The intimacy of love and friendship has not shielded them from the philosopher’s gaze. As Epicurus demonstrates, philosophical reflection on friendship did not need to wait for what Charles Taylor calls the “affirmation of ordinary life.”1 Much of that reflection, however, has examined the connection between private and public relationships, between friendship and the state. In the first two sections of this chapter, I consider how the Essays illuminate this relation. I return to the political intervention question and argue that Hume again provides grounds for thinking that government is ill-equipped to forward progress. His views contradict the ancient notion of a natural harmony between well-governed states and virtuous friendships. The last two sections consider what the Essays have to say about erotic love and the related topic of friendship across gender lines. In most respects, Hume’s treatment of these issues itself constitutes progress, as he moves beyond the positions of both his predecessors and contemporaries. Nonetheless, I argue that in his treatment of homosexuality and, to a lesser degree, gender equality, he retards rather than encourages improvement.

6.1 Friendship and the State

Aristotle calls humans political animals.2 Perhaps we are. But we are also animals who love, bear children, cling to parents and offspring, sometimes cherish siblings, and form some of our strongest bonds with those not related to us at all. For Aristotle, there is no inherent tension here. The city is not the family, but the master art of politics orders all subservient arts, including those of friendships and the household. The administration of the polis is analogous to that of the household, and the relation between

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1 See Sources of the Self, Part III.
2 See Politics, 1253a3.
citizens is something like that between friends. Among the noblest activities of friendship is promoting the city’s welfare. Aristotle does not imagine that things work so smoothly in Athens, but he strives for an architectonic science to prescribe a better imposition of logos on communal lives. Friendships of the highest type support rather than conflict with polities of the highest type.

This is not the spirit of scepticism. From Hume’s perspective, although well-run states and intimate relationships are both essential for happy human lives, nothing guarantees symbiosis between them. Some older treatments of the possible tension between friendship and the state assume that such conflicts signal a failing in either the friendship or the polity, or both. Hume’s Essays offer reasons for questioning this assumption – perhaps even stronger reasons than he recognized.

In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle introduces the “political art” as follows:

We ... see that even the most honored capacities – ... generalship, household management, rhetoric – fall under the political art. Because it makes use of the remaining sciences and, further, because it legislates what one ought to do and what to abstain from, its end would encompass those of the others, with the result that this would be the human good. For even if this is the same thing for an individual and a city, to secure and preserve the good of the city appears to be something greater and more complete: the good of the individual by himself is certainly desirable enough, but that of a nation and of cities is nobler and more divine.\(^3\)

Behind these lines lies a hope for knowledge of how to pursue the common good, through the medium of institutions arranged as neatly as Russian nesting dolls. When things go well, all subservient institutions contribute to individuals’ flourishing within a state, whose good is inseparable from the good of the whole community.

With this hope comes another: that virtuous friends might pursue local goods together, contributing to and being supported by the city’s good. Aristotle knows well the story of his philosophical grandfather, executed by the state because of conversation with those he called friends, and called by some friends to violate the state’s laws to save himself. We see a darker note also in Aristotle’s insistence that among the most precious goods of friendship is protection from slander.\(^4\) Slander in such a state is not only humiliating; it is dangerous. Today’s slanders become tomorrow’s charges.

\(^3\) Nicomachean Ethics, 1094b2–11, 3.  \(^4\) Ibid., 1157a20–24.

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But Socrates’ interlocutors were rarely true friends, and Athens was not an ideal polity. It was a contentious, unstable city that Aristotle eventually had to leave to protect his own life. Here lie two neat explanations for why friendships often warred with the city, despite their joint aim of human flourishing. First, few friendships are based on virtue; such people are rare, and their finding one another is rarer still. Second, Athens careened between forms of government, none of which mirrored Aristotle’s good polities.

By the time Cicero writes his essay on friendship, *De amicitia*, the tension between duties to state and love of friends is intimately present to him. Where Aristotle mentions in passing that excellent friendships form slowly, Cicero dwells on the need to test friends to be sure, among other things, that they will not ask you to do treasonous things. These tests are delicate; the only way to test what sort of friend someone will be is to take her as a friend. Once we have done so, however, our feelings get the better of us: “thus friendship outruns the judgement and takes away the opportunity of a trial.” To find the rare friend who is “firm, steadfast and constant,” we must “check the headlong rush of goodwill as we would that of a chariot.” We need to know that friends will not ask us to do horrible things, since common men often do ask such things and resent denial. Moreover, since it is dishonorable to plead friendship in defense of sins “against the State,” if friends band together to betray their country, then we may conclude that both friends failed to that extent in virtue.

Cicero puts these warnings in the context of parallel warnings about corruption in the state itself. The threat of treasonous friendship is grave, because Roman “political practice has already swerved far from the track and course marked out for us by our ancestors.” Civil order is in disarray, and Laelius foresees a “people estranged from the Senate and the weightiest affairs of state determined by the caprice of the mob.” This state’s structure provides no bulwark against corruption. But these are precisely the conditions under which exceptional men may be tempted to act against the State, believing their actions promote the greater good. Cicero’s suggestion, however, is not that the conditions produce exceptions to duties of allegiance. Rather, they provide reasons to be especially careful in forming friends and in acceding to their requests.

This thought is not foreign to Hume. We saw that in “Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion,” he argues that delicacy of taste enables selectivity in

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5 Ibid., 1156b26–30. 6 Cicero, *De Senectute, De Amicitia, De Divinatione*, 173. 7 Ibid. 8 Ibid., 151. 9 Ibid., 151–3. 10 Ibid., 153.
choosing friends and protection against negative influence. Yet for Hume, no amount of care can entirely prevent friendly associations that are potentially threatening to the state. Tension between friendship and the state is an ineliminable feature of social life.

Our constant propensity to factions is one source of this tension. Strong factionalism threatens civic stability, and friendship often generates factionalism. In “Of Parties in General,” Hume initially divides factions into personal and real, where the former are “founded on personal friendship or animosity among such as compose the contending parties” (1.8.56). Personal factions are special dangers in small republics, but the tendency to form them is perennial and pervasive: Hume writes that “the smallest appearance of real difference will produce them” (1.8.56–7). Even if the faction originated in genuine disagreements, personal considerations may cause it to persist beyond the disagreements’ resolution. “When men are once inlisted on opposite sides, they contract an affection to the persons with whom they are united, and an animosity against their antagonists: And these passions they often transmit to their posterity” (1.8.58).

Aristotle also claims that people who engage in common activities for a cause bond with one another and that such activities reinforce already-existing bonds. Hume’s point sounds darker, because he emphasizes that love for some people can generate antagonism toward others. Are we incapable of loving some without vilifying others? Surely, magnanimous people love their friends without condemning everyone with whom those friends disagree.

Unfortunately, the relevant question is not: are some people capable of such nobility? Questions about political structures must consider common tendencies, not the nobility of the rare. Hume makes this point in “Of the Independency of Parliament,” noting that it is reasonable to design political arrangements around the assumption that all people act only for self-interest, with no regard for the public good. Though the assumption is false, in a legislative system of majority rule, a selfish majority can impede pursuit of the common good. And it is reasonable to presume that selfish members will always be the majority.

The real problem, however, is not selfishness so much as our limited social passions — what Pocock calls the “undisciplined sociability of mankind.” Hume claims “men are generally more honest in their private than in their public capacity, and will go to greater lengths to serve a party,

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11 Real factions are “founded on some real difference of sentiment or interest” (1.8.56).
than when their own private interest is alone concerned.” Party ties undermine the generally strong fear of dishonor, since “where a considerable body of men act together, . . . a man is sure to be approved of by his own party, for what promotes the common interest; and he soon learns to despise the clamours of adversaries” (1.6.43). As we saw in the previous chapter, our vanity and pride need the support of others’ approval. Public disapproval, moreover, can have severe consequences. But factions provide alternative sources of approval and protection against society’s disapproval. What promotes the party’s interest garners its applause, even if this interest crosses the larger public’s. When the applause takes the form of moral approval, people feel not only useful but virtuous, as long as they serve the party’s interest. Hence the apparently paradoxical character of factionalist behavior that Hume observes in “Of the First Principles of Government”: “When men act in a faction, they are apt, without shame or remorse, to neglect all the ties of honour and morality, in order to serve their party; and yet, when a faction is formed upon a point of right or principle, there is no occasion, where men discover a greater obstinacy, and a more determined sense of justice or equity” (1.4.33).

When people are most self-righteous – united by a noble cause, for which they will sacrifice much – they also, to serve this same cause, prove willing to stoop to the most ignoble means to defeat their opponents. Our sociability leads to both results, because our sensibility to honor and dishonor, like all moral categories, is social at various levels.\textsuperscript{13} Moral language demands the social correction that the general point of view provides,\textsuperscript{14} so moral reflection on the self requires taking the perspectives not only of those close but also of any others affected by your behavior. But for the partisan, another sociability intervenes. The strong passions tying her to her fellows block her ability to sympathize with the extended group. The contracted group of her party becomes her social world, so she believes them, even when they praise sliminess as resourcefulness. Should she express any reservations about the sliminess, her party friends will dismiss her objections and may even question her loyalty. Passions not

\textsuperscript{13} See EPM 5.35: “Popular sedition, party zeal, a devoted obedience to factious leaders; these are some of the most visible, though less laudable effects of this social sympathy in human nature.” Hume applies this analysis to William Russell’s case in the History: “By many passages in his speech he seems to the last to have lain under the influence of party zeal; a passion, which, being nourished by a social temper, and cloathing itself under the appearance of principle, it is almost impossible for a virtuous man, who has acted in public life, ever thoroughly to eradicate” (H 6:435).

