

Values from Virtues: A Question of Fitness

Paul Haught
Christian Brothers University

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Abstract

In this paper I develop the concept of normative fitness and explicate its importance for environmental virtue ethics. Normative fitness refers to the effect of virtue for conditioning its possessor for moral responsiveness or for discerning moral and nonmoral values. This effect appears to have special significance in the context of environmental virtue ethics where the discernment of nonanthropocentric environmental values is associated with the possession of certain virtues. Unfortunately, normative fitness elevates the practical challenge for environmental virtue ethics, since many anthropocentric ends are also consistent with environmental virtue. Thus the normative fitness-inducing effect of virtue appears to exacerbate the conflict between environmental anthropocentrists and nonanthropocentrists. In drawing upon insights from Hume concerning normative fitness and from recent developments in environmental virtue theory, I conclude that the burden of accepting practical difficulties is warranted in light of the plausibility of justifications for nonanthropocentric environmental value and the overall importance of virtue as a term indicating moral success.

...a virtuous person is someone who not only has a good heart but is successful in making the world the sort of place people with a good heart want it to be.¹

- Linda Zagzebski

In this essay, I revisit a familiar controversy in environmental ethics concerning the motivational distinction between anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric environmental ethical ends. For the purpose of this discussion, and for the sake of avoiding some ambiguity (and no doubt at the risk of creating more) I refer to this distinction in slightly different terms. Because anthropocentrism has numerous connotations, some more benign than others, I will use the term *prudentialist* to refer to environmentalist viewpoints that advocate various forms of environmental protection, restraint, sustainability, and so on, on the grounds that those policies and modes of conduct are supportive of human interests and the sustainability of human communities. In other words, for the prudentialist, many short-term and certainly most long-term human goods are primary in determining what sorts of environmental practices and policies we should choose. By contrast, environmentalists who advocate various forms of environmental

¹ Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 100.

protection, restraint, restoration (in certain senses), and so on, for the sake of features of the environment (often in addition to human interests) are *extensionists*. An extensionist acts in ways that reflect that the features of the more-than-human world are morally considerable because they have value for their own sakes. In the present context, I consider the distinction between prudentialist and extensionist viewpoints with respect to virtue-based approaches to environmental ethics.

Because prudentialism and extensionism are motivationally distinct—one is committed to them for different if not conflicting reasons—it is difficult for normative ethical theories to be inclusive of both. In the hard cases, normative ethics must choose between good for humans and good for living things/species/ecosystems, leading to disappointed losers for most if not all such cases. Environmental virtue ethics, by contrast, holds open the promise of inclusivity. That is, from the standpoint of virtue ethics, one can intelligently hold that, motivated by virtue, the virtuous person will in some cases prioritize the good of the human species and in other cases will want to prioritize extensionist goods. Depending on the case, context, and very often the unique capabilities of the agent and her circumstances, compassion, for instance, in one scenario will be appropriate for the human-focused concerns and consistent with compassion for animals or respect for species and environmental collectives in another. Not only does this picture seem adequate to the ways in which many concerned environmentalists go about their own thinking, but it is supported by the richness of the catalogue of virtues and the corresponding diversity of ends that go along with the virtues.

As one sympathetic with and impressed by recent achievements in developing systematic accounts of environmental virtue ethics, I'm optimistic about the promise of this inclusive approach. What concerns me the most about the virtue-based approach, however, is the extent to

which it relies on the effect of virtue for what I will call *normative fitness*. In simplest terms, normative fitness refers to the effect that virtues *fit or otherwise equip the agent* for moral responsiveness or for discerning moral and nonmoral values. In this way, the possession of a virtue has the effect of bringing to light certain features of the world that are obstructed for the vicious (or normatively *unfit*) person. When one possesses the virtue of generosity, for instance, one sees the world in the way that the generous person would (characteristically) see it—as a place where the characteristic giving of one’s time and resources is of value to oneself and others. Likewise for the other virtues (and I would suppose the vices too). My concern is not that this effect of virtue is undesirable. To the contrary, virtues are moral achievements, and most of us presumably want others to view the world in the ways that generous, caring, and benevolent people characteristically do. Rather, my concern is that the normative-fitness-inducing effect of virtue exacerbates the prudentialist/extensionist conflict for environmental virtue ethics, especially when it comes to the hard cases, those cases when it is not only apparent but clear that human interests and environmental goods conflict.² And in such cases the virtuous extensionist is likely to be self-conflicted because her virtues are grounded in a scheme of ends not shared by her prudentialist allies-now-become-adversaries. The tentative conclusion I reach in this discussion is that normative fitness both creates and sustains a practical difficulty for making

² By alluding to “hard cases” and the extensionist viewpoint, I do not intend to equate extensionism with a kind of ecocentric absolutism, by which all conflicts between humans and nature require that humans lose. The extensionist, rather, assigns weight to nonanthropocentric values in nature that the prudentialist is unfit to appreciate. The prudentialist might give such values lip service (e.g., “I think endangered species should be protected”) but balks when the costs for protecting such values is too high to justify in prudentialist terms. Perhaps a good illustration of what I’m calling the extensionist viewpoint is found in Rolston’s response to three critics concerning his position that the policy to ban human inhabitants from the Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal be upheld. Rolston holds this position despite the objection that it means that local Nepalese will likely suffer from hunger without access to park lands and resources. Citing the intrinsic value of the Asian rhinoceros and Bengal tigers native to the park, Rolston urges that the root causes of human hunger in the region be addressed but not at the expense of these species and their habitat. He writes, “Wherever the unregulated human growth, do not suppose that, in such a bad situation, one should always solve the problem by sacrificing endangered species and their habitat. There are better ways to be humane, as humane as one can, but stopping short of extinguishing species, else we lose the species only to continue the human tragedy.” Holmes Rolston, III, “Saving Nature, Feeding People, and the Foundations of Ethics,” *Environmental Values* 7 (1998), p. 352.

extensionist values intelligible to prudentialists. Despite this practical obstacle, extensionists are not warranted in capitulating to prudentialist ends. Rather, the normative fitness-inducing effects of virtue, exemplified by such virtues as humility and wonder, can be defended as specific modes of achievement in discerning the value of the more-than-human world. Moreover, these effects are available to prudentialists within their existing catalogue of virtues.

