Selby-Bigge claims that Hume’s rejection of the “love of mankind” (T 3.2.1.12–3; SBN 481–2) “sternly limits [the] extent and influence [of benevolence]” (Hume, *Enquiries*, xxv).⁸ Penelhum also suggests that Hume’s rejection of the “love of mankind in general” implies a more restricted interpretation of Hume’s account of the limits of benevolence. He claims,

Hume agrees with Butler that we are not wholly selfish, and that we are often benevolent. But he insists that our benevolence is always interested—directed, that is, towards our families or friends or fellow-citizens. He rejects the belief in the love of mankind in general. (“Hume and Butler,” 258)

As I will now show, however, Hume’s denial of the “love of mankind” does not commit him to a narrower account of the limits of benevolence.

2.1.1 The “Love of Mankind” (T 3.2.1.12; SBN 481–2)

To understand Hume’s denial of the existence of the “love of mankind,” it is necessary to understand his argument in the context of his attempt to find the origin of the virtue of justice. He is attempting to establish that justice is an artificial virtue, and he begins by arguing that humans are not capable of having a “love of mankind.” Hume says,

In general, it may be affirmed, that there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself. . . . An affection betwixt the sexes is a passion evidently implanted in human nature; and this passion not only appears in its peculiar symptoms, but also in inflaming every other principle of affection, and raising a stronger love from beauty, wit, kindness, than what wou’d otherwise flow from them. Were there such an universal love among all human creatures, it would appear after the same manner [such that mankind, merely as such, would be both the object and the cause of the passion]. Any degree of a good quality wou’d cause a stronger affection than the same degree of a bad quality wou’d cause hatred; contrary to what we find by experience. Men’s tempers are different, and some have a propensity to the tender, and others to the rougher, affections: But in the main, we may affirm, that man in general, or human nature, is nothing but the object both of love and hatred, and requires some other

cause, which by a double relation of impressions and ideas may excite these passions [of love and hatred]. In vain wou'd we endeavor to elude this hypothesis. There are no phaenomena that point out any such kind affection to men, independent of their merit, and every other circumstance. (T 3.2.1.12; SBN 481–2)

The key to understanding Hume's conclusion is to recognize the significance of his claim that "man in general, or human nature, is nothing but the object both of love and hatred, and requires some other cause, which by a double relation of impressions and ideas may excite these passions [of love and hatred]." When he refers to the "the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to oneself," he is referring to the possibility of a unique instance of love having mankind as its object and human nature as its cause. On Hume's account, there is not a "love of mankind" because another's merely possessing human nature—that is, merely being human—cannot be the cause of the passion of love.

2.1.2 Public and Private Benevolence

From his argument against the existence of a "love of mankind," Hume infers that neither "public benevolence" nor "private benevolence" can be the original motive to justice: "If public benevolence, therefore, or a regard to the interests of mankind, cannot be the original motive to justice, much less can *private benevolence*, or a regard to the interests of the party concern'd, be this motive" (T 3.2.1.13; SBN 482). This inference raises two questions. First, what is the difference between "public benevolence" and "private benevolence"? Second, what is Hume's reason for inferring from the argument against the existence of the "love of mankind," that "public benevolence" cannot be the original motive to justice?

Recall that Hume identifies benevolence as "a desire of the happiness of the person below'd" and says that it "arises when our happiness or misery [has] any dependance on the happiness or misery of another person, without any farther relation [to ourselves]" (T 2.2.9.3–5; SBN 382–3). The cause of the type of benevolence discussed in passages such as these is the condition of another person; the object is the other person, and the goal is to bring about the well-being of this other person. Since those who feel the type of benevolence to which Hume is referring at T 2.2.9.3–5 (SBN 382–3) are concerned with the interests of a particular party and since "private benevolence" is "a regard to the interests of the party concern'd," it is reasonable to infer that the type of benevolence to which Hume is referring in the passages at T 2.2.9.3–5 (SBN 382–3) is "private benevolence."

To understand what Hume means by the phrase “public benevolence,” consider what the cause, the object, and the goal of such a desire would be. Hume uses the phrase “public benevolence” to refer to “a regard to the interests of mankind” (T 3.2.1.13; SBN 482). Hence, the *cause of public benevolence* would be the condition of mankind—that is, the condition of “men, independent of their merit, and every other circumstance” (T 3.2.1.12; SBN 482). The *object of public benevolence* would be mankind, and the *goal of public benevolence* would be to bring about the well-being of mankind. More specifically, both the *quality* that operates and the *subject* on which it is “plac’d” would constitute the cause of such benevolence (cf. T 2.2.1.5; SBN 330). On Hume’s account, to attempt to conceive of “men, independent of their merit, and every other circumstance” is to attempt to conceive of mankind abstractly; thus, to attempt to conceive of the condition of mankind is to attempt to conceive of a quality that has no precise degree. According to Hume, however, the human mind cannot form any notion of quality without forming a precise notion of its degree (see, e.g., T 1.1.7.1–6; SBN 17–20). Hence, regarding “men, independent of their merit, and every other circumstance,” there is no quality about which a person could be concerned. Therefore, there is no cause of “public benevolence,” and without a cause, there is no such passion. Thus, Hume rejects the hypothesis that “public benevolence” can be the original motive to justice for the same reasons he rejects the existence of the “love of mankind”—namely, human beings are not capable of producing such a passion (cf. T 3.2.2.19; SBN 495–6).