\textsuperscript{14} See EPM 9.6.
seconded by others are difficult to sustain. How long can her scruples endure when starved of reinforcement?

Under the sway of faction, it becomes difficult to resist becoming a knave in the service of one’s party. We are familiar with the blame Hume places on religious factions and speculative principles in general for such knavery. As Jennifer Herdt puts it, “Members of religious factions perceive actions in defense of their party as selfless and principled, but this simply licenses them to do greater harm with a clean conscience.” There is no gainsaying Herdt’s emphasis on the peculiar threat that Hume ascribes to religious factionalism. But his remarks about our ineliminable tendency to form personal factions, which also threaten stability and retard public spirit, suggest that no attempts to overcome the various forms of superstition will extirpate these threats.

Nor would an attempt to do so be wise. Again, we cannot avoid the problem by eliminating parties, which arise from a strong, natural human propensity. To condemn the tendency to cleave to those near in relation and interest would even be somewhat perverse. Our disposition to love a few intensely is not a fault to be lamented, but a feature of humanity that enables some of its most beautiful and honorable activities.

The common root of destructive factionalism and loving intimacy suggests that conflicts between friendship and citizenship will likely arise even in well-structured polities, among people who are not exceptionally vicious. Hume indicates, however, that developing certain virtues may mitigate such conflicts. He includes “your country” among those things to which we feel close because of their relations to ourselves. Elsewhere, he claims that cultivating this feeling may help overcome factionalism’s divisive effects. In “That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science,” he recommends moderation in response to Britain’s party divisions but notes that “perhaps the surest way of producing moderation in every party is to increase our zeal for the public” (1.3.27). He also writes that “a man, who is only susceptible of friendship, without public spirit, or a regard to the community, is deficient in the most material part of virtue.” So Hume envisions a virtuous person who loves his family, his friends, his party, and the public as a whole without conflict among these loves. But even here, his language suggests how difficult it would be to produce such people and maintain their happy balance of passions. After commending “zeal for the public,” he asks his readers to “try, if it be possible, . . . to draw a lesson of moderation with regard to the parties, into which our country is at present

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15 Religion and Faction in Hume’s Moral Philosophy, 205.
divided; at the same time, that we allow not this moderation to abate the industry and passion, with which every individual is bound to pursue the good of his country” (1.3.27, emphasis added). It may not be possible, and not only because people embroiled in controversy rarely listen to calls for moderation. Again, the Sceptic’s pessimism seems wise, when he notes that it is difficult to “diminish or extinguish our vicious passions, without diminishing or extinguishing such as are virtuous” (1.18.173). Zealots who lose the animating passion of their causes may land on apathy or despair rather than zeal for the public good. And again, on a systemic scale, it matters little if a few honorable people achieve this delicate balance, if the vast majority must choose between angry factionalism or indolent apathy.

Is there any real conflict here with Aristotle’s view that private relations conflict with public ones only when there is vice on one side or another? Since Aristotelian virtue is rare, the rarity of those zealous for both private interests and public good is expected. But though Aristotle acknowledges virtue’s scarcity, he believes that it would be less scarce among the citizens of a good state for two reasons. First, the ideal state excludes from citizenship those whose form of life is “ignoble and contrary to virtue” – that is, the entire merchant and artisan classes – as well as those without leisure to develop virtue, such as people who work the land, who will preferably be slaves. Second, such a state promotes virtue’s cultivation in its citizens, taking special care to promote civic friendship and “drive out discord.” Aristotle’s ideal city is ideal in part because of its freedom from such discord, resulting from a confluence of virtue, external conditions, and good legislation. He recognizes that such an ideal would be rarely, if ever, actualized. His study of less-than-ideal constitutions warns against the causes of factionalizing instability. But that study is nonetheless informed by the hope that wise legislators in fortuitous circumstances could promote civic friendship, thereby reducing the inequality and vice that generate discord.

Robertson notes that Hume shares some hope that wise legislators can palliate discord. “In the early Essays,” Robertson writes, “Hume’s response . . . to the problem of faction reveals a clear commitment to identifying the institutional framework which would ensure a harmony of interest between government and society.” Robertson’s insight reflects Hume’s concern

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16 Politics, 1328b40, 210. For the claim that it is best if farmers are slaves, see 1330a25–30.
17 In Greek, στασις (stasis), which can also be translated as “faction” (Nicomachean Ethics, 1153a23–6, 164).
18 “Scottish Enlightenment at the Limits of the Civic Tradition,” 160–1.
for political structures that do not require extraordinary virtue on the part of rulers to protect the well-being of subjects. But from Hume’s premises, there is really no ensuring the harmony of interests. We can erect many bulwarks against destructive factionalism, but the malleability of how we conceive our own interests outstrips even the wisest legislators’ predicative capacities. The human capacity to subjugate self-interest to the interest of a party will inevitably elude the political art. Robertson adds that the problems of factions from “principle and affection as well as interest” made Hume emphasize “also that government must exercise a general responsibility for the manners and character of society at large.” As I have argued, although Hume believes that a constitution can alter a people’s habits, he is not very optimistic about the results. Wise legislators can take steps to avoid corrupting their people, but efforts to positively reform them are as likely to fail as succeed. Attempts to habituate people against personal factionalism would be particularly dangerous, given that the tendencies that give rise to it are the same tendencies that promote the bonds of friendship that are so important for human well-being.

From Hume’s sceptical perspective, we have no reason to believe that well-designed states can prevent conflicts between public and private goods. The opposing view requires an architectonic vision of the good life in which Hume has no reason to hope. Ties of friendship will become ties of faction – and sometimes destructive ones. Only rare noble souls will escape these tendencies, abiding by Hume’s counsel in the advertisement to the Essays “to love the Public, and to bear an equal Affection to all our Country-Men” rather than hating “one Half of them, under Colour of loving the Whole.”

6.2 Delicate Taste versus Love of the Public

Even on the individual level, there are problems with combining the virtues of private friendship with public spirit. In Chapter 4, I argued that cultivating delicacy of taste can improve the tendency to violent, cold passions. These are the passions of factionalism; might this cultivation, then, also help cultivate virtuous public spirit? Overcoming destructive factionalism requires the contemplative, critical stance: party members must come to see other citizens less as those whose actions threaten evil or promise good and more as intricate complexes of traits, desires, and experiences. Yet since delicacy of taste promotes close friendships, we need

Ibid., 161.
not fear that adopting this stance will create someone so publicly bound that she is no private good.

Though I find this suggestion promising, I fear that the project would be futile. In his portraits of the party zealot and the delicate, tasteful friend, Hume offers two quite recognizable characters. But when I try to imagine what is good in both combined into one model of public spirit, my imagination fails me. It does not seem a realistic personality type.

Delicate taste comes with unusual sensitivity, not to life’s daily vicissitudes but to beauties and deformities. The latter include natural, aesthetic, and moral qualities, and sensitivity to these gives us our excellent friend impatience for vulgar conversation and rudeness, as well as deep appreciation for her friend’s excellence. In other words, the quality that enables her to value an excellent character’s unique beauty also causes her to find most conversation insipid. Hume says that “delicacy of taste is favourable to love and friendship, by confining our choice to few people, and making us indifferent to the company and conversation of the greater part of men.” Unlike “mere men of the world” — gregarious types who find pleasure in most people’s conversation — those with delicate taste have “little enjoyment but in the company of a few select companions.” They “feel too sensibly” the failures of the rest of the world (1.1.7). Because they love few, they love deeply.

Consider the difference between those with delicate taste and “mere men of the world.” Hume does not choose the latter type as the opposition because he believes them to be the worst sort; on the contrary, he seems to think they are the next best thing. Neither pole is a misanthrope. And the man of the world has this consolation: because he can enjoy anyone’s company, few particular persons are indispensable to his happiness. People with delicate taste, on the other hand, share with those with delicate passion an enlarged sphere of pains as well as pleasures, relative to the average person. Some of these pains arise from experiencing others’ failings. Can someone with this range of pains also possess zeal for the public? In the Essays, Hume associates public spirit with love for the public

20 Note that Hume contrasts delicacy of taste with both delicacy of passion and the sensibility of the sociable “man of the world.” We should not infer that the latter two dispositions are the same. The world is not made up only of those with one or another form of delicacy. The man of the world seems unlikely to have delicacy of passion, since this trait makes one highly sensitive to perceived affronts. He seems too easygoing to be delicate of passion. To give a literary example, Mr. Weston in Jane Austen’s Emma fits the description of a man of the world, and his passions are very resilient. He is the last person to take offense, perhaps even when he should. Marianne Dashwood, however, who has delicacy of passion, would be the last person to be suspected of being a woman of the world in Hume’s sense. She finds most people’s company insufferable.
(the Advertisement), “regard to the community” (1.3.27), “affection to a
country or community” (1.11.84), and even “amor patriae” (2.1.259). But it is
difficult to explain such love in accordance with Hume’s principles, and even more
difficult to imagine someone with delicate taste achieving it.