Normative Fitness and Sensible Knavery

So how does normative fitness cause the problem, and what precisely is the problem? There are numerous virtue theoretical accounts that describe the phenomenon of normative fitness. The one that informs my critique is found in David Hume's discussion of the so-called "sensible knave" in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals*. For Hume, the knave represents an important challenge to his sentiment-based theory of virtue because the knave's appearance is deceptively moral. The reason for this is that the knave, in the bulk of his actions, appears to possess a trait that others in his moral community find praiseworthy, namely his tendency to act in his rational self-interest. Indeed, the knave is so successful in earning his peers' approval that his self-interest is by all appearances on par with prudence (at least in Hume's usage of the term; Aristotelians and others may wish to challenge Hume on the extent to which virtues can be ascribed independently of the possession of full virtue or a unified account of virtue in his theory). The sad news for the knave's moral associates, however, is that he is so thoroughly self-interested and rational that he free-rides on their benevolence, helping himself to

all of the benefits of their generosity and compassion without ever feeling motivated to reciprocate in kind.³

The principle problem that the knave poses for Hume concerns his apparent unresponsiveness to sympathy, which for Hume, is a necessary condition for morality. Because the knave lacks the capacity for sympathy, no degree of argument or other means of persuasion can convince the knave to be moral. With his account of the knave, then, Hume exposes his theory to a significant vulnerability: that there could be those among us who lack sympathy, and who, protected by *our* morality, deceive us into promoting their own ends.⁴ As Hume explains, the knave

in particular incidents, may think that an act of iniquity or infidelity will make a considerable addition to his fortune, without causing any considerable breach in the social union and confederacy. That *honesty is the best policy*, may be a good general rule, but is liable to many exceptions; and he, it may perhaps be thought, conducts himself with most wisdom, who observes the general rule, and takes advantage of all the exceptions.⁵

The knave, being sensible, effectively employs his instrumental reason to determine the best ways of achieving his self-interested ends. Consequently, it is no argument against the knave to protest that he is acting irrationally; he already has reason on his side doing his selfish work for him. Hume is thereby resigned to

confess that, if a man think that this reasoning [that the knave cannot be persuaded to morality by reason] much requires an answer, it will be a little difficult to find any which will to him appear satisfactory and convincing. If his heart rebel not against such pernicious maxims, if he feel no reluctance to the

³ I've had several students in my Business Ethics courses who approvingly regard the egoism of the knave as comparable to the normative demands of successful business. That their views enjoy the endorsement of Milton Friedman and others with respect to adverse effects of corporate social responsibility suggests that if not knavery, then one of its allies is alive and well within our moral discourse.

⁴ For an account of just how damaging the knave appears to be for Hume's theory, see David Gauthier, "Artificial Virtues and the Sensible Knave," *Hume Studies* 18 (1992): 401-27 and Annette Baier's response, "Artificial Virtues and the Equally Sensible Non-Knaves: A Response to Gauthier," *Hume Studies* 18 (1992): 429-39.

⁵ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Niddich. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 283.

thoughts of villainy or baseness, he has indeed lost a considerable motive to virtue.⁶

The obvious question, then, is what can be done about the knave, and how can the rest of us, that is, those of us who are sympathetically motivated to be moral, as it were, protect ourselves against such a person? Hume recommends two responses to sensible knavery. The first is that, in a community dominated by knaves, it is best to act like a knave. Otherwise, one risks being taken advantage of and manipulated by one's knavish peers; moral integrity is a weakness in a society in which one's generosity and trustworthiness are consistently exploited to suit others' advantages. For Hume this first response is probably unnecessary, however. Most, if not all, human communities, in his view, are more characteristically *moral* than they are *knavish*. That is, most human communities reflect the widespread activity of sympathy in their moral norms, and for Hume, these norms themselves allow a much greater degree of evaluative richness than prudent motives alone could support. To put it differently, most moral communities praise agents for possessing a wealth of other virtues besides prudence. Consequently, Hume's second response is to encourage non-knaves to retrench their commitment to the full spectrum of human values, which is reflected in normative richness, and which the knave (because of his egoistic constitution) is unfit to enjoy. On Hume's view, then, there is an important sense in which the knave is significantly missing out on the benefits of morality. Hume thus sharply admonishes the knave for denying himself the superior happiness that stems from self-reflection and morality:

[the sensible knave], if he has any tincture of philosophy, or even common observation and reflection, will discover that they themselves are, in the end, the greatest dupes, and have sacrificed the invaluable enjoyment of character, with themselves at least, for the acquisition of worthless toys and gewgaws.⁷

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. Baier remarks that Hume overstates the case against the knave here. Most of the things that we acquire are not, strictly speaking, worthless. "Wealth is not worthless." Baier, "Artificial Virtues," 431.