As Selby-Bigge and Penelhum suggest, it is tempting to infer that Hume’s rejection both of the “love of mankind” and of “public benevolence” implies that the scope of benevolence must be limited to those with whom one has a relationship with some degree of intimacy—e.g., a friend or fellow-citizen. As I have argued, however, such an inference is unwarranted. Hume’s rejections of the “love of mankind” and of “public benevolence” imply that “public benevolence” is not the origin of justice. They do not, however, imply a restriction on the scope of benevolence.

2.1.3 “Being Affected” and the “Love of Mankind”

Although Hume is committed to the idea that the scope of benevolence can include strangers, he claims that the broad scope of benevolence is not evidence for the “love of mankind.” He says,

’Tis true, there is no human, and indeed no sensible, creature, whose happiness or misery does not, in some measure, affect us, when brought near to us, and represented in lively colours: But this proceeds

merely from sympathy, and is no proof of such an universal affection to mankind, since this concern extends itself beyond our species. (T 3.2.1.12; SBN 481)

This passage, however, raises an interpretive difficulty—namely, what is the difference between (i) being affected in some measure by the condition of any creature whose plight is represented to us in lively colors and (ii) having a universal love of humankind?

There are (at least) four differences between being affected by the condition of another creature and having a universal love of humankind. First, since “[t]he degree of any passion depends upon the nature of its object” (T 2.2.2.24; SBN 344), it is possible that the degree to which a person is affected by the representation of the plight of another may be so weak that it does not give rise to love (cf. T 2.2.9.15; SBN 387). Since Hume says, “’Tis altogether impossible to give any definition of the [passion] of love” (T 2.2.1.1; SBN 329), it might seem rather difficult to evaluate the claim that an affect may be too weak to actuate love. He also says, though, that love is “always followed by, or rather conjoin’d with benevolence” (T 2.2.6.3; SBN 367). Thus, to evaluate whether a passion is too weak to give rise to love, one only needs to examine whether the passion is strong enough to give rise to benevolence.⁹ If there were a universal love of humankind, then any time that another’s plight were “brought near to [a person], and represented in lively colours,” one would feel a desire for the happiness of the person who is experiencing discomfort. On Hume’s account, however, human beings are not always so moved. For instance, if a person sees a beggar in a great degree of misery, with which he or she does not strongly sympathize, his or her psychological mechanism of sympathy will give rise not to benevolence but to contempt (cf. T 2.2.9.1–20; SBN 381–9). For many, the sight of a leper dying in the street may give rise to feelings of uneasiness and contempt, but for Mother Theresa, the sight of such a person may give rise to benevolence and love.¹⁰

The second point can be seen most clearly by analyzing Hume’s claim that “perhaps a man wou’d be belov’d as such, were we to meet him in the moon” (T 3.2.1.12; SBN 482). The claim might seem to conflict with his denial that people have a “love of mankind, merely as such”; however, an examination of the context of the claim reveals the way in which Hume can both affirm the possibility of the love of the man in the moon “as such” and deny the existence of a “love of mankind.”

Hume denies that people have a “love of *mankind*, merely as such, *independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself*” (T 3.2.1.12; SBN 481, emphasis mine). The *cause* of the love of mankind, like the cause of other

passions, is composed of both the quality(-ies) that operates and the subject on which it is (they are) “plac’d.” Independent of “personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself,” however, there is no quality that can be “plac’d” on the subject (i.e., mankind); hence, there can be no cause of the “love of mankind.” On Hume’s account, merely being human is not a sufficient quality. If, however, one were to love the man in the moon, as described in Hume’s example, one’s love would “[proceed] only from the relation to [oneself]” (T 3.2.1.12; SBN 482). Thus, the man on the moon may be loved “as such” (i.e., as a man) but only because he stands in a particular relation to oneself—e.g., he is the only other human being with whom one has contact. Hence, according to Hume, although people may feel love and benevolence for *any* human being *given certain circumstances*, people do not feel love and benevolence for human beings *regardless of their circumstances*.

Third, the object of the passion that arises from being affected by the condition of another creature is a *particular thinking being*, but the object of the universal love of humanity would be *mankind in general*. Hence, the object of the passion that arises from being affected by the condition of another creature is different from the object of the universal love humanity.

Finally, although people will always be affected by the misery of any sensible creature whose condition is “brought near to [them], and represented in lively colours,” the objects of such feelings are not only human beings. The object of a passion like benevolence is a thinking conscious being (T 2.2.5.14–5, 2.2.6.4; SBN 362–3, 367), but, according to Hume, “beasts are endow’d with thought and reason as well as men” (T 1.3.16.1; SBN 176). Consequently, humans are not the only creatures that can be accurately categorized as thinking conscious beings. Therefore, an animal can be the object of one’s benevolence. Hence, the scope of benevolence is not limited to human beings (cf. Árdal, *Passion and Value*, 66–7; Bricke, *Mind and Morality*, 187), and it is not specifically *human* nature with which one can sympathize. Thus, the fact that people can be affected by the plight of any human being, given proper circumstances, is not an indication of a universal love of humankind. It merely reveals that people have a psychological mechanism of sympathy that can give rise to feelings that may be directed toward a variety of conscious beings.