To see why, we must turn to Hume’s account of the origins of love and hatred. The generation of these indirect passions requires a double relation of impressions and ideas. The object of these passions, Hume says, is always another person “of whose thoughts, actions, and sensations we are not conscious” (T 2.2.1.2). When we conceive of another possessing some quality that produces pleasure (like beauty), these relations produce love, which is affectively similar to pleasure. Conversely, if the quality produces pain, we hate the object. (Hume uses both “love” and “hatred” broadly; they need not indicate extreme feelings.) This account seems unable to explain why we might love our fellow citizens as such, given that we cannot know all of them well enough to perceive their pleasing qualities. Hume’s discussion of love of relations gives some response. In certain cases, love appears to arise from a single relation: we feel affection for relatives, people who remind us of ourselves, and even those whose only recommendation is long acquaintance. These affections proceed independently of our recognizing others’ pleasing qualities and can even survive recognizing painful qualities. Why?

Hume’s answer appeals to the principle that human minds crave stimulation, and nothing is so stimulating as another human. Alone, we become bored, restless, and melancholy. We seek objects of thought to escape these pains, and when we find one that answers, the “blood flows with a new tide: The heart is elevated: And the whole man acquires a vigour, which he cannot command in his solitary and calm moments.” Nothing answers so well as human company, “as presenting the liveliest of objects, viz. a rational and thinking being like ourselves.” Crudely put, we enjoy company because other people give our minds something to do. Therefore, anyone whose company we share repeatedly, all else being equal, becomes a source of pleasure. Repetition gives the person’s effect a “more durable influence.” Any relation between two people, moreover, enhances their

Arguing against Livingston’s ascription of the civic tradition to Hume, Christopher Finlay claims that Hume uses “public spirit” to mean “an attachment to those structures which best protect the interests of society,” even if these structures do not promote civic humanist ideals (Hume’s Social Philosophy, 143). Hume does want to promote the moderate attitudes that would support such structures, but his language implies that public spirit also requires affection to fellow citizens.

See also DP 3.1.
enlivening effects on each other’s spirits. “Whatever is related to us is conceiv’d in a lively manner by the easy transition from ourselves to the related object” (T 2.2.4.5).

Because such people are sources of pleasure, we have all the materials for producing the indirect passion of love, even if we can identify no pleasing quality in the other person. That person, by virtue of entertaining the mind, does produce an independent pleasure, and this impression can generate the resembling impression of love. Hence, we love our relations (again, all else being equal) in proportion to the closeness of our relation. Parental love is strongest, but we “love our countrymen, our neighbours, those of the same trade, profession, and even name with ourselves” (T 2.2.4.2).23

Perhaps people with delicate taste would be more sensitive to these passional transitions. Trained to perceive delicate connections, they are more alive to their connections to fellow citizens. On the other hand, they are also more alive to those citizens’ qualities that tend to produce hatred or contempt. They confine their affection to a few people, Hume says, because they feel “too sensibly how much all the rest of mankind fall short” (1.1.7).

Hume lists the following as potential causes of love: virtue, knowledge, wit, good sense, good humor, bodily accomplishments, and “the external advantages and disadvantages of family, possessions, cloaths, nation and climate” (T 2.2.1.4). With this list in mind, we can see that delicate taste produces two effects favorable to love. First, it makes people better at perceiving the positive qualities near the beginning of the list, where others might mistake virtue for pretension or wit for foolishness. Second, it leads them to deemphasize the qualities at the bottom of the list, as delicate taste knows that much pleasure can be had without many worldly goods. “When a man is possessed of that talent, he is more happy by what pleases his taste, than by what gratifies his appetites, and receives more enjoyment from a poem or a piece of reasoning than the most expensive luxury can afford” (1.1.5).

23 Hume summarizes this thesis more succinctly in the Dissertation on the Passions: “A person, who is related to us, or connected with us, by blood, by similitude of fortune, of adventures, profession, or country, soon becomes an agreeable companion to us; because we enter easily and familiarly into his sentiments and conceptions: Nothing is strange or new to us: Our imagination, passing from self, which is ever intimately present to us, runs smoothly along the relation or connexion, and conceives with a full sympathy the person, who is nearly related to self. He renders himself immediately agreeable, and is at once on an easy footing with us: No distance, no reserve has place, where the person introduced is supposed so closely connected with us” (DP 3.4). Hume also claims that love of children is a natural instinct. See Chapter 5, note 35.
Nonetheless, delicate taste still seems more likely to engender hatred than love for one’s fellow citizens in general. Hume says that the tasteful are dissatisfied with the conversation of most people: it reveals their crudeness, ignorance, dullness, silliness, or ill-temper. Tasteful people love more deeply but also more narrowly. Being free from the tendency to proportion love to material success is a real advantage. But it also increases the distance between those with delicate taste and the general population, who do possess this tendency.

Hume’s paragon of intimate friendship, in other words, is unlikely to also be a paragon of civic friendship. She is not misanthropic; she may approach each person she meets with optimism that here may be a rare fellow qualified for the highest kind of friendship. Usually, however, she will be disappointed. Such repeated disappointment is not conducive to love of the people.

Note that this issue is related to, but distinct from, the question of whether love of humankind as such is among the principles of human nature. In the *Treatise*, Hume explicitly denies that there is such a passion, in his discussion of the origin of justice (at T 3.2.1.12). His denial rests on the absence of evidence that we have any “kind affection to men, independent of their merit, and every other circumstance.” The diffuseness of its object appears to be an obstacle to public spirit, as it would be to a general love of humankind. But the question I am raising is not whether or not people can love humankind in general, independently of merit and circumstances. It is rather whether a person with delicate taste can love others bound to her by the circumstance of common citizenship while recognizing their lack of merit.

Can the mechanisms that produce love of relations, which Hume says cause us to love our fellow countrymen, come to the rescue? The notion that we repeatedly share compatriots’ company seems a nonstarter, even

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24 I would not go so far as to say that delicate taste alone is sufficient to make someone excel in virtue in general. Interestingly, it is difficult to find any ascription of public spirit to Hume’s paragon of virtue in section 9 of the *Enquiry*, Cleanthes (EPM 9.2).

25 John Kekes argues that supplementing Aristotle’s account of civic friendship with Humean sympathy and custom will produce an understanding of civility suitable for modern societies (“Civility and Society”). Kekes’s civility is not the same as public spirit, but it is a closely related concept, and it would be interesting to explore what role civility might play in addressing the problems I raise in this section.

26 For a helpful discussion of Hume’s denial of the love of mankind and its relation to our ability to feel benevolence toward a broad range of people, see Rico Vitz, “Hume and the Limits of Benevolence.” Gill points out that, in the *Treatise* passage, Hume is siding with Mandeville against Shaftesbury and even echoing Mandeville’s examples (British Moralists on Human Nature, 242).
for a country as small as eighteenth-century Scotland or England. Yet Hume suggests in “Of National Characters” that members of the same nation will frequently interact with each other. He proposes that a national character might arise among citizens of the same nation by sympathy, as “like passions and inclinations . . . run, as it were, by contagion” through the populace. “Where a number of men are united into one political body, the occasions of their intercourse must be . . . frequent, for defence, commerce, and government” (1.21.202).

If we interpret this passage as saying that each citizen of a nation interacts frequently with every other citizen, its plausibility suffers dramatically. The contagion metaphor suggests a better interpretation. As a virus carrier need not have contact with a hundred people to be the source of infection to those hundred, individual citizens need not interact with an entire populace to exert influence over its character. One group of people share traits; some subset of them mingle with another set, who adopt some of those propensities, and so on. Because character traits require more reinforcement than viruses in order to spread, the analogy is weak. Nonetheless, the influence does not require person-to-person contact amid the whole citizenry. Yet in the absence of this contact, we do not have the familiarity needed to breed love among fellow citizens.

We are left with the idea that the relation of shared citizenry itself greases the mechanisms of sympathy to such a degree that we find our countrymen “immediately agreeable.” This commonality vivifies the transition from self to other, so that we take pleasure in the idea of another citizen as we do the idea of family member. The problem with this suggestion is that our ties with fellow citizens are extremely weak. Later in the Treatise, Hume writes, “An Englishman in Italy is a friend: A European in China; and perhaps a man wou’d be belov’d as such, were we to meet him in the moon. But this proceeds only from the relation to ourselves; which in these cases gathers force by being confin’d to a few persons” (T 3.2.1.12). The more people who have a claim to our affections, the weaker those affections will be. To love every Englishman is only a little easier than loving everyone in the world.

Again, this problem will be worse for someone with delicate taste. She loves a few deeply and is unlikely to diffuse love over large groups of people, of whose defects she must be all too aware. Moreover, she will not get help from similarity of temper with many people. That which gives delicate taste its advantages – its propensity to cultivate passions that are more fine, calm, and careful than what is common – exacerbates the problem.
Delicate taste shares something with the traveler’s vanity that Hume identifies in the *Treatise*. Some people, he writes:

depreciate their own country, in comparison of those, to which they have travell’d. These persons find, when they are at home, and surrounded with their countrymen, that the strong relation betwixt them and their own nation is shar’d with so many, that ’tis in a manner lost to them; whereas their distant relation to a foreign country, which is form’d by their having seen it and liv’d in it, is augmented by their considering how few there are who have done the same. For this reason they always admire the beauty, utility and rarity of what is abroad, above what is at home. (T 2.1.9.8)

Delicate taste enables people to roam widely, if figuratively, among the world’s ideas, arts, and experiences. A person who has done this will feel how rare her experience is. It is reasonable to expect that she may feel, like the traveler, closer to others like her (from whatever country) than to her fellow citizens. Delicate taste, in other words, may make one feel like a foreigner in one’s own land.