To be sure, the knave has much in common with the rest of us, particularly an agreeable penchant for pleasure-seeking. But Hume also asks,

what comparison between the unbought satisfaction of conversation, society, study, even health and the common beauties of nature, but above all the peaceful reflection on one's own conduct; what comparison, I say between these and the feverish, empty amusements of luxury and expense? These natural pleasures, indeed, are really without price; both because they are below all price in their attainment, and above it in their enjoyment.⁸

Hume's comments here may strike many of us as naïve and overoptimistic. Even if we agree with Hume that the pleasures of reflection and conversation are superior to those gained from acquiring "toys and gewgaws," it is probably too demanding to require such virtues of others insensitive to our values. The knave lacks the ability to appreciate them in any case, which is why it is probably best to conclude that Hume's rebuke is not really meant for knaves. Rather it is an injunction to the rest of us to be thoughtful, to reflect on the sources of our moral and other pleasures and to inquire as to the character one needs to achieve such satisfaction. What such reflection will show is that knavish self-interestedness, and by affiliation an excessive dependence on prudence, are unlikely to engage us with the wealth of other values that tend to show up in relation to our creaturely constitutions. Hume, of course, is not claiming that simply because we have unselfish feelings that we ought to construct a moral demand to satisfy them—to do so would be to ignore the contributions of other key elements of his moral theory. But he is appealing to his readers to reflect on their standards for virtue and to take notice of how those standards do not all reduce to the pleasure attained by doing well for oneself.

It is important not to embellish Hume's response to knavery by attributing it to Hume's otherwise optimistic assessment of human nature as generally benevolent. Hume consistently

⁸ *Enquiry*, 283-4.

regards prudence—acting in one’s best self-interest—as a virtue.⁹ Indeed, prudential considerations are instrumental for Hume in explaining how we are able to act upon the perceived advantages of cooperation and adhering to custom.¹⁰ Nonetheless, we risk knavishness, and its corresponding deprivation of the full set of pleasures we can experience, if we reduce all evaluations to standards of prudence.

A Problem of Translation (with Remainder)

By this point it should be apparent that Hume’s discussion of the knave will bear some resemblance to the situation in environmental ethical discourse of the controversy between environmental prudentialists and environmental extensionists. In simple terms, the knave is to prudentialism as moral agency is to extensionism, but this is not quite right since prudentialists are recognizably moral in the bulk of their conduct. Prudentialists, rather, in many respects owing to their exclusive yet reasonable commitments to human interests, are unable to appreciate the values in nature discerned by the extensionist. Before discharging the analogy, however, a few qualifications with respect to Hume’s moral theory are in order. First, it may be objected that Hume’s knave is unfit on account of Hume’s naturalism, that is, on account of the knave’s lack of sympathy. Normative fitness (the effect of a virtue for enabling its possessor to discern value) is perhaps a problem if one is a committed Humean, but it is not an operative concern for other virtue theories. To this I would respond that Hume actually gives two explanations for the

⁹ Hume includes prudence in his list of natural virtues, and he regards it as that trait that liberates the agent from a dependence on fortune and circumstance for our prosperity (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 599-600). Prudence also encourages one to follow local custom (*Treatise*, 599). Weighing in on the intellectual vs. moral virtue distinction, Hume remarks that prudence is both of “the heart and the head,” having a “considerable influence on conduct” (*Enquiry*, 313).

¹⁰ See *Treatise*, 484-501 and esp. 510 and 599.

knave's unfitness, one having to do with his lack of sympathy, but the other owing to his excessive prudentialism, and that this latter explanation is applicable to broader virtue theoretical accounts. Second, one may object that Hume's commitment to the impotency of reason in moral motivation is operative in the knave's unfitness. However, this objection is probably itself attached to the highly cultivated rationality of Aristotle's *phronimos*, that is of the practically wise person. If so, it may be unfairly critical of Hume but nonetheless significant for considering the situation of sensible knavery. For on this Aristotelian view we would be tempted to conclude that the knave simply does not reason well about his ends and that is why he lacks virtue (in addition to his characteristic viciousness). Very likely the Humean will respond that the knave reasons well enough to get what he wants, and so we go back and forth on practical rationality, and Aristotle wins because his view allows that both reason and emotion are morally motivating whereas Hume's does not. Maybe so, but this line of discussion misses the point *that the knave somehow unfits himself by his self-interested preoccupation* which I take to be an intelligible concern for most virtue theories, regardless of intellectual tradition. It is worth noting that later on in the *Enquiry*, Hume describes two other ways in which agents unfit themselves for morality. One of these he calls "philosophical enthusiasm," referring to an excessive allegiance to the contributions of one's own moral theorizing, or what might be comparable to what virtue theorists today find fault with in attempts at moral codifiability.¹¹ The other is religious superstition, another case where (on the Humean view at least) one's reason has been diverted to pursue other ends. If *reasoning well* lies at the heart of the normative fitness problem, then we may be touching on an even more troublesome predicament than the one I am considering in this essay.

¹¹ Hume's clearest statement of this view can be found in the short "A Dialogue" near the end of the second *Enquiry*, pp. 324-43.

A third objection to an analogy based on the knave may be formulated independently of Hume's discussion, although it utilizes one of his responses, which is that we don't have to make the case for morality to knaves or to his immoralist and egoist allies.¹² They wouldn't listen to us anyway. Moral justification is thus a practice that appeals to those who are already fit to be responsive to what morality has to offer. Even well-intentioned moral agents can disagree about the fine-grained content of specific virtues. My problem with this line of argument, however, is that it risks conflating the knave with those who lack virtue or at least lack full virtue.

Awkwardly, this would imply that the virtuous need not press their case to the morally vicious any more than knaves or immoralists. I would be surprised if characteristically vicious agents were any more receptive to our moral calling than the typical egoist, but virtue theories by and large try to provide practical and theoretical justification for their moral education, even when the cases are fairly hopeless. Unless we are willing to go as far as Hume to conjecture that there are those among us who are simply incapable through genetic or cultural endowment to be morally responsive (and I am one to go fairly far along with Hume on this), we are still left with the necessity of pressing the case, to make it clear that the moral excellences we have cultivated are indeed excellences and that the world is improved for our having cultivated them.