2.1.4 Summary: The “Love of Mankind” and the Limits of Benevolence

Thus, even though Hume denies that people have a “love of mankind,” he affirms that one’s benevolence may extend beyond one’s family, friends, and fellow citizens to any sensible creature—regardless of whether one has a prior emotional relationship with the creature. There is, however, a second

passage that may be interpreted as evidence for a narrow scope of benevolence in the *Treatise*.

2.2 The “Narrow Circle” and the Limits of Benevolence

At T 3.3.3.2 (SBN 602), in the section entitled “Of Goodness and Benevolence,” Hume says, “Being . . . acquainted with the nature of man, we expect not any impossibilities from him; but confine our view to that narrow circle, in which any person moves, in order to form a judgment of his moral character.” Although it might seem tempting to interpret Hume’s comment as evidence for some type of commitment to a narrow scope of benevolence,¹¹ it actually evinces his commitment to affirming the broad scope of benevolence, as I will now show.

2.2.1 The “Narrow Circle” (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602–3)

In the introductory paragraph to “Of Goodness and Benevolence,” Hume begins by stating that he intends to provide an account goodnes and “shew whence its merit is deriv’d.” He then says,

When experience has once given us a competent knowledge of human affairs, and has taught us the proportion they bear to human passion, we perceive, that *the generosity of men* is very limited, and that it *seldom extends* beyond their friends and family, or, at most, beyond their native country. Being thus acquainted with the nature of man, we expect not any impossibilities from him; but *confine our view to that narrow circle, in which any person moves*, in order to form a judgment of his moral character. When the natural tendency of his passions leads him to be serviceable and useful within his sphere, we approve of his character and love his person, by a sympathy with the sentiments of those, who have a more particular connexion with him. (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602, emphasis mine)

To show that Hume’s comments regarding the “narrow circle” are evidence that he is committed to affirming the broad scope of benevolence, let me clarify Hume’s account of the relationship between generosity and benevolence. Generosity is one of the qualities that constitute the kind of character that Hume describes as “benevolent” (T 3.3.3.3; SBN 603). Hume identifies generosity with kindness (see, e.g., T 3.2.5.8; SBN 519; and EPM 9.21; SBN 282), and he identifies both generosity and kindness with love and benevolence (see, e.g., T 3.2.2.16-9; SBN 494–6; cf. EPM 3.6, 9.12, 21; SBN 184–5, 277, 282). Therefore, when Hume says that generosity extends beyond the

narrow scope of family, friends, and fellow citizens, he is making a statement about the *scope of benevolence*. His comment implies that the objects of benevolent motivation, as well as the objects of benevolent actions, need not be limited to one's family, friends, and fellow citizens. Therefore, Hume's claim at T 3.3.3.2 (SBN 602–3) evinces his commitment to affirming the broad scope of benevolence.

2.2.2 Why Does Benevolence Seldom Extend Beyond the "Narrow Circle"?

Interpreting the passage at T 3.3.3.2 (SBN 602–3) as I suggest helps to clarify Hume's account of the scope of benevolence, but it also raises an important question—namely, why is benevolence limited such that it *seldom* extends beyond the narrow limits of one's family, friends, and fellow citizens?

To understand Hume's reason for asserting that benevolence seldom extends beyond one's family, friends and fellow citizens, consider the following scenario. A woman comes upon the scene of an accident in which there are two victims—a stranger and the woman's mother—each of whom is suffering severe pain from the same type of injury. On Hume's account, although either of the victims may be the object of the woman's benevolence, the woman will feel this sentiment for her mother to a greater degree for two reasons. First, "[t]he degree of any passion depends upon the nature of its object; and an affection directed to a person, who is considerable in our eyes, fills and possesses the mind much more than one, which has for its object a person we esteem of less consequence" (T 2.2.2.24; SBN 344). Second, "in the original frame of our mind, our strongest attention is confin'd to ourselves; our next is extended to our relations and acquaintance; and 'tis only the weakest which reaches to strangers and indifferent persons" (T 3.2.2.8; SBN 488). As Hume notes, this "partiality . . . and unequal affection" has an influence on a person's behavior. If the woman could only provide aid to one of the victims, one would expect (at least Hume would expect) that she would provide assistance to her mother.