Cultivating delicate taste is therefore unlikely to ameliorate the tension between public spirit and private friendship. But the case is not hopeless. Someone with delicate taste may recognize the importance of love of public and strive to overcome her tendency to disdain the members of that public. She might try to think of them as fellows engaged in a common enterprise and make a concerted effort to recognize the noble hopes and virtues present in any sector of humanity. She might even endeavor to protect her sensibility by avoiding interactions with people that bring out their lowest side, as some of us do by not reading anonymous online comments.

It remains true, however, that one of the best dispositions in Hume’s catalog – delicacy of taste – is by nature in tension with another one – love for the public. For people with delicate taste, cultivating what Hume calls the “most material part of virtue” will be an uphill struggle. Moreover, everyone possesses to some degree one of the tendencies that create an obstacle to public spirit, so many people will experience such a struggle. We all feel relations more weakly as they become looser ties.

The tension between public and private will be perennial, and perennially complicated. Social passions that generate the warmest, noblest aspects of our nature also incline us to factionalism. Furthermore, we have no reason to expect that those who make the best private friends will also incline to civic friendship. But there is also no reason for Hume to deny these tensions; accepting them coheres with a moderately sceptical view of human relations. We can and must continually search for solutions, but we must do so without unfounded assurance. Some resources for this search...
might be provided by Hume’s claim in the second Enquiry that “it is always found, that a warm concern for the interests of our species is attended with a delicate feeling of all moral distinctions” (EPM 5.39).27 I have raised the concern that delicacy can produce contempt for others; this sentence suggests that concern for others can produce a kind of delicacy. If the latter claim is right, then we might draw a lesson about the order of education. If we cultivate love for others first, before concentrating our energy on developing delicacy of taste, then perhaps a significant portion of that delicacy can be channeled into warm concern for others. Regardless, the task of balancing public and private love will be ongoing and often frustrating – yet too important to abandon.

6.3 The Amorous Affection

There is something charming, but unsatisfying, about Hume’s writing on sex. His description of erotic passion in “The Epicurean” is eloquent. His retelling of Aristophanes’ Symposium speech in “Of Love and Marriage” is a delightful little burlesque. But his adherence to standards of refinement, exhibited in a parade of euphemisms for sexual desire (“the amorous passion,” “gallantry,” and even (gasp!) “the appetite between the sexes”) can be tiresome. Despite his acquaintance with diverse sexual practices, he sometimes appears uncomfortable with human bodies. Compare, for example, the different ways that Hume and Montaigne handle an earthy passage from Plutarch about ire between brothers. Montaigne makes the line even more crude than in the original: “And that other, whom Plutarch wanted to reconcile with his brother, said: ‘I don’t think any more of him for having come out of the same hole.’”28 Hume, in “Of Moral Prejudices,” reports that the brother “was too much a Philosopher to think, that the Connexion of having sprung from the same Parent, ought to have any Influence on a reasonable Mind, and exprest his Sentiment after such a Manner as I think not proper to repeat” (EWU 2.540).29

27 Jacqueline Taylor cites this Enquiry passage in the context of discussing varieties of the sentiment of humanity; superior people cultivate humanity as a “warm concern” (Reflecting Subjects, 126). For a discussion of the possible tension between the Enquiry’s emphasis on humanity and the Treatise’s denial of a universal love of mankind, see Remy Debes, “Humanity, Sympathy, and the Puzzle of Hume’s Second Enquiry.”

28 Montaigne, “Of Friendship,” in Essays, 136. The Loeb translation of Plutarch’s “On Brotherly Love” has the brother saying, “I account it no momentous or important matter to have sprung from the same loins” (Moralia, 25.4).

29 Potkay suggests that Hume became aware of the anecdote through reading Montaigne (Fate of Eloquence, 76).
Hume writes within the standards of politeness expected by his contemporary readers, and unlike Montaigne, gives little indication of finding these standards constraining. But Hume was no prude. A closer look reveals, underneath their polite coverings, healthy views of sexual relationships. I will consider three aspects of his treatment of sexual relationships in the *Essays*: sex’s value for the individual and society, Hume’s understanding of the relationship between sexual customs and nature, and sex and marriage.

6.3.1 The Value of Sex

Because sex is pleasant, it is, for Hume, presumptively good. Recall his claim in “Of Refinement in the Arts” that no “gratification, however sensual, can of itself be esteemed vicious” (2.2.279). We naturally pursue gratification of sensual desires; we naturally approve of others who do so also; and only the perversion of “the frenzies of enthusiasm” would claim otherwise (2.2.268). Although Hume’s topic in “Of Refinement in the Arts” is more commercial than bodily indulgence, we can presume that what he says about the former applies to the latter. Such indulgence becomes vicious only when it interferes with satisfying obligations of virtues like justice, generosity, and humanity. Sexual violence, callousness, and carelessness are vicious not because they are sexual, but because they are harmful and painful for self and others.

They also, on Hume’s view, reveal that something has distorted the natural course of human passions – indeed, the natural course of animal passions in general. Although instinctual desire may motivate sexual acts, these desires naturally accompany caring and friendly passions. Hume’s view, as expressed in “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” is too strong to be credible. “Nature has implanted in all living creatures,” he says, “an affection between the sexes, which, even in the fiercest and most rapacious animals, is not merely confined to the satisfaction of the bodily appetite, but begets a friendship and mutual sympathy, which runs

30 See T 2.3-9.8 and DP 1.1–2.
31 Compare Spinoza’s claim in the *Ethics*: “Nothing forbids our pleasure except a savage and sad superstition” (A Spinoza Reader, 224).
32 The original title of the essay, “Of Luxury,” could have had a sexual connotation for Hume’s readers. The term’s original meaning in English was “lasciviousness” or “lust,” and this usage survived into the nineteenth century (Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “luxury,” accessed February 24, 2017, http://oed.com). See Chapter 3, note 29.
through the whole tenor of their lives” (1.14.131).³³ (We must assume that Hume was either unaware of or preferred not to think about the prevalence of postcoital cannibalism among insects.)

A softened version of this claim, however, is more plausible: it is normal for affection and sexual desire to generate and reinforce one another. All else being equal, we tend to like and have benevolent feelings toward people who are willing to have sex with us, especially when the feeling is mutual. These feelings do not require the intention to have sex; erotic frisson may be enough. If so, then sexual desire’s value goes beyond mere physical pleasure. It promotes tenderness and affection – sometimes leading to profound friendships: “The happiest marriages, to be sure, are found where love, by long acquaintance, is consolidated into friendship” (1.19.628).³⁴ The friendship that allows marriages to flourish subsists on an affection that “never rises to such a height, as when any strong interest or necessity binds two persons together, and gives them some common object of pursuit” (1.19.189). Sex itself, done well, is an activity where mutual interest binds people together in a common pursuit. Over time, partners can carry this sensibility into other enduring and profound pursuits.

Hume resists, however, the cult of sensibility’s insistence on the singularity of erotic attachment. The propensity of sexual encounters to promote loving feelings does not imply that they promote singular, immortal devotion. Directly after the strong claim from “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences” quoted above, he writes that in humans, “the confinement of the appetite” to a single object “is not natural; but either is derived accidentally from some strong charm of love, or arises from reflections on duty and convenience” (1.14.131). In other words, humans naturally feel sexual desire for multiple people. Hume sees the dispersion

³³ Hume’s discussion of “the amorous passion” in the Treatise, while consistent with this claim, is more nuanced and recognizes the fragility of the relevant “friendship and mutual sympathy.” He analyzes eros as composed of the sensation of beauty, sexual desire, and “a generous kindness or good-will” (T 2.2.11.1). But he acknowledges that the passion may begin from any one of these elements (though it most commonly begins from seeing its object as beautiful). “Kindness or esteem,” he says, “and the appetite to generation, are too remote to unite easily together. The one is, perhaps, the most refin’d passion of the soul; the other the most gross and vulgar” (T 2.2.11.4). Beauty aids the transition because of its intermediary position between these extremes. Kindness and esteem are therefore vulnerable inasmuch as beauty, or one’s sense of it, can change and fade.

³⁴ Hume removed this passage, which goes on to scorn the possibility of “raptures and extasies beyond the honey-month” for the 1770 edition. (It is still relevant to friendship between lovers, however, since he presumably never meant to imply that married couples only have sex for a month.) I rather like that Hume, in his old age, took out such a cynical note about the possibility of enduring erotic pleasure in marriage.
of sexual interest as a further advantage: the tenderness associated with sexual companions diffuses itself, generating the passions and practices of gallantry. Far from a silly and superficial practice, this promotion of goodwill between the sexes is an important restraint to men’s ability to tyrannize physically over women.

Moreover, eros performs a foundational social function. Because humans are “born in a family,” we are “compelled to maintain society, from necessity, from natural inclination, and from habit” (1.5.37). But we are only born in families because of antecedent sexual attraction, which brings men and women together and, as Hume says in the Treatise, “preserves their union, till a new yye takes place in their concern for their common offpring” (T 3.2.2.4). Sexual desire is “the first and original principle of human society.”

Sex is valuable because it is pleasant, because it promotes intimate friendship and tenderness between the sexes, and because it makes human society possible. This is high praise, but if we are tempted to overestimate sex’s importance, Hume provides several correctives. First, he characterizes sexual desire as a common, low-minded passion, not part of the elevating sublime. In “Of National Characters,” he argues that the only plausible character differences ascribable to climate would be the northern preference for liquor and the southern for sex. (Women “ripen sooner in the southern regions” [1.21.213].) But these differences being caused by climate would only show that “climate may affect the grosser and more bodily organs of our frame” (1.21.215). This language echoes the Treatise’s assessment of sexual desire as “the most gross and vulgar” passion of the soul (T 2.2.11.4).