The problem that involves normative fitness, therefore, occurs when we consider what exactly pressing the case entails. We already know that most of our non-virtuous audience is unlikely to be receptive to our arguments on behalf of our virtues. Those who reason well enough or are dispositionally in near enough proximity may be gradually brought on board, but the bulk of our audience will have to be persuaded through other means. And where I think the

¹² Ronald Sandler makes a claim along these lines: "The point of ethical inquiry is to identify what being a virtuous person or acting well involves, not winning over a committed amoralist or moral sceptic. The place where justification in ethics comes to an end is the place where ethical inquiry begins." *Character and Environment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 37.

extensionist runs into internal conflict is that these means will require conceding significant ground to the prudentialist. One will have to approximate the extensionist's concerns, translated in prudentialist terms, and this will necessitate a significant degree of capitulation to the prudentialist's dispositional set. In other words, extensionists become prudentialists in spite of themselves.¹³

Is Environmental Virtue Ethics Necessarily Prudentialist?

Hume identifies two constraints on morality relevant to this translation problem as it concerns normative fitness. One of these is that the grounds of morality cannot be so otherworldly that they fail to resonate with the members of one's moral community. Related to the problem of religious superstition mentioned earlier, what Hume seems to have in mind here is that the good for the agent cannot be postponed beyond the horizon of a human life. The achievement of virtue in its possession and its effects for the agent or for his or her community must be realizable in the present or at least the nearby future. The other constraint, found in Hume's so-called "narrow circle requirement" is that the ascription of virtue is set in terms of the virtue ethical discourse of an agent's moral community. That is, in order to attribute virtue to an agent effectively (and fairly), one is limited as a matter of practicality to employing the concepts, language, norms, and other relevant standards available to an agent and the members of his or her community. This last constraint reveals Hume's own sensitivity to the translation problem,

¹³ The virtue theorist, of course, also has parenting as a means by which virtues can be passed along to others. Rosalind Hursthouse uses the parenting case instructively in her book *On Virtue Ethics* to highlight the effect of teaching moral rules to children to prepare them for their eventual acquisition of virtue as they mature. Undesirable moral habits that children acquire from their parents, including racism, are also difficult to unlearn on Hursthouse's account, even when as adults they have compelling reasons to give them up. *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford, 1999).

and both the otherworldly constraint and the narrow circle requirement imply that there can often be a significant gap between moral insight (occurring in the discerning individual) and moral progress (in one's moral community).

For Humean virtue theorists, these are important constraints that remind us that morality is a collective and social achievement, and in distinctively Humean terms, we can evaluate this achievement with respect to our current level of success in responding to our shared circumstances and needs. One need not be a Humean virtue theorist, however, to appreciate Hume's observations here. If translatability is a problem, then one is compelled to utilize a common language within which to communicate in approximate terms what she has discerned is of moral importance. I think virtue theorists of all stripes are sensitive to this situation, and its relevance to racial, gender, disability, animal welfare and environmental concerns highlights the freshness of these issues within our contemporary moral discourse. We are still seeking a common language, whether through virtue or other normative theories, to articulate novel intuitions about value on all of these moral fronts. But with Humean style constraints in place, the practical guidance for the virtuous agent is often to avoid pressing one's case (at least in one's own terms) to those not in position to respond to new moral insights lest they perceive them as too otherworldly or too unfamiliar.¹⁴

As a response to the problem of translatability, avoiding an exercise in futility does indeed seem like good practical advice. However, to obey such constraints strikes me as unlikely and undesirable for the one who has made a leap in moral insight and corresponding conviction.

¹⁴ In an appendix to her book on environmental virtue ethics, Louke van Wensveen provides a remarkably inclusive catalogue of ecological virtue and vice terms. Wensveen's list is provided simply as a compilation of virtue language drawn from selected works in environmental philosophy. Most of the virtues listed are traditional, but there are some that would be likely to trigger Humean style constraints for an extensionist bound by them. For example, Wensveen's list includes such virtues as "harmonizing with the will of the land," biocentrism, holistic thinking, "flowing with Nature," living lightly on the Earth, channeling emotions, organic knowledge, and sense of ecological self. Louke van Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2000), pp. 163-67.

The novelty of the insight may make it difficult to communicate to one's peers, and Humean style constraints may urge one to question the reasonableness of one's own convictions.

Reasonable doubts notwithstanding, I would hazard the speculation that many people who reflect on the conduct of virtuous exemplars from human history regard them as persons whose novel insights enabled them to challenge the norms of their contemporaries. Had they not, despite the frequent failure of such agents to reach the hearts and minds of their contemporaries, the realization of the moral ideals they expressed through their own conduct would have been postponed or precluded altogether. Yet, the position of several philosophers writing on environmental virtue is to heed the practicality of Humean style constraints and to advise caution when it comes to treating the environmentally destructive behavior of one's contemporaries as morally blameworthy. The result is that prudentialism risks becoming the default position for environmental virtue ethics, despite the fact that many of the positions in environmental virtue ethics urge some form of what I have been calling extensionism.