Note, though, that on Hume's account, the woman is not acting egoistically, for the following reasons. Benevolence arises from sympathy (T 2.2.5.15, 2.2.9.10–7; SBN 363, 384–8). "In sympathy [one's] own person is not the object of any passion, nor is there any thing, that fixes [one's] attention on [oneself]" (T 2.2.2.17; SBN 340). Hence, the object of the woman's benevolence is not herself. Consequently, the goal of the woman is not to perform the action that best benefits herself. She is simply caused to act by the principle of sympathy, which is essentially "partial."¹²

When Hume says that people should "not expect any impossibilities from [others]" and that they should confine their moral judgments to a "narrow

circle,” he is suggesting that people are not morally obligated to do acts of which individuals, as a rule, are not capable. For instance, people should not consider the woman in the previous example to be morally vicious for helping her mother instead of a stranger. Hume, though, seems to be saying more. If he is committed to affirming the broad scope of benevolence, then he is committed to the notion that *anyone* can be the object of a person’s benevolent motivation. Why, then, does he say that moral judgments should be confined to a “narrow circle”? According to Hume, moral judgments evaluate people’s characters, not simply their actions. It is a matter of fact that people are naturally confined to one locale. Thus, even though the *possible* objects of a person’s *benevolent motivation* are any thinking beings, human society is such that the *actual* objects of one’s *benevolent actions* are limited to a “narrow circle” of people—roughly, one’s family, friends, and fellow citizens. Moreover, since passions like benevolence are derived from sympathy, they depend, in a great measure, on the contiguity, and even the sight of the object (cf. T 2.2.7.4; SBN 370). Thus, both *the nature of human psychology* and *the nature of human society* are such that people do not express virtues habitually to anyone outside the “narrow circle.” The habitual failure of a person to express his or her virtues towards those outside the sphere in which he or she moves, however, should not be regarded as vicious, on Hume’s account, because the habitual expression of one’s virtues towards such people is not something for which human nature generally allows. Therefore, according to Hume, moral judgments should be confined to the sphere in which a person moves.

2.2.3 Summary: The “Narrow Circle” and the Limits of Benevolence

Thus, to read the passage at T 3.3.3.2 (SBN 602–3) as evidence for a narrow interpretation of the limits of benevolence is to conflate the *possible* objects of a person’s *benevolent motivation* with the *actual* objects of one’s *benevolent actions*. Hume is committed to affirming that the *scope of benevolent motivation* can include anyone; however, he claims that the *scope of people’s moral judgments* should be limited to the sphere of the person whose character is being judged—that is, the “narrow circle” in which the person moves.

2.3 Summary: Evidence for the Narrow Scope of Benevolence in the Treatise?

Hence, neither Hume’s rejection of the “love of mankind” (T 3.2.1.12–3; SBN 481–2) nor his account of people’s limited generosity and the “narrow circle” to which moral judgments must be confined (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602–3) is evidence for the narrow scope of benevolence in the *Treatise*. In fact, each passage is consistent with the strong textual evidence I discussed in the first section

of this paper, according to which Hume is committed to affirming the broad scope of benevolence.

Therefore, after considering the most compelling textual evidence in the *Treatise* on the limits of benevolence, it is reasonable to conclude that on Hume's account benevolence is neither limited to one's family and friends (cf. Capaldi, *Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy*, 204–5; *David Hume*, 182), nor to one's fellow citizens (cf. Penelhum, "Hume and Butler," 258), nor even to human beings (cf. Árdal, *Passion and Value*, 66–7; Bricke, *Mind and Morality*, 187). According to Hume, a person's benevolence can extend to any sensible creature whose condition is "brought near to us, and represented in lively colours" (T 3.2.1.12; SBN 481).

3. The Limits of Benevolence in the Second *Enquiry*

A brief examination of the second *Enquiry* can help elucidate Hume's position on the limits of benevolence in the *Treatise* in two ways. First, Hume reaffirms the position that he articulated in the *Treatise*. Second, he makes explicit a helpful distinction between two kinds of benevolence that is implicit, but not articulated, in his earlier work. Therefore, let me turn briefly to the second *Enquiry*.¹³

3.1 Evidence for the Broad Scope of Benevolence in the Second *Enquiry*

In the second appendix of the second *Enquiry*, Hume says,

Benevolence naturally divides into two kinds, the *general* and the *particular*. The first is, where we have no friendship or connexion or esteem for the person, but feel only a general sympathy with him or a compassion for his pains, and a congratulation with his pleasures. The other species of benevolence is founded on an opinion of virtue, on services done us, or on some particular connexions. (EPM Appendix 2.5, note 60; SBN 298, note 1)¹⁴

Thus, the scope of "particular benevolence" is limited to people with whom one has some "connexion," such as one's family, friends, and fellow-citizens, but the scope of "general benevolence" is not so limited.¹⁵ It can include any person(s) for whom one can feel compassion, such as a man in danger of being trod under foot by horses (T 2.2.9.13; SBN 385–6), a beggar in great misery (T 2.2.9.16; SBN 387), or the miserable inhabitants of a city in ashes (T 2.2.9.17; SBN 388). Hence, in the second *Enquiry*, as in the *Treatise*, Hume consistently

affirms that the scope of benevolence is not limited to one's family, friends, and fellow citizens, but can extend to any person.

Furthermore, there are two principal pieces of textual evidence in the second *Enquiry* that reveal Hume's commitment to the idea that human benevolence can extend to animals. First, in a discussion of justice, Hume uses an example in which animals are the objects of human compassion and kindness (EPM 3.18–19; SBN 190–1). In the fourth appendix to the second *Enquiry*, he identifies compassion with humanity (EPM Appendix 4.14; SBN 319). Elsewhere, humanity is identified with benevolence (cf. EPM 2.5, 3.48, 5.18, 9.19; SBN 178, 204, 220, 281). Moreover, he continually associates both compassion and kindness with the social virtues of humanity and benevolence (see, e.g., EPM 3.18, 5.18, Appendix 2.6, Appendix 4.14; SBN 190, 220, 298, 319). Thus, for Hume, an instance of compassion is an instance of benevolence (cf. T 2.2.9.15–6, 3.3.3.3; SBN 387, 603). Therefore, when Hume notes that animals can be the objects of compassion and kindness, in the second *Enquiry*, he is reaffirming his claim that animals can be the objects of human benevolence.