In one of the few philosophical treatments of Hume’s views of sexual desire, Dan O’Brien cites this last passage as evidence for a puzzle. Hume’s calling sexual desire “gross and vulgar” is “seemingly contradictory” to his rejection of the monkish virtues. The latter, O’Brien says, might lead us to “expect Hume not to have moral qualms concerning sexual attraction.”

O’Brien responds to the puzzle by appealing to the condemnation of vicious indulgence in sexual passions and the negative consequences thereof. But this explanation requires narrowing the referent of the Treatise passage to only vicious lust, in a way not supported by the text. Fortunately, no explanation is actually necessary. Hume does not have moral qualms with sexual attraction in general. The language of grossness and vulgarity may

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35 See also T 3.2.1.12. 36 “Hume on Sexual Attraction,” 103–4.
seem to reflect a very unhealthy attitude toward sex, but the present sense of “gross” as meaning repulsive or disgusting is late American slang. Neither “gross” nor “vulgar” is a compliment coming from Hume’s pen, but the insult is mild. He only means that sexual desire is a common passion, requiring no advanced discernment of mind or perfection of taste.

Hume’s second corrective to overestimating sexual importance is his low assessment of how much pleasure sex itself actually produces. He goes so far as to claim that most of sex’s pleasure does not come from actual sex. Again, he speculates implausibly about animals, claiming that “even among brute-creatures, . . . their play and dalliance, and other expressions of fondness, form the greatest part of the entertainment.” Mental pleasures are even more important for rational beings: “Were we to rob the feast of all its garniture of reason, discourse, sympathy, friendship, and gaiety, what remains would scarcely be worth acceptance, in the judgment of the truly elegant and luxurious” (1.14.134).

To accept the claim about brute creatures’ preference for fore- and after-play, we would have to put aside the many species of animals for whom sex is always more rape than romp. But is less elegant sex “scarcely worth acceptance”? Before laughing, notice the actual condition that Hume describes – sex with no discourse, sympathy, friendship, or gaiety. Would such sex be worth acceptance – with someone you have no wish or ability to converse with, whom you do not like, whom you cannot play with, or even share the feelings of? This is sex from the prostitute’s position, and now Hume seems to speak weakly in saying that it is scarcely worth acceptance. Sex’s value is part of the complex human condition, in which all activities can be integrated into our inner lives and our relations with others.

This integration relates to a further indication of Hume’s moderate view of sex’s importance – his insistence that, although personal freedom promotes erotic experience, such experience is less important than the friendship that can result from marriage’s curtailment of that freedom. These friendships may originate with sex, but Hume believes that they become the more important aspect of the relationship. In “Of Polygamy and Divorces,” he takes seriously the suggestion that the freedom to divorce might preserve marriages, because such freedom may be “the only secret for keeping alive that love, which first united the married couple” (1.19.187). We do not want what we are forced to have. “In vain you tell me,” says the proponent of this view, “that I had my choice of the person, with whom I would conjoin myself. I had my choice, it is true, of my prison; but this is but a small comfort, since it must still be a prison”
Although Hume concedes that passionate love “requires liberty above all things,” friendship “thrives under constraint” (1.19.188). The necessity of staying together and marriage’s common projects will therefore promote friendship, and “the marriage-knot ... chiefly subsists by friendship” (1.19.189).

Hume is not at his most insightful here, particularly when he argues that people who cannot escape one another will overlook small annoyances and frivolous disputes for harmony’s sake. His notional interlocutor is more persuasive in asking, “How often does disgust and aversion arise after marriage, from the most trivial accidents, or from an incompatibility of humour; where time, instead of curing the wounds, proceeding from mutual injuries, festers them every day the more, by new quarrels and reproaches?” (1.19.187). But my point here is that Hume does not consider preserving erotic desire worth the sacrifice of the friendship that can develop in a prolonged marriage. If legal divorce would promote the former yet discourage the latter, he infers that divorce should not be legal.

We need not accept this reasoning to accept the wisdom of prize f friendship over sex. If Hume is right, these two forms of love naturally go together. And “Of Polygamy and Divorces” does suggest that enduring marriages might include periods of waxing and waning eros over time. Not all spouses forever lose their desire for one another shortly after the vows. Though friendship’s gentle warmth and calmness may be in tension with erotic desire’s fire and intensity, such contrary principles need not “always destroy each other; but the one or the other may predominate on any particular occasion, according as circumstances are more or less favorable to it” (1.19.188). Nonetheless, Hume is clear that he believes the rewards of friendship to exceed those of sexual passion. Solomon, with his hundreds of wives and concubines, presumably had inexhaustible means of satisfying the latter. But Hume understands how such a man could have written the Hebrew Bible’s most eloquent treatise on the vanity of human

37 Cf. Montaigne: “As for marriage, it is a bargain to which only the entrance is free – its continuance being constrained and forced, depending otherwise than on our will – and a bargain ordinarily made for other ends” (Essays, 137).

38 Baier notes that the asymmetrical chastity standard Hume describes in the Treatise “accords badly with Hume’s proper evaluation of the importance of friendship in marriage, and its incompatibility with male sovereignty. That ‘entire and total union’ which he takes as the telos of marriage would seem to be possible only if whatever restrictions there are on sexual freedom be mutual” (“Good Men’s Women,” 14–15).

39 Hume’s retelling of Aristophanes’ myth at the end of “Of Love and Marriage” also supports this possibility. Its recipe for happy marriages requires that love be the foundation of marriage, but with a view toward satisfying the practical requirements of “care” and the erotic needs of “pleasure.”
existence. “Had he tried the secret of one wife or mistress, a few friends, and a great many companions, he might have found life somewhat more agreeable. Destroy love and friendship; what remains in the world worth accepting?” (1.14.185).

6.3.2 Sex Free from Superstition

Hume’s recommendations for a happier life than Solomon’s suggest either one wife or one mistress. This is one of many places in which Hume expresses openness to unorthodox sexual arrangements. He does not consider all such arrangements equally good; “Of Polygamy and Divorces” recommends monogamous marriage without legal divorce. But his openness to other possibilities indicates some freedom from the superstitious notions about sex that have disproportionately damaged women over millennia. His attitude about the relevant relations between custom and nature is reasonable. He leaves open the possibility that our judgments about sexual virtue and vice may progress as customs change. Finally, he avoids associating virginity or chastity with purity, and, with one important exception, he does not condemn those who transgress current sexual norms as “unnatural.”

Consider Hume’s assessment of the relative viciousness of overindulgence in alcohol or sex. In “Of National Characters,” he claims that “the passion for liquor [is] more brutal and debasing than love” (1.21.215). “Love” refers here to sexual love; this is part of his discussion of the prevalence of the “amorous disposition” in southern climates. He does go on to say that the passion for love is still dangerous, because it leads to extreme jealousy and other disadvantages when it “goes beyond a certain pitch.” But he does not take back his claim that the passion for liquor is worse, and he says here that sexual love “when properly managed, is the source of all politeness and refinement.” “Of Refinement in the Arts” makes the more extreme claim that drunkenness is “more pernicious both to mind and body” than “libertine love, or even infidelity” (2.2.272).

40 Solomon was long held to be the author of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth).
41 In the History, Hume reports Sir John Lambe’s reported remark about the Puritans: “That to the world they seemed to be such as would not swear, whore, or be drunk; but they would lye, cozen, and deceive: That they would frequently hear two sermons a-day, and repeat them too, and that sometimes they would fast all day long.” Hume’s comment seems to count both drinking and lust as lesser vices: “This character must be conceived to be satirical; yet, it may be allowed, that that sect was more averse to such irregularities as proceed from the excess of gaiety and pleasure, than to those enormities, which are the most destructive of society” (H 5:243).
This view is not unique; Dante, after all, puts drunkards in a deeper circle of hell than the lustful. But it is a view that has long been at odds with common moral judgments: men, at least, who drink too much are winked at as engaging in boyish indiscretion, whereas women who have sex outside marriage have been excoriated as damaged goods, who can never be clean again. Compare Richard Allestree’s treatment of intemperance with that of lust (in *The Whole Duty of Man*). Both are wicked, but alcohol is evil only when one drinks to excess, and because of its harmful effects. Chastity “or Purity,” on the other hand, is the only bulwark against moral filth. It “consists in abstaining from all Sorts of Uncleanness,” pollutes both body and soul, and bars the doors of heaven, “where no unclean Person or Whoremonger hath ever enter’d.”42 Adultery “is the most irreparable Injury that can be, and brings GOD’S Wrath down in the most severest Judgment: Adulterers GOD will Judge.”43

Hume does not celebrate sexual promiscuity; chastity remains among the virtues.44 But the problem with failures of chastity is not that they pollute women with a stain no time can remove. In a letter to John Home, written from Vienna in 1748, Hume seems to condemn pimps more harshly than prostitutes. “A Court of Chastity is lately erected here,” he reports, “who send all loose Women to the Frontiers of Hungary, where they can only debauch Turks & Infidels: All Whore-masters are punish’d as they deserve, that is, very severely” (Letters 1:128).

What is the problem, then, with being unchaste? In the *Treatise*, chastity is an artificial virtue, which serves to convince men that their progeny is truly theirs and therefore deserves their care and protection. The *Enquiry* appeals to the need for a “combination of parents” for the “long and helpless infancy of man.” If chastity did not promote this combination, “such a virtue would never have been thought of” (EPM 4.5). The influence of general rules accounts for the extension of chastity rules to women beyond child-bearing age and for society’s virulence in condemning transgressions. But he acknowledges that a “speculative philosopher” might think that “they are more excusable [than all other injustices], upon account of the greatness of the temptation” (T 3.2.12.6).