An instructive example of exercising this self-limiting constraint on pressing the case comes from Jennifer Welchman. Welchman, notably, advocates a Humean approach to environmental stewardship, arguing that moral agents are called to “develop a greater sensitivity to the noneconomic needs, values, and interests that natural entities and environments *serve* if we are to develop enduring commitments to preserve them.”¹⁵ Welchman's stewardship ethic very well fits what I have been calling environmental prudentialism. Indeed, she describes her Humean position as “enlightened anthropocentrism,” supported by the virtues of benevolence and loyalty. In my view, Welchman is right to draw out the implications of Hume's moral philosophy for environmental ethics in anthropocentric terms. Ultimately, even so-called nonanthropocentric values have to be seen as falling within the full spectrum of *human* values,

¹⁵ Jennifer Welchman, “The Virtues of Stewardship,” *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999), p. 423. Emphasis added.

and Welchman accommodates this view in referring to the moral significance of human desires (though self-reflective) for beauty and biodiversity. Welchman's defense of enlightened anthropocentrism, though perhaps consistent with Humeanism, risks overstatement. Yet I must qualify this concern. One place where such overstatement in her account might be supposed to lie, but actually does not, is in her most explicit defense of enlightened anthropocentrism:

As one who aspires to no more than enlightened anthropocentrism, I am, of course, unapologetic about this point [that benevolence and loyalty do not preclude environmentally destructive policies and practices]. If species or entities about which virtually no one cares, has cared, or are ever likely to care can be saved from extinction only by demanding enormous sacrifices of things for which many people have cared, do care, and will continue to care, then we can and perhaps must permit their destruction. As a rule, uncertainty about our understanding of the natural systems involved favors preservation. However, in those instances where both our certainty and the costs are very high, I cannot see why we must accept the costs.¹⁶

Here, Welchman's precautionary rule tempers the sting that nonanthropocentrists might feel in the defense of anthropocentrism; it appears that only in extreme circumstances will the Humean anthropocentrist allow concern for her own species to override concern for the well-being of others. Yet nonanthropocentrists get stung again later—this time more painfully—at the conclusion of her discussion, when she writes, “To those who believe both that we need to embrace nonanthropocentric principles of value if we are ever to respond adequately to human threats to the environment and that theoretical justification of such principles can move us to act upon them, what I have to offer is certainly not the loaf they desire.”¹⁷ In light of Welchman's acknowledgement of the motivational limits of the prudentialist position she articulates, it would be unfair to criticize her argument for failing to accommodate the extensionist viewpoint. Notably, though, it is Welchman's skepticism that such a position could be motivating (for moral

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 421.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 423.

creatures such as ourselves) that underscores the extent to which Humean style constraints on virtue ascription ought to be recognized.¹⁸

It is interesting, then, that similar constraints appear for a philosopher who is evidently less skeptical about nonanthropocentric value, at least about the coherence of linking the theoretical justification for such value with environmental virtue. In his groundbreaking book *Character and Environment*, Ronald Sandler develops what is arguably the most systematic treatment of environmental virtue ethics to date. I will not be able to do justice to his achievement here, but one of the strengths of the position he develops is that it explicitly shows how virtue ethics can be inclusive of what I have been calling the extensionist perspective.¹⁹ Sandler's approach is to emphasize and develop a theory of virtue in which pluralistic ends both determine and are supported by the virtues. Not surprisingly, among these diverse ends are those consistent with prudentialism, that is, with the good of the agent and the good of his or her community in view. For Sandler, these agent and community-directed ends fulfill the eudaimonistic function of virtue ethics. Noneudaimonistic ends also appear in Sandler's

¹⁸ Welchman's argument also assumes that a Humean theory of human nature, if correct, would also preclude nonanthropocentrism from ever gaining normative force. Part of this stems from Welchman's strong internalist reading of Hume on moral value. It is not clear, however, why internalism should necessarily prevent an agent from responding to intuitions of value, especially those associated with the possession of virtues as in Hume's case. Difficulties with his position notwithstanding, Callicott has at least articulated one way in which subjectivism can accommodate the notion of nonanthropocentric intrinsic value. See especially his essay "On the Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species" (for his concept of a "truncated" intrinsic value) in J. Baird Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 1989), pp. 129-55. For a discussion of the implications of Humean subjectivism for environmental ethics that develops these within the context of Hume's theory of virtue, see Paul Haught, "Hume's Projectivist Legacy for Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 28 (1), 2006: 77-96.

¹⁹ Sandler uses the term *extensionist* in a different sense from mine to refer to a set of positions in environmental virtue ethics. For Sandler, an extensionist is a virtue theorist interested in evaluating traditional virtues for their applicability to environmental ethical concerns. This approach is limited, however, because it lacks the support of a theory of virtue, specifically a theory that identifies what makes a character a virtue. Sandler's project is to produce such a theory, and insofar as it does, it is able to include contributions from extensionist environmental virtue theorists. By contrast, my term refers to the importance of nonanthropocentric environmental value for environmental ethics including environmental virtue ethics. Sandler's theory is thus extensionist (my term) to the extent that it is grounded on his retooled deployment of Paul Taylor's theory of inherent worth. My concern in this paper is that Sandler is too ready to abandon this ground when issues of translatability (and hence of normative fitness) compel, as a matter of practicality, the virtuous environmentalist to adopt the virtues of prudentialism. For his discussion of extensionism in environmental virtue ethics, see Sandler, pp. 11-13.

argument, and he appropriates and refines Paul Taylor's theory of inherent worth to inform and justify the relation between virtues and environmental entities that possess a good of their own. On Sandler's view, this means that environmental collectives such as species and ecosystems lack intrinsic value, but they are nonetheless frequently the proper targets of environmental virtue because of their instrumental relation to individual organisms (and some collectives, such as ant colonies) that do possess goods of their own.