Second, in his argument that benevolence is not merely an instance of self-love, Hume claims that “[a]nimals are found susceptible of kindness, both to their own species and to ours,” and he asks rhetorically, “[I]f we admit a disinterested benevolence in the inferior species, by what rule of analogy can we refuse it in the superior?” (EPM Appendix 2.8; SBN 300). Since Hume claims that the benevolence of inferior creatures can extend beyond members of their own species, it would be rather implausible that he would deny that human beings lack the ability for their benevolence to extend to a sensible creature merely because the creature is not human.

Thus, both in the *Treatise* and in the second *Enquiry* Hume affirms that human benevolence can extend to any sensible creature whose condition is “brought near to [a person], and represented in lively colours” (T 3.2.1.12; SBN 481). Therefore, Hume consistently affirms that benevolence is broad in scope.

3.2 Problematic Passages in the Second Enquiry?

There are passages in the second *Enquiry* that might seem to be inconsistent with Hume's positions in the *Treatise* regarding the “love of mankind” and “public benevolence.” As I will now show, however, these passages are consistent with the position Hume propounds in the *Treatise*.

The expressions “public interest,” “interests of society,” and the like¹⁶ are used in the second *Enquiry* (as they are in the *Treatise*) to identify the interests of groups of people, for instance, one's fellow citizens, for which Hume claims one can be concerned (see, e.g., EPM 3.46, 5.17, 31, 38–9, 46; SBN 203, 219, 223, 225, 231–2; cf. T 3.2.2.24, 3.3.1.14; SBN 499–500, 580). Sympathizing with

the “public interest,” on Hume’s account, can give rise to “extensive benevolence” (see, e.g., EPM 2.4, 3.6; SBN 177, 184–5; cf. T 2.2.9.15, 3.2.2.19; SBN 387, 495–6). For instance, when Hume says, “The view of a city in ashes conveys benevolent sentiments; because *we there enter so deep into the interests of the miserable inhabitants*, as to wish for their prosperity, as well as feel their adversity” (T 2.2.9.17; SBN 388, emphasis mine), he is citing an occasion of “extensive benevolence.”

Let me note three things about Hume’s use of expressions that identify groups of people with whom one can be concerned. First, these phrases do not commit Hume to affirming that there is a “love of mankind.” Recall that in the *Treatise* Hume denies that there is a “love of mankind, *merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to [oneself]*” (T 3.2.1.12; SBN 481, emphasis mine). The objects of “extensive benevolence,” however, are not considered “merely as such, independent of personal qualities.” According to Hume, it is the inhabitants of the city, for instance, that are the objects of one’s benevolence and their miserable condition that is its cause.

Second, Hume does not account for “public benevolence” in terms of a regard for “public interest.” A regard for the “public interest” or the “interests of society” is what Hume calls “extensive benevolence.” “Public benevolence” is described in the *Treatise* as “a regard to the *interests of mankind*” (T 3.2.1.13; SBN 482, emphasis mine). In the context of Hume’s argument, the expression “interests of mankind” refers to the interests of “mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to [oneself]” (cf. T 3.2.1.12; SBN 481). Thus, Hume’s claim that one can sympathize with the “public interest” or the “interests of society” does not conflict with his rejection of “public benevolence.”

Third, when trying to establish the origin of justice both in the *Treatise* and in the second *Enquiry*, Hume considers the possibility that there could be a strong “extensive benevolence” such that

though the necessities of human race continue the same as at present, yet the mind is so enlarged, and so replete with friendship and generosity, that every man has the utmost tenderness for every man, and feels no more concern for his own interest than for that of his fellows

and claims,

Every man, upon this supposition, being a second self to another, would trust all his interests to the discretion of every man; without jealousy, without partition, without distinction. And the whole human race

would form only one family; where all would lie in common, and be used freely, without regard to property; but cautiously too, with as entire regard to the necessities of each individual, as if our own interests were most intimately concerned. (EPM 3.6; SBN 184–5; cf. T 3.2.2.16–9; SBN 494–6)¹⁷

Thus, there could be, on Hume’s account, either (i) a love of mankind, where mankind is considered both not “merely as such” and not “independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to oneself” or (ii) a benevolence so extensive that it has every human being as its object.