By tracing chastity’s value to the needs of child-rearing, Hume grounds the artificial virtue in humankind’s natural conditions. But the opening of

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42 *Whole Duty of Man*, 24–5. 43 Ibid., 32.
“Of Polygamy and Divorces” makes it clear that he does not see these natural conditions as dictating a single set of marriage rules to protect the utility of chastity. Although Hume claims marriage’s purpose is “propagation of the species,” he first calls it “an engagement entered into by mutual consent” and infers that it is therefore “susceptible to all the variety of conditions, which consent establishes,” as long as they serve this end (I.19.181). Without positive law, marriages would vary with circumstances and needs. He then details several arrangements that have served unusual needs – sailors who marry for a single season while docked on land, one man joined to multiple wives, one wife joined to multiple men, wives and children held in common. “All regulations . . . on this head,” he writes, “are equally lawful, and equally conformable to the principles of nature; though they are not all equally convenient, or equally useful to society” (I.19.183).

Hume’s arguments in favor of his society’s established conventions of marriage do not rely on circumstances unique to eighteenth-century Europe. He contends that polygamy and divorce are likely to produce ill effects for any people, and have done so when implemented. He criticizes the tyrannical practices encouraged by “eastern” marriage institutions and the dim view of marriage among the Romans when divorce was common. Nonetheless, these arguments are striking by virtue of what they do not say about the relation between custom and nature. In contrast to those who argue that biological nature determines humans to mate for life with one member of the opposite sex, Hume insists that we naturally have desires for multiple sexual partners. He does not appeal to any moral law inscribed on our souls, prohibiting violations of traditional chastity norms.

He thus severs the discussion of sexual practices from the appeals to nature that have caused so much suffering and oppression, as various forms of sexual activities have been deemed unnatural or “against nature.” As Jonathan Dollimore has argued, the “natural/unnatural opposition has been one of the most fundamental of all binaries, and one of the most violent of all hierarchies.” It raises the specter of monsters, of interfering with the most basic conditions of existence – and thus inspires both fear

45 It is possible that when Hume says in “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences” that “confinement of the appetite is not natural,” he has in mind what we would now call serial monogamy. But the weight of evidence tells against this interpretation. He infers from his claims here that the mutual goodwill that goes along with erotic attraction is naturally widespread among human beings at any one point in time, not that it is natural for us to have a series of partners in flirtation, one after the other.

46 Baier emphasizes the unnaturalness of chastity rules in “Good Men’s Women.”

47 Sexual Dissidence, 109.
and disgust. The list of sexual activities to which these epithets have been applied includes not only polygamy and incest but also homosexuality and the dangerous practice of women enjoying sex.

Hume’s theory allows for strong condemnation of certain sexual practices, such as rape, as horrifically unjust and inhumane. But we do not strengthen this condemnation by adding that such behavior is unnatural. Behavior that would be rape if the participants were human is quite common in nature. Pretending otherwise only weakens the case against human rape, by suggesting that we have only weak resources for its censure.

It may be that our contemporary norms about sex and marriage incline us to misunderstand Hume’s views about the relation between marriage and chastity. Falkenstein argues that by the time Hume publishes “Of Polygamy and Divorces,” he has concluded that “male promiscuity cannot be reconciled with female chastity” and that the “best policy is to place equal obligations to chastity on both sexes.” Falkenstein then claims that this is “the stated conclusion” of the essay. Though I am generally sympathetic to Falkenstein’s hypothesis that Hume’s views on these matters evolved, this inference is unwarranted. The stated conclusion of the essay is: “The exclusion of polygamy and divorces sufficiently recommends our present European practice with regard to marriage” (1.19.190). Insofar as there was a single European practice, it prohibited divorce (unless one had some special connection to the reigning powers) and marrying more than one person at a time. Monogamy does not imply sexual exclusivity. We now often use “monogamy” to refer primarily to a sexual arrangement, which may or may not be instantiated in marriage. But this is an extended usage from the original meaning of the restriction of marriage to one other person, more or less regardless of sexual behavior. Marriage practices could be monogamous even if no one expected sexual fidelity on the part of the husband, as has often been the case, as Hume often notes.

I say “on the part of the husband,” of course, because requiring fidelity of women but not men has been so common. Hume’s explanation of chastity as an artificial virtue assumes an asymmetry of expectations, about which commentators have raised compelling complaints. But what

48 See T 3.1.2.10 for Hume’s argument that “nothing can be more unphilosophical than those systems, which assert, that virtue is the same with what is natural, and vice with what is unnatural.”


50 See especially Baier’s argument that this asymmetry produces the need for a double standard between different classes of women, as men will depend on unchaste women to satisfy their less-condemned desires. See “Good Men’s Women,” 8–13.
matters for my point here is that Hume would not have assumed that the norms that apply to marriage necessarily apply to sex, though they are obviously related. So when he claims that reproduction is the purpose of marriage, it does not follow that he believes reproduction to be the purpose of sex. He can thus avoid the many distasteful implications of the latter view. He also avoids the need for rhetorical cartwheels to explain why it is not vicious to have sex more times than is necessary to produce a finite number of children.

Hume’s treatment of marriage leaves open two interesting possibilities. First, in extraordinary circumstances, alternative practices may prove more beneficial and therefore would be justifiable. The system that Hume says the Sevrambian captain contrives may be the best solution to an unusual problem. The inhabitants of a wrecked ship in a deserted place are disproportionately male, so women pair with multiple men. Such accommodations are in keeping with his suggestion in “Of Some Remarkable Customs” that “irregular and extraordinary appearances are frequently discovered in the moral, as well as in the physical world” and that such appearances can justify practices contrary to cherished rules (2.10.366).

Second, Hume’s view implies that, should human circumstances significantly change, our judgments of sexuality and marriage institutions could evolve. If wives and children became less dependent on a father’s financial support and protection (as they now are), women would not need to live in fear of their husbands doubting their chastity. These changed circumstances remove one justification for the asymmetrical burden placed on women to protect their sexual reputation. They also encourage us to think more profoundly about the nature of fidelity in marriage and the genuine goods it serves.

In these respects, Hume is progressive, but this assessment requires two important qualifications. One concerns his treatment of homosexuality, and the other his report of a radical woman who dares to separate reproduction from marriage.

Hume’s general method of dealing with homosexuality is to ignore it as much as possible. One might think that ancient homoerotic practices

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51. Potkay discusses this silence about homosexual behavior as part of the development of stricter “polite codes” during the eighteenth century; these codes “comprehended a growing list of what could not be said (and perhaps not thought) about the body in general” (Fate of Eloquence, 76). It is true, as I indicated above, that Hume is reticent about all sexual matters.

52. I recognize the legitimate objection, most famously made by Foucault, to calling these practices homosexual. They were part of a form of life foreign to the one in which our sense of homosexuality has its home. The same is true of all of the homoerotic activity Hume would have been aware of. Moreover, there is no reason to think that most of the men and boys engaged in pederasty were uniquely attracted to men. Nonetheless, as they did include homoerotic activity, they are relevant to
would be relevant to the issues he discusses in “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations,” given that these practices were associated with later marriage for men and may have affected reproductive rates. But he relegates them to one sentence in a footnote about the averision to marriage in Plutarch’s Rome. In retelling Aristophanes’ myth from the Symposium, he omits the primal humans who become homosexual pairs and says that “each individual person was a compound of both sexes” (EWU 5.560). This averting of the eyes is consistent with his other writings: he seems unwilling to believe kings capable of homoerotic desires and has his speaker in “A Dialogue” say that he does not “care to examine more particularly” the “Greek loves” (EPM Dia.28).

In the little that he does say about homosexuality, Hume uses the damaging language of purity and unnaturalness. In the footnote in “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations,” he refers to “the unnatural lusts of the ancients” (2.11.400). In a letter to Gilbert Elliot, Hume explains his acceptance of the amusing hypothesis that the practice of men exercising naked together led to pederasty. Contrasting these practices with those of Homer’s age, he writes that the “Friendship betwixt Achilles & Patroclus was pure” and that “Homer takes Care to lay them apart, & gives each of them a Wench in his Arms” (February 1751, in Letters 1:152, emphasis added). In the History, he describes the “buggery” charge that got Titus

this discussion. For subtle critiques of Foucault’s claim that homosexual behavior became associated with an identity only in the nineteenth century, see Dollimore, Sexual Dissidence, and Jordan, Invention of Sodomy.

53 He calls it “Plato’s account of the origin of love and marriage.”

54 For instance, Hume describes James I’s affection for Robert Carre in the most romantic terms, as arising out of “the king’s passion for youth, and beauty, and exterior appearance” and characterized by “unlimited fondness” (H 5:52, 53). One would be forgiven for thinking Hume is making a rather lewd joke in saying that the king, “laying aside the sceptre, took the birch into his royal hand, and instructed [Carre] in the principles of grammar” (H: 5:53). Yet a few sentences later, Hume says that “such incidents, are the more ridiculous, though the less odious, as the passion of James seems not to have contained in it any thing criminal or flagitious.” That is to say, it does not seem to Hume that James’s love for Carre was erotic.