Notwithstanding theoretical and conceptual challenges to Sandler's nod toward biocentrism, given the robustness of his theory of virtue it would seem that it possesses all of the resources to avoid the difficulties associated with translatability and normative fitness. At the very least, Sandler's virtue-oriented approach does not appear identical with or likely to collapse into prudentialism, and its inclusion of noneudaimonistic ends promises to ground all of the virtues in a much richer and wider set of norms. It thus comes as a surprise that he seems prepared to abandon these noneudaimonistic ends of his theory in cases where translatability concerns arise. Sandler's concession occurs in the context of his presentation of three adequacy conditions for environmental ethics. The first two reveal that an environmental ethic is adequate to the extent that it can justifiably support criticism of environmentally destructive actions, and that it can provide moral guidance, and on both counts Sandler is content that his theory passes the test. To the extent that Sandler's development of Taylor's theory of inherent value is sufficient for these justificatory aims, I am willing to go along with him here.²⁰ The third adequacy condition, however, produces a potential obstacle for Sandler's theory with its demand for practical efficacy. An environmental ethic must provide "arguments, reasons, or justifications

²⁰ Sufficiency is all that is required to meet Sandler's adequacy conditions. If a theory other than Taylor's (or Sandler's enhanced version of it) turns out to be more adequate—perhaps extending moral considerability to environmental collectives—then the justifications for environmental ethics are sustained. For my present argument, it is not necessary to question the validity of such justifications so long as their being sufficient is plausible. The extensionist standpoint requires rational assent even if the extensionist's reasons fail to motivate prudentialists.

that are efficacious in moving people to perform the actions or adopt the policies that are recommended.”²¹ This condition resembles Welchman’s skeptical stance with regard to nonanthropocentrism; people are unlikely to be moved by theories of inherent value and the like. Or to put it in Humean language, they would be unlikely to be “dislodged” from their settled stations of normative fitness. Sandler goes on to describe the contemporary scene involving American environmentalist attitudes, noting the many instances of gaps between belief (e.g., “environmental protection is good”) and motivation (e.g., “I’m not ready to change my consumptive and recreational practices”). Adding to this observation, he notes that “No theory of environmental ethics is going to have an overwhelming effect on people’s environmentally related behavior.”²² Clearly the situation for environmental virtue (both extensionist *and* prudentialist) is bleak. Does this mean that environmental virtues will have to be set aside on the grounds of practical efficacy?

Sandler’s response is cautious. Even if many Americans fail to appreciate environmental values or lack the relevant virtues, Sandler suggests that advocacy for removing obstacles to environmental virtue (e.g., facilitating opportunities for wilderness experiences or promoting environmental awareness education) would nonetheless be warranted. The force of this suggestion rests on successfully justifying respect for noneudaimonistic ends in nature. Assuming that environmental virtue ethics can fulfill this requirement—Sandler is confident that his theory can—then one is warranted in holding what I have been calling the extensionist stance even when one’s contemporaries are mostly prudentialists or ignorant of environmental ends altogether. Sandler’s response indicates that when respect for noneudaimonistic ends is justified, yet one’s contemporaries are unfit to appreciate or to be otherwise motivated by rational

²¹ Ibid., p. 108.

²² Ibid., p. 116.

justification, then it is appropriate to take measures to educate and activate their responsiveness to value. Moreover, to the extent that one's justification for respecting noneudaimonistic ends is adequate, one would not be warranted to ignore that justification by pressing one's case to prudentialists on prudentialist terms. If justification for respecting noneudaimonistic ends is constitutive of virtue, then one ought not abandon it lightly. Sandler thereby demonstrates that environmental virtue ethics can avoid collapsing into prudentialism even while he recognizes that translatability is a problem.²³

Sandler's defense of the practical efficacy of his theory is reminiscent of Thomas Hill's conclusion concerning the agent who despite his humility nonetheless sees nothing wrong with destroying the environment for his own benefit.²⁴ For Hill, virtues like humility that support respect for nature are justifiable for that end. However, Hill is also quick to note that we cannot hold someone blameworthy for lacking this virtue. This may seem odd considering his analogy: "A person who *understands* his place in nature but still views nonsentient nature merely as a resource takes the attitude that nothing is *important* but human beings and animals.... He is more like the racist who, though well aware of other races, treats all races but his own as insignificant."²⁵ Clearly, the racist is blameworthy for his prejudice, but Hill questions whether the circumstances surrounding the environment-destroyer's action would be fully known to his

²³ Translation and related concerns appear in several places in *Character and Environment*, including responses of Sandler's virtue theory to agent-relative considerations for moral action and to questions of supererogation.

²⁴ If I understand his distinction, Sandler would likely identify Hill's arguments as an exercise in extensionist (Sandler's usage) environmental virtue ethics. Sandler's pluralistic theory presumably avoids some of Hill's cautionary remarks because the noneudaimonistic targets of humility are grounded on a theory of inherent value. That translation is still a problem for Sandler's position with regard to practical efficacy, however, suggests that the limitations Hill notes on the application of environmental virtue ethics—particularly owing the asymmetry of praise and blame—are relevant.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219. It is worth noting that Hill qualifies his understanding of humility as the "morally admirable" kind.

environmentalist critics.²⁶ The value of Hill's approach is that it might allow one to discover what traits we would most want to develop and encourage in ourselves and others so that we can avoid rendering further harm to the natural environment. Hill shows that consideration of the excellences that might be called upon to support that ideal can be fruitful. The weakness of this approach, according to Hill, is that even if one can successfully determine the relevant sorts of excellence, it may not be appropriate to blame someone for lacking them. As Hill explains, "To do so, it seems, would be unfair, for, even if this attitude typically stems from deficiencies which affect one's attitudes toward sentient beings, there may be exceptions and we have not shown that their view of nonsentient nature is itself blameworthy."²⁷