That people do not have such an “extensive benevolence” is, on Hume’s account, merely a consequence of the nature of the human mind. He claims, for instance, that the human mind is not capable of being moved by vague considerations of the good of the entire species, or even merely of a segment of the species, such as a country of people living in a remote land. According to Hume, people are naturally constituted such that the “loose indeterminate views to the good of [their] species” cannot motivate them to act because a species is not a “duly limited object, on which [people] could exert themselves” (EPM 5.38n22; SBN 225n1). Elsewhere, he says,

It is wisely ordained by nature, that private connexions should commonly prevail over universal views and considerations; *otherwise our affections and actions would be dissipated and lost, for want of a proper limited object*. Thus a small benefit done to ourselves, or our near friends, excites more lively sentiments of love and approbation than a great benefit done to a distant commonwealth: But still we know here, as in all the senses, to correct these inequalities by reflection, and retain a general standard of vice and virtue, founded chiefly on general usefulness. (EPM 5.42, note 25; SBN 229, note 1, emphasis mine)

Thus, according to Hume, one reason that people do not have such an “extensive benevolence” is that if a person is not able to identify some particular quality(-ies) of a putative object of love or benevolence with which he or she can be concerned, then there is no cause that can operate on his or her sympathy. For instance, if one stops to consider the good of the species or the good of the inhabitants of a distant country, the good of the group may be so difficult to determine with any specificity that the human mind will not be able to identify a quality(-ies) that can operate as the cause of a passion. Note, though, that if our nature were different, perhaps one could sympathize with the misery of an entire species if its plight could be “brought near to us, and represented in lively colours,” just as human nature presently allows us to

sympathize with the miserable inhabitants of a city in ashes (cf. T 2.2.9.17, 3.2.1.12; SBN 387, 481).¹⁸

3.3 Summary: *The Limits of Benevolence in the Second Enquiry*

Thus, on Hume's account, there is a type of benevolence—namely, “particular benevolence”—the scope of which is limited (roughly) to family, friends, and fellow citizens. Interpretations of Hume's work that propound the narrow scope of benevolence rightly identified the scope of “particular benevolence.” What such interpretations mistakenly suggest, however, is that this is the only type of benevolence in Hume's account of human psychology.

An examination both of the *Treatise* and of the second *Enquiry* reveals that according to Hume although no human being has an “extensive benevolence” such that he or she has a “love of mankind” merely as such, he consistently affirms that human benevolence is broad in scope and can extend to any sensible creature. Therefore, Hume's account of the limits of benevolence in the second *Enquiry* is consistent with his position in the *Treatise*.

4. Conclusion

I began by calling attention to two questions on which there is no consensus among Hume's commentators—namely, what is Hume's position on the limits of benevolence, and why is benevolence limited? Regarding the first question, I argued that Hume consistently affirms both in the *Treatise* and in the second *Enquiry* that the scope of benevolent motivation extends beyond one's family and friends (cf. Capaldi, *Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy*, 204–5; *David Hume*, 182), beyond one's fellow citizens (cf. Penelhum, “Hume and Butler,” 258; cf. *David Hume*, 154, *Hume*, 156), and even beyond human beings (cf. Árdal, *Passion and Value*, 66–7; Bricke, *Mind and Morality*, 187) to any thinking being, which, on Hume's account, includes animals. Regarding the second question, I argued that, according to Hume, although the scope of benevolent motivation can include any thinking being, the nature of human psychology (particularly the nature of sympathy) and the nature of human society are such that benevolence seldom extends beyond a person's family, friends and fellow citizens. In answering these questions, I hope to have developed the insights previously offered by Hume's commentators and to have provided a definitive explanation of Hume's account of the limits of benevolence.

NOTES

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1 Regarding the first question, for instance, there is a wide variety of answers. According to Nicholas Capaldi, Hume claims that benevolence is “restricted to family and friends” (*Hume’s Place in Moral Philosophy* [New York: Peter Lang, 1989], 204–5; cf. Capaldi’s *David Hume: The Newtonian Philosopher* [Boston: Twayne, 1975], 182). Terence Penelhum offers a similar reading, but on Penelhum’s account benevolence is not merely limited to one’s family and friends. In “Hume and Butler,” for instance, he says, “[B]enevolence is always interested—directed, that is, towards our families or friends or fellow-citizens” (*Hume Studies* 14 [1988]: 251–76, 258, emphasis mine; cf. his *Hume* [London: Macmillan, 1975], 156, and *David Hume: An Introduction to His Philosophical System* [West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1992], 154). J. L. Mackie says, somewhat vaguely, that benevolence “begins and ends pretty close to home” (*Hume’s Moral Theory* [London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1989], 126). According to John Bricke’s interpretation, “only humans . . . are the objects of human love and benevolence” and among them benevolence is “normally quite limited” (*Mind and Morality: An Examination of Hume’s Moral Psychology* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996], 187). Páll Árdal claims that a person’s benevolence “can extend to anyone” (*Passion and Value in Hume’s Treatise* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966], 66–7). John Laird suggests that Hume’s account of the limits of benevolence changes from *A Treatise of Human Nature* to *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (see, e.g., his *Hume’s Philosophy of Human Nature* [London: Methuen, 1932; reprinted Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1967], 238; see also comments by L. A. Selby-Bigge in his edition of *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3rd ed., revised by P. H. Nidditch [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975], xxv). Other commentators—e.g., Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume’s Treatise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume’s Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of Its Origins and Central Doctrines* (London: Macmillan, 1941); David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralists Skeptical Metaphysician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1977)—do not specifically address Hume’s account of the limits of benevolence.