55 The interlocutor refers to one who engages in homosexual behavior as “something else too abominable to be named” (EPM Dia.17). These remarks are especially striking in light of the second Enquiry’s general lenience with respect to sexual issues, which is among the charges raised against Hume in the effort to excommunicate him from the Scottish Kirk. For John Bonar’s charge that Hume defends the proposition that “adultery is very lawful, but sometimes not expedient,” see Fieser, Early Responses to Hume’s Life and Reputation, 39–40. On Bonar’s role in Hume’s prosecution, see Harris, Hume, 355–6.

56 Cf. Hume’s description of the exaggerated reports gathered by Cromwell about activities at convents and monasteries, including tales of “abortions procured, of infants murdered, of unnatural lusts between persons of the same sex” (H 3:228).
Oates removed from his ship chaplaincy as a “complaint of some unnatural practices, not fit to be named” (H 6:337).

It is unsurprising that Hume fails to extend his principles about the inherent permissibility of all pleasures and the customary nature of sexual unions to homoerotic desires. He is expressing a view that his readers and peers would be unlikely to challenge. Expressing an opposing view, moreover, would have been dangerous, and Hume is much gentler on homoerotic practice than many of his contemporaries. On the other hand, he is not just silent on the point; he uses what amount to slurs in both print and correspondence. As with his racism, we should hesitate to assume that the fault is mere ignorance. It is even less likely that Hume never encountered homosexuals than it is that he never had contact with intelligent people of other races, although the former may have had an easier time hiding themselves.

In this case, Hume seems incapable of sympathizing with passions so different from his own. It is no wonder that he resorts to the language of naturalness and purity, given that he has turned his eyes away from the consideration of consequences that he applies to feminine chastity. No analogous argument could have explained homosexuality’s condemnation anyway, since such unions did not produce children who needed a father’s care.

In another case, however, Hume expresses sympathy with someone engaged in radical sexual practice. In “Of Moral Prejudices,” he relates the story of a wealthy, independent Frenchwoman who resolves never to marry and subject herself to a man’s rule. Since she wishes to rear a son, she finds a man, whose person and mind please her, to father her child.

I am grateful to Andrew Sabl for pressing me on these issues in both conversation and correspondence. Sabl believes that Hume’s condemnatory remarks about homosexuality are tongue-in-cheek, cases of “praising with faint damn.” I am willing to accept that Hume may have had a light-hearted attitude toward homoerotic behavior, and maybe that birch-in-hand remark is an instance of it. But humor cannot explain away the language of impurity and unnaturalness that I identify here.

He also could not have been ignorant of the cruelties perpetrated against homosexuals. He reports in the History that Edward II was murdered by having a hot iron “thrust into his fundament . . ., which they inserted through a horn” (H 2:172). Although Hume does not accuse Edward II of having homoerotic relations, it stretches the imagination too far to suggest that he would not have connected this abuse to the king’s reputation for liaisons with men. See Ormrod, “The Sexualities of Edward II.” Ormrod notes that there are rumors of Edward’s alleged sodomy from the fourteenth century onward; moreover, this charge was considered politically important and therefore of interest to the History.
Although she would happily remain his friend, he wants marriage and ultimately sues for custody of their son.\textsuperscript{59}

Hume leaves us wondering about the case’s outcome, but he describes the woman sympathetically. She possesses strength of mind and is motivated by a sense of her own independence combined with the evidence of friends whose husbands are controlling, unfaithful, jealous, or indifferent. She does not settle for the first eligible lover she meets, but searches long for a suitable mate and then puts him through a trial of discourse before inviting him into her bed. She intends no cruelty to the young man but is unwilling to let his violent passion overtake her calm resolution.

Yet Hume introduces the story as a warning against a too “Philosophic Spirit” – “an Example . . . not to depart too far from the receiv’d Maxims of Conduct and Behaviour, by a refin’d Search after Happiness or Perfection” (EWU 2.542). In one sense, this woman has “reason” on her side, and the man has been misled by passion. But this asymmetry does not decide the dilemma in her favor: here Hume reminds us that sexual mores are always bound up with political customs. Interestingly, the woman’s defense in court appeals to a contract, whereas the man’s case relies on convention. He claims “a Right to educate [his son] as he pleas’d, according to the usual Maxims of the Law in such Cases”; she “pleads, on the other Hand, their express Agreement before their Commerce” (EWU 2.544). Recall that Hume begins “Of Polygamy and Divorces” by claiming that marriage is a contract that could take many forms, were it not true that “human laws restrain the natural liberty of men” (1.19.182). This woman has attempted to fashion her own contract, ignoring conventional laws governing sexual relations that produce children. Such laws do restrain natural liberty, and Hume’s political philosophy warns that contracts without convention’s backing always prove unstable.

Marriage is a political institution, in two senses. First, the state recognizes and regulates marriage, as it must, since spouses share property and produce children who need the law’s protection. Second, spousal relations inevitably involve power dynamics analogous to those of a state. But marriage is also home for two of human life’s most intimate activities – sexual relations and, ideally, close friendship. These activities are as delicate and particular as human life gets, whereas the political aspects are as crude

\textsuperscript{59} Harris’s summary of this story is misleading: “She in effect seduced a man, got herself a child by him, and then offered him money to leave her and the child alone” (Hume, 156). Hume writes that the woman communicated “her whole Intention” to the man before having sex with him. The man seems more manipulative. He enters into the relationship knowing her desires for its limitations but then refuses to accept them.
and general as other institutions that the state must manage. The necessary
intrusion of the public into the private in this case means that there may
again be irresolvable tension within this aspect of human life. Perhaps this
is why Hume leaves us in suspense about the outcome of the French-
woman’s case, “which puzzles all the Lawyers, as much as it does the
Philosophers” (EWU 2.544).60

6.4 Gallant Men and Rare Women

It would be remiss to end this chapter on love without a word about
Hume’s mitigated defense of gender equality.61 If we are to take seriously,
as he suggests, the possibility of friendship between men and women, then
we must also consider how equal such a friendship might be. How close
does Hume think such friendships can come to the ideal, which requires
equality of mind and character?

It is difficult to read Hume’s remarks on this point without a wistful
desire that he had taken his somewhat radical views a step further. Though
retaining this desire, I want to explain why he might have been unable to
take that step. Blocking his path was a specific vision of progress in virtue,
which combines the humanity of the modern ideal with the proper pride
and sublime spirit of the ancient. It was hard enough to find examples of
such men and, for reasons compatible with Hume’s psychology, nearly
impossible to find examples of such women.

The withdrawn essays include two gallant epistles to women, “Of Essay-
Writing” and “Of Love and Marriage.” Looking past their saccharine tone,
we find some radical statements about women’s equality.62 “Of Love and
Marriage” contains the subversive suggestion that marriages should involve
“no pretensions to authority on either side”; he would wish “that every
thing was carried on with perfect equality, as between two equal members

60 Baier suggests that Hume’s ambiguity here intentionally leaves “the court of the reader’s judgment
to give the verdict on just what his own intentions were” in portraying such a strong woman and
enslaved man. Her own opinion is that “Hume is challenging the accepted gender stereotypes under
the guise of a recommendation that we not let our philosophic spirit move us to ‘depart too far from
the receiv’d Maxims of Conduct and Behaviour’” (Moral Prejudices, x).

61 There is a rich literature on Hume’s views of women. For readers interested in these issues, Anne
Jaap Jacobson’s anthology, Feminist Interpretations of David Hume, is indispensable. In addition to
the pieces mentioned below and elsewhere, see Baier, “Hume on Women’s Complexion”; Livia
Guimarães, “The Gallant and the Philosopher”; Jane Duran, “Hume on the Gentler Sex”; and
Jacqueline Taylor’s Reflecting Subjects, sections 3.6 and 6.3–6.4.

62 For a spirited defense of the philosophical merit of the essays that seem written to appeal specifically
to women, see Vicki J. Sapp, “The Philosopher’s Seduction.”
of the same body” (EWU 5.560). Of Essay-Writing even ascribes some superiority to well-educated women, calling them “the Sovereigns of the Empire of Conversation,” who are “better Judges of all polite Writing than Men of the same Degree of Understanding” (EWU 1.535, 536). Here he grants women dominance only in the “conversable world,” which requires only the easier and less rigorous operations of the mind. But he speaks favorably of the French salons, where women in a manner led the learned world as well, and the essay’s overarching aim is to encourage the union of these two worlds. These compliments do not come with the familiar insults, such as Malebranche’s assertion that “everything abstract is incomprehensible” to women or Rousseau’s that women do not “have sufficient precision and attention to succeed at the exact sciences.”

Furthermore, as we have seen, Hume associates increasing equality for women with civilization’s advancement. He criticizes the ancients for confining women to the domestic sphere and credits increased interaction between the sexes with improved humanity in men. There is also a striking remark in the History, in which Hume says that during “the first race of the monarchy, the Franks were so rude and barbarous a people, that they were incapable of submitting to a female reign” (H 2:197).