Neither Hill's recognition of the asymmetry of praise and blame nor Sandler's recommendation to remove the obstacles to virtue entail that environmental virtue ethics must capitulate to the norms of prudentialism. They do, however, confirm, that a shift in moral consciousness will be difficult to express in terms that will be intelligible to the vicious. In the same vein they explain the temptation of well-intended extensionists to concede ground to their prudentialist peers. The upshot of these concessions—to asymmetry and translatability as challenges to environmental virtue ethics—is, on the one hand, that at least as a practical matter, extensionists will continue to have to find methods other than appeals to theoretical considerations to influence their prudentialist peers to shift their perspective. On the other hand, the fact that Sandler's position shows how environmental virtue ethics can be explicitly and

²⁶ Hill may also have in mind the fact that habits of racial bias are often formed early and are also difficult to break. Possessing such habits does not excuse one from their blameworthiness but it does suggest that the blame may also owe to cultural and parental factors that are in some respects not of the agent's making and not easy to eradicate by appeals to the irrationality of racial bias. Rosalind Hursthouse notes this disapprovable yet challenging feature of moral development and character formation with respect to racism in considering the challenge of educating the emotions. See Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, p. 119.

²⁷ Hill, p. 224. The asymmetry of praise and blame in ethics is well-known, leading some ethicists to observe that the virtue tradition—because of its evaluative richness especially with respect to objects of praise—may offer the best prospects for balancing these two poles of moral evaluation. See, for instance, Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 257-58.

neatly grounded in a theory of nonanthropocentric value, makes it possible (and theoretically permissible) for the extensionist to exercise the positive effects of normative fitness and the possession of virtue.

Humility, Wonder, and the Success of Possessing Virtue

The challenge, as I have been articulating it, concerns the lack of normative fitness that the committed prudentialist has for appreciating the insights concerning the value of the more-than-human world as appreciated by the environmental extensionist. That is, owing to his or her preoccupation with the anthropocentric ends (including environmentally sustainable practices that support those ends), the prudentialist is unfit to properly appreciate the extension of moral considerability to and the respect of nonmoral values in the more-than-human world. The difficulty posed by the prudentialist's disposition is perhaps significant enough that the motivation to press one's case in terms of prudentialist norms is understandable, though it would not be warranted if it means suspending one's commitment to extensionist virtue. In moving toward a conclusion of this essay, I want to suggest to extensionists the importance of enriching an account of the virtues with a characteristic of virtue that plays up the advantage of its normative fitness-inducing effect. Linda Zagzebski has called attention to this characteristic in recognizing virtue as a "success term." In the quote with which I began this essay, Zagzebski notes that the ethically good person is one who is successful in making the world one in which good persons want to be. Such a way of thinking about virtue appears consistent with a common extensionist intuition, not only that the more-than-human world has value for its own sake, but that recognition of such value is transformative for the agent who discerns it. Holmes Rolston,

ironically, gives expression to this effect in his objection to virtue-based environmental ethics. Rolston contends that environmental virtue ethics is self-defeating insofar as it treats the value of the *agent* rather than the environment as primary because fundamental to virtue ethics is the identification and cultivation of praiseworthy characteristics, human excellences.²⁸ Taking particular aim at teleological environmental virtue ethics, Rolston notes that an emphasis on self-fulfillment in ethics obscures the priority that natural values ought to take in environmental ethics. It “puts second things first, and would-be winners become losers” because it is for the sake of the agent that things have value at all. Environmental values, including intrinsic values, are merely derivative of the qualities of the agent. Putting it somewhat differently, Rolston observes that the character of many environmentalists is hardly self-interested in the (enlightened) way to which virtue ethics seems committed. As he explains,

If we compare Thoreau with other icons of environmentalism, we can see that this search for self-fulfillment does not dominate the concerns of Aldo Leopold, or Rachel Carson, or Jane Goodall, or E.O. Wilson, because all these persons are overwhelmed by self-transcending commitments that are orders of magnitude greater than themselves. Leopold seeks a land ethic, the integrity of the biotic community; Carson laments the vanished warblers, the silent spring, the vanished fish in the dying ocean; Goodall respects the chimpanzees; Wilson (*pace* his “selfish genes”) cares deeply for the ants.... But what each most fears is the loss of these wild others, for their own sakes, not some loss of our experiences that we would have been the better for.²⁹

Of interest to me in Rolston’s remarks is less his criticism of the virtue-based approach than his claim about the self-transcending commitments of environmentalist exemplars. In his own response to Rolston’s criticism, I think Sandler is correct to note that the objection rests on a misconception about the relation between virtue and value. To remove the misconception,

²⁸ This argument was originally advanced by Rolston in Holmes Rolston, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), pp. 117-19 and recently updated for inclusion in Sandler and Cafaro’s anthology on environmental virtue ethics. See Rolston, “Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole” in Ronald Sandler and Philip Cafaro, *Environmental Virtue Ethics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), pp. 61-78.

²⁹ Rolston, “Environmental Virtue Ethics,” p. 75.

Sandler appeals to the moral success that possession of virtue entails, noting that many environmental virtues are achievements in relating to nature.³⁰ Where Rolston's objection may be less easy to dismiss is registering how relating to nature fits with respect to self-transcending commitments. Virtue theories in general are wary of normative appeals that risk becoming too demanding, and many emphasize the importance of virtues benefiting their possessors (Sandler's pluralism may get his own account away from this, but the theory is nonetheless significantly grounded in eudaimonistic ends). Self-transcending commitments seem to elude such limitations, and yet those who embody them are undoubtedly important for alerting others to the significance of the values they have discerned and to which they have become dedicated.