2 My primary focus, throughout this paper, is the *scope of benevolent motivation* (i.e., the set of beings that can be the object of one’s psychological state), not the *scope of benevolent actions* (i.e., the set of beings that can be the object of one’s benevolent acts). I will use the term “benevolence” to refer to benevolent motivation, unless explicitly stated otherwise—for instance, I will use the phrases “scope of benevolence” and “scope of benevolent motivation” interchangeably.

3 All quotations from *A Treatise of Human Nature* will be taken from David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and referred to as ‘T’, followed by the book, part, section, and paragraph numbers. Each reference will also use the abbreviation ‘SBN’ to note the corresponding page(s) in the second edition prepared by Selby-Bigge and revised by Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). For instance, “(T 1.2.3.4; SBN 34)” would refer to a quotation from the *Treatise*—first book, second part, third section, fourth paragraph—which can be found on page 34 of the edition by Selby-Bigge/Nidditch.

All quotations from the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* will be taken from Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), and referred to as ‘EPM,’ followed by the section and paragraph numbers. As with references to the *Treatise*, each reference to the second *Enquiry* will also use the abbreviation ‘SBN’ to note the corresponding page(s) in the edition by Selby-Bigge/Nidditch. For instance, “(EPM 5.6; SBN 215)” would refer to a quotation from the second *Enquiry*—section five, sixth paragraph—which can be found on page 215 of the edition by Selby-Bigge/Nidditch.

4 I treat this quote as if it were a definition of “benevolence.” Elizabeth Radcliffe, Ken Winkler, and an anonymous referee have called to my attention two possible problems with reading the passage as I do. First, it seems to commit Hume to the implausible claim that we never have benevolence toward someone we do not love, but, as I note, love and benevolence are not necessarily connected, on Hume’s account. Second, in Book 2, Hume seems to use the term “love” to refer to moral or aesthetic esteem—i.e., a passion for those whose character traits or beauty we approve or esteem from a general point of view. This seems to preclude the possibility that certain beings (e.g., animals) can be the objects of benevolence, but I argue (below) that animals *can* be the objects of benevolence.

Let me attempt to respond to these concerns. On Hume’s account, it is conceivable that love and benevolence may be separable; hence, they are not necessarily conjoined. He claims, however, that they are always conjoined in human experience (see, e.g., T 2.2.6.3-6, 2.2.11.4, 3.3.1.31, 3.3.4.2, note 88; SBN 367–8, 395, 591, 608, note 1). Given Hume’s commitment to affirming that love and benevolence are always conjoined in human experience, he *is* committed to claiming that we never have benevolence toward someone we do not love. Thus, if Hume uses the term “love” in a univocal sense, my interpretation would imply that he is committed to the seemingly implausible claim that we esteem every being who is the object of our benevolence. However, Hume uses the term “love” in (at least) two different senses. Sometimes he uses it to refer to moral or aesthetic esteem (see, e.g., T 2.2.2.10, 3.3.4.2, note 88; SBN 337, 608, note 1), but he also uses it in a very general sense to refer to what he calls the tender passions or affectionate sentiments, such that the term “love” is interchangeable with the term “tenderness” (see, e.g., T 2.2.9.1,12,18-19, 2.2.10.6, 2.3.9.31; SBN 381, 385, 388–9, 391, 448; cf. EPM 2.5; SBN 178). Thus, on my reading, Hume is committed to the plausible claim that we never desire the happiness of another being without also having a tender regard for him or her or it (cf. T 2.2.9.10; SBN 384).

5 More specifically, Hume identifies benevolence as a “calm desire” that “produce little emotion in the mind, and [is] more known by [its] effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation” (T 2.3.3.8; SBN 417).

6 I am using Hume’s convention of claiming that psychological states “have” a cause, object, end, etc. (see, e.g., T 2.1.5.7; SBN 288). The convention is, strictly speaking, somewhat misleading. For instance, rather than saying that the object of my state of believing (or desiring, etc.) is a book, it would be more appropriate to say that the object of my attention when I am in the state of believing (or desiring, etc.) is a book. I take it that, for Hume, such phrases refer to the same psychological phenomena. Hence, I will tend to use Hume’s manner of speaking to avoid the confusion that could result from alternating frequently between it and a more contemporary convention.

7 That is, although benevolence is, as a matter of fact, always conjoined with love in human experience, it is possible that there could be a being that is capable of feeling one of these passions without the other. Hume says, for instance, “I see no contradiction in supposing a desire of producing misery annex’d to love, and of happiness to hatred. If the sensation of the passion and desire be opposite, nature cou’d have alter’d the sensation without altering the tendency of the desire, and by that means made them compatible with each other” (T 2.2.6.6; SBN 368).

8 Selby-Bigge also lists Hume’s argument at T 3.2.1.12 (SBN 481) under the heading of “Benevolence” in his analytic index to the *Enquiries*.

9 My claim here is not that the strength of benevolence and the strength of love exactly correspond to one another. My claim is that since love and benevolence are always conjoined in human experience (on Hume’s account), the presence of one is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the presence of the other. Thus, if a passion is too weak to give rise to benevolence, it is also too weak to give rise to love.