These considerations are promising, but Hume also repeatedly acquiesces in and reinforces the notion that women are naturally inferior to men. His approval of gallantry depends on the claim that men should treat women generously, since “nature has given man the superiority above woman, by endowing him with greater strength both of mind and body” (1.14.133). In “Of the Immortality of the Soul,” he cites as a disadvantage of “the religious theory” of immortality that it cannot account for “the inferiority of women’s capacity” (EWU 10.593). He ascribes negative traits to women, such as a disposition to vengefulness (1.21.2013) and “love of dominion” or tyranny over men (EWU 5.558). As I discuss below, Hume softens these ascriptions with charitable explanations of what might

63 For a reading of “Of Love and Marriage” that takes Hume’s retelling of the androgyne myth as having serious implications for the possibilities of equality between the sexes, see Sheridan Hough, “Humean Androgyynes and the Nature of ‘Nature.’”
64 Malebranche, The Search after Truth, 130; Rousseau, Emile, 565.
65 On the alternative view, which accepts human mortality, women are inferior because their “domestic life requires no higher faculties either of mind or body” (EWU 10.593). This passage is ambiguous. One might read Hume as employing a subtle elenchic technique – showing that traditional religious views, which subordinate women to men, are not compatible with themselves. Because Hume criticizes the ancients for confining women to the domestic sphere, it is possible to read him as leaving open the possibility that women might improve as they are more allowed to move beyond this sphere. Given his remarks elsewhere, however, this interpretation seems implausible, and there is insufficient evidence to accept it rather than the straightforward reading.
produce these traits. Nonetheless, here he does not see beyond the domi-
nant ethos of his age.

Hume does, however, defend women in two important respects. De-
spite believing women to be inferior to men, he renounces the cruelty that
often accompanies this belief. He also admits that there are many excep-
tions to the general rule: particular women are often superior to particular
men. His most powerful statement against cruelty to women is in “Of Polygamy and Divorces,” where he argues against strong male sovereignty.
By nature, he says, men and women share a “nearness of rank,”66 so that
they should be friends and lovers. “Would we willingly exchange such
endearing appellations,” he asks, “for the barbarous title of master and
tyrant?” (1.19.184). He calls these practices “inhuman”; they are sure to
destroy any love wives may have had for their husbands. And in discussing
gallantry in “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” he scorns
men (again, as barbarous) who abuse women as a show of superiority, such
as the “ancient Muscovites,” who “wedded their wives with a whip, instead
of a ring” (1.14.133).

We can add to all of Hume’s remarks about the inferiority of women a
similar caution to the one he gives about national stereotypes at the
beginning of “Of National Characters.” To infer that any individual
woman must be inferior to any individual man (or to men in general)
would be to make the same kind of “undistinguishing” judgment as that of
refusing to admit that a Brit may be an excellent cook, or a Swiss a good
lover (1.21.197). In his story in “Of Moral Prejudices,” the French-
woman’s superiority to most men makes it hard for her to find a worthy
man to father her child. Even the man she finds may be inferior to herself,
as his violent passions lead him to extreme and aggressive behavior. The
History is also telling here: Hume admires Elizabeth I as a ruler above most
of the men who came before and after her, and warns against letting
“prejudice . . . founded on the consideration of her sex” influence our
judgment on this point (H 4:352).67 Finally, in a section of the Treatise
that assumes men’s general superiority, Hume still notes that it “often
happens” that a mother is “possessed of a superior spirit and genius to the
father” (T 2.1.9.13).

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66 Again, he is careful to add here, “not to say equality.”
67 For a study of Hume’s treatment of Queen Elizabeth as a “rational being,” see Wade Robison,
“Hume the Moral Historian.” Robison argues that Hume’s impartiality with respect to Elizabeth’s
sex calls into question accusations that the Hume of the Histories is a party man.
Falkenstein links Hume’s recognition of these exceptional cases to the justification for gallantry, arguing that the pains men take not to treat women as inferiors avoids the uneasiness that would occur should a man find himself presuming superiority to women who are in fact superior to him. The practice also forestalls nasty contests that would ensue from the clash of opinions about who the superior truly is. But these are not the considerations that Hume appeals to. He refers to gallantry as a “generous” effort to “alleviate that superiority” of mind and body that men have over women (1.14.133). We might in fact accuse Hume of failing to observe polite gallantry in the conversational space of this essay, as his discussion does nothing to alleviate the discerning female reader’s sense that Hume believes in her inferiority.

In truth, there is little indication in the text that polite, gallant men worry much about encountering exceptions to the rule of male superiority. Hume’s admitting the numerous exceptions to the alleged rule highlights the harm of his own nonchalance in this regard, including his several remarks about women’s inferiority. During a time when women’s education was so limited, it is not surprising that women seemed generally inferior. Jacqueline Taylor adds to Hume’s insight that polygamy harms men by depriving them of friendship, that the associated “need to tyrannize women also has the epistemic cost of not seeing women for who they really are, the capacities they really possess, and their (near) equality with men.” We can add that a similar, if less severe, epistemic cost comes with complacent pride in male superiority. Hume can never quite get beyond that “near.”

Relative to the domestic tyrant, this is a gentle failing, and Hume does emphasize the exceptions. But propagating the stereotype, especially in works for the general reading public, increases the hardship of the already

68 “Without Gallantry and without Jealousy,” 157–9. Falkenstein is careful to point out that the system of gallantry “does not impose moral obligations or serve as a foundation for rights” (158). It is only a step on the road to more substantial reforms in gender relations.

69 The possibility that Elizabeth I might have affected sorrow at the death of Mary Queen of Scots in order to appear more womanly and gain the affections of her subjects presents an interesting foil to male gallantry. It suggests how a woman who does know herself superior to men might be similarly “generous.” On Elizabeth’s “excellent hypocrisy,” see Baier, Death and Character, 49–51.

70 Cf. Mary Wollstonecraft: “But avoiding, as I have hitherto done, any direct comparison of the two sexes collectively, or frankly acknowledging the inferiority of woman, according to the present appearance of things, I shall only insist that men have increased that inferiority till women are almost sunk below the standard of rational creatures. Let their faculties have room to unfold, and their virtues to gain strength, and then determine where the whole sex must stand in the intellectual scale” (Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 101).

71 Reflecting Subjects, 173.
difficult position of women who were exceptions to the rule. Public reassertion of the generalization decreases the chances of extraordinary women being taken seriously as intellectual and moral peers, thus muffling potential counterexamples. Hume’s account of pride implies that when others fail to reinforce a person’s sense of her positive qualities, the results include enervation of spirit and an undermining of positive self-assessment. Extraordinary women, then, may despair of opportunities for exercising their talent. Even if they do not, their accomplishments cannot acquire public significance if the dominant culture dismisses them as female trifling. The consequent silencing of superior women makes it less likely that they will inspire other women to attain greater excellence of mind and character, and more difficult to discover that the stereotype is ill-grounded.

Having accused Hume of this much, it is only fair to admit that there are mitigating circumstances. His practical philosophy portrays an ideal character who shares the noble pride admired by the ancients and the commitment to humanity admired by the moderns. To inspire that “noble emulation” that he says “is the source of every excellence,” one must have traits of both the good and the great (1.14.135). One may possess much personal merit without the more sublime virtues. But those virtues seize the public’s attention in ways that inspire esteem and imitation. For such purposes, we need power without tyranny and strength without cruelty. However rare this combination may be in general, the situation of women for most of human history would make it even rarer among members of the “fair sex.”

Consider the ancient examples of powerful women, some of whom Hume cites in various places: Clytemnestra, Medea, Hera. Consider the real-life examples of Elizabeth I and Isabella, wife of Edward II. All these powerful women were also known for vindictiveness, cruelty, and aggression. This is precisely what Hume would predict, given the enduring oppression of women. In his ascriptions of negative qualities to women, he sometimes attributes those qualities to circumstantial causes rather than innate gender differences. When he says in “Of National Characters” that the passion of revenge “seems to reign with the greatest force in priests and women,” he gives this mollifying explanation: “Because, being deprived of the immediate exertion of anger, in violence and combat, they are apt to fancy themselves despised on that account; and their pride supports their

72 Hume mentions Clytemnestra in “A Dialogue” at EPM Dia.46. Corneille’s portrayal of Medea appears at EPM 7.7; Timomachus’s painting of Medea at 1.22.222.
vindictive disposition” (1.21.201n). Likewise, after accusing women of violent love of dominion in “Of Love and Marriage,” he blames the situation on men’s abuse of their authority. “Tyrants, we know, produce rebels; and all history informs us, that rebels when they prevail, are apt to become tyrants in their turn” (EWU 5.560).73

These explanations leave open the possibility that treating women better may prevent their developing such vicious traits. They also help explain why so few women exemplified the ideal of strength without cruelty. Having been long oppressed by men, women were unlikely to gain power without exertions of cruelty. (“Of Love and Marriage” also includes a story of Scythian women who rebel against their male enslavers, overpowering the men by stabbing out their eyes.) Even if women were, through lucky accident, able to gently acquire power, the natural course of human passions would run toward a desire for revenge against those who had previously tyrannized them. It is significant that Hume ascribes this train of sentiments to priests as well as women: women react to such frustration just as analogously confined men do.

Despite Hume’s experience and study of outstanding women, he fails to seriously question the age-old belief in women’s inferiority. Despite holding a theory of the passions that acknowledges humiliation’s powers to stifle efforts toward self-improvement, he allows himself to judge feminine capacity on the basis of a sample corrupted by centuries of humiliation.

On the other hand, Hume’s critical gaze notices the damage done by tyranny over women, and he provides grounds for experiments in gender equality – the very experiments that in some places now make it possible for women to be both strong and humane. At the end of the day, despite his occasional condescension, one senses that Hume simply liked women and, especially as he grew older, respected them as well. He enjoyed their company and wanted them as friends. Since he recognized that true friendships require equality, he had every reason to promote as much equality between the sexes as was feasible. Though we may wish he had seen that more was feasible than eighteenth-century Europe acknowledged, we can admire the worthiness of the aim and the amiability of its motive.

73 Unfortunately, Hume’s saying that this is the reason why he would have perfect equality in marriage suggests that his support for such equality is more a matter of policy than persuasion of actual equality between men and women.