10 Hume’s moral psychology accounts for a variety of sentiments that may proceed from an occasion of sympathy. There are two principle reasons for this variety of responses. The first reason is that for people who are *comparing* their sentiments to those of another “[t]he misery of [the other] gives [them] a more lively idea of [their] happiness, and [the] happiness [of the other gives them a more lively idea of their] misery. The former, therefore, produces delight; and the latter uneasiness” (T 2.2.8.8; SBN 375). For instance, one may enter into the pain of a person who is suffering and feel pleasure upon comparing his or her own condition to that of the person in misery. Similarly, one may enter into the pleasure of a person who is feeling joy and feel pain upon comparing his or her own condition to that of the one who is experiencing happiness.

The second reason for this variety of possible responses is the way in which the principle of sympathy operates. A detailed explanation of the operation of the principle is significantly beyond the scope of the present paper. Thus, for now, let me simply note that according to Hume, even for one who is not comparing his or her sentiments to those of another, the response depends on whether one’s sympathy is strong and extensive or weak and limited (in Hume’s sense of these

terms, cf. T 2.2.10.13–17; SBN 385–8). Provided that one is not comparing his or her sentiments to those of another; if one’s sympathy with the plight of the other is strong and extensive, one will feel benevolence, but if it is weak and limited, one will feel contempt. Hence, on Hume’s account, there may be a mixture of sentiments that proceed from a sympathetic encounter with another person.

11 The possibility of this interpretation was called to my attention by an anonymous referee, and there may be evidence of such an interpretation in the literature. Mackie, for instance, claims that Hume’s discussion of goodness and benevolence “hardly calls for comment” and that Hume’s remark at T 3.3.3.2 (SBN 602) is an effort to confine the discussion of benevolence to “the limited, self-referential, altruism which, [according to Hume] is all that we can reasonably expect of people” (Mackie, *Hume’s Moral Theory*, 126). There are, however, three important points about Mackie’s analysis that are unclear. First, Mackie’s comment does not distinguish between a person’s *benevolent action* and his or her *benevolent motivation*. Second, it is unclear how the type of benevolence Mackie interprets Hume to be discussing at T 3.3.3.2 is “limited.” Finally, the phrase “self-referential altruism” is not defined. It is possible that Mackie has in mind the doctrine of moral psychology that claims (i) that people are motivated, without regard for self-interest, to act for the benefit of others, and (ii) that this motivation is (usually) more strongly felt for people with whom one shares a higher degree of intimacy—for instance, one is more likely to feel a stronger motivation to help a member of one’s family than a stranger (cf. Broad, “Certain Features in Moore’s Ethical Doctrines,” in *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, 3rd ed. [London: Cambridge University Press, 1968], 43–67, 54–5)—but it is not clear that he is using the phrase “self-referential altruism” in this way.

12 Cf. Broad’s account of “self-referential altruism” (“Certain Features in Moore,” 54–5).

13 If, as Capaldi suggests, Hume stops referring to sympathy as an idea enlivening mechanism in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (Hume, 181; cf. *Hume’s Place in Moral Philosophy*, 240), Hume’s interpreters would be unable to find the account of the *cause(s) of benevolence* that is found in the *Treatise*. Although Hume’s interpreters might be unable to explain his account of the *cause(s)* of benevolence in the second *Enquiry*, they are certainly able to explain his account of the *object(s)* and, therefore, the scope of benevolence.

14 Hume’s use of the phrase “general sympathy” in this passage refers to a sympathy or compassion with a particular person(s) with whom one has no prior emotional “connexion.” It is the absence of a “connexion” with the person that makes the sympathy or compassion “general,” as it is the absence of such a “connexion” that makes some instances of benevolence “general.”

15 Both “general benevolence” and “particular benevolence” fit the description of what Hume calls “private benevolence,” or “a regard for the interests of the party concern’d,” in the *Treatise* (cf. T 3.2.1.13; SBN 482).

16 Hume uses a number of phrases that are (roughly) synonymous with “public interest” and the “interests of society”—e.g., “public good of a community” (EPM

6.4; SBN 235), “good of mankind” (see, e.g., T 3.3.1.19; SBN 584; EPM 5.39; SBN 226), “interest of our species” (EPM 2.22, 5.93; SBN 181, 225). In a discussion of the source of moral sentiments, he concludes that “we must renounce the theory, which accounts for every moral sentiment by the principle of self-love. We must adopt a more public affection, and allow, that the interests of society are not, even on their own account, entirely indifferent to us” (EPM 5.17; SBN 219). In this passage, the expression “a more public affection” is contrasted with “self-love” and refers not to a “love of mankind,” but to a more “extensive benevolence,” which is the source of moral sentiments, according to Hume (cf. T 3.2.2.24, 3.3.3.1–9; SBN 499–500, 602–6; EPM 3.48; SBN 203–4).

17 Hume draws two conclusions from the possibility of such an “extensive benevolence.” First, it is merely a contingent fact the origin of justice is to be found in convention. Second, such an “extensive benevolence” would obviate the need for justice (EPM 3.4–6; SBN 184–5; T 3.2.2.16–9; SBN 494–6).

18 Moreover, in the normal course of one’s life, one does not usually consider the good of the species because one is (naturally) busy being concerned with the good of those with whom he or she has a “connexion.”