Virtue ethics reserves a special place for the heroic, the noble, and the morally courageous, but praise of such excellences seems faint if those of us not called to greatness are likewise unable to be moved when instances of such virtue occur. Of course, it may be argued Rolston's recognition of the self-transcending commitments of environmental exemplars appears to have the unfortunate effect of running up against the Humean-style constraints mentioned earlier. If so, then extensionism (to the extent that exemplary characters fall within that perspective) certainly avoids prudentialism, but it approaches the supererogatory, again raising concerns about its demandingness. If these concerns are to be addressed, then a strategy that might be pursued is to consider the response of someone embodying environmentally motivated self-transcending commitments to a request for assistance in coming to share her perspective. No doubt one could anticipate her offering arguments that appeal to something like nature's intrinsic value and other features, but it would not be surprising either if she were to talk about those virtues that helped shape her world view. And here is where two features of Sandler's pluralistic

³⁰ Sandler, p. 112.

account of the virtues is helpful in clearing room for utilizing the normative-fitness-inducing effects of virtue.

One of these I mentioned earlier: his suggestion to support the removal of obstacles to virtue, whatever they may be. The other is found in his chapter entitled, “The Environment Itself.” There Sandler introduces a typology for describing various modes of virtuous environmental responsiveness. Two virtues that appear on his list (and certainly not the only ones) that would appear to be especially supportive of the self-transcending commitments of Rolston’s exemplars are humility and wonder.³¹ To the extent that the possession of these virtues (and others) fits agents for the discernment of values that go beyond enlightened self-interest, they would be valuable themselves, not for producing the extensionist worldview, but for providing and sustaining the conditions for appreciating the values to which the extensionist is committed.

Both virtues have been well-covered in the environmental ethical literature, humility in particular, but a few additional points of emphasis will clarify the role that their normative fitness-inducing effects has for sustaining the viability of extensionism. Humility is the virtue Hill described as supporting a family of other virtues relevant to environmental attitudes, such as cherishing (that which is important to us) and gratitude. Humility is an important virtue for emphasizing not only a relation, but typically a relation of dependence. Moreover, humility gives leeway to something other than oneself, yielding to its presence, giving it a voice, acknowledging the significance of its otherness. While Hill is correct, I believe, to caution against overloading humility with environmentalist connotations, humility retains its importance for extensionism by fitting the agent to discern her or his particular modes of relating to some

³¹ On Sandler’s list, humility appears as a “virtue of sustainability.” Wonder is identified as a “virtue of communion with nature.” Neither virtue is confined to its category, however, and he notes that virtues may support many different modes of environmental responsiveness. Sandler, p. 82.

form of otherness, and to acknowledge the boundaries of oneself with respect to that otherness. To be humble is often to put oneself into a proper relation with that which is greater than oneself. To be virtuous, humility cannot refer to self-ingratiation or obsequiousness, but it clearly points in the direction of the value of something more-than-oneself, bringing it close to self-transcending commitments and the value of articulating the nature of one's relation to otherness.

Wonder, for its part, has the effect of directing the attention of the discerning agent to otherness. Its particular success is in fitting the agent for receptivity to the intelligibility of noneudaimonistic ends and increasing the potential for recognizing specifically environmental values. To explicate how wonder has these effects, and how wonder might be used to dislodge an agent from prudentialist commitments, I will conclude with a reflection derived from the theorist with whom I started, considering what wonder would mean within the context of Humean virtue theory. The anthropocentrism of Hume's value theory recommends it as a good place to test this move to consider how the possession of wonder might possibly yield fitness for discerning the value of the more-than-human world. What I hope this last section shows is that even while translatability remains a practical challenge for environmental virtue ethics, the normative fitness-inducing effects of wonder (and humility) can be useful starting points for engaging the prudentialist with extensionist concerns. Hume's own effort to understand the effects of wonder, curiosity, and the love of truth are illustrative of the effort anyone inclined to virtue needs to take from time to time. For it is often only through such reflective exercises, sometimes offered in common conversation with our peers, that we collectively become aware of the effects of the virtues as well the nature of the achievement for discerning value (and in the case of wonder and humility, enhancing relationality) for which they have fit us.

In Humean terms, wonder would have to be praiseworthy primarily because of its usefulness to its possessor,³² but wonder, unlike humility, will not typically have its possessor as its object (wonder about oneself is the obvious exception). Where Hume comes closest to describing this characteristic is in his discussion of curiosity in Book II of the *Treatise*.³³ One feature of this passage is that it emphasizes for Hume how deliberative activity can be a source of pleasure in which an agent can take pride, and Hume explicitly identifies love of truth with pleasure in moral deliberation.³⁴ My interest at present addresses another feature, namely Hume's identification of *curiosity* with this affection (the title of the section is "Of curiosity, or the love of truth"). Hume's intention is to explain why seeking and discovering truth pleases. There are two "kinds" of truth that can be the object of this affection: one that consists in the "discovery of the proportions of our ideas," the other consisting in "the conformity of our ideas of objects to their real existence."³⁵ The first kind of truth is described in terms of geometry (discovering the equivalence of two circles by compass or mathematical equation), arithmetic, and gaming, but it turns out to be less the discovery of truth than engaging in these activities for some other end that causes them to be pleasurable. What is pleasing about geometry or arithmetic is a sufficiently challenging problem that pleases only because it fixes our attention by its complexity or because its solution will be useful or important. Gaming is pleasurable because generally "life is so tiresome a scene" that games becomes a source of amusement, and the pleasure derived from that amusement makes it possible to enjoy the intricacies of strategy,

³² In the first *Enquiry*, Hume also claims that the passion of wonder is agreeable in discussing human psychological responses to reports of miracles: "The passion of *surprise* and *wonder*, arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards belief in those events, from which it is derived. And this goes so far, that even those who cannot enjoy this pleasure immediately, nor can believe those miraculous events, of which they are informed, yet love to partake of that satisfaction at second-hand or by rebound, and place a pride and delight in exciting the admiration of others." David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 117.

³³ *Treatise*, p. 448-54.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

“difficulty, variety, and sudden reverses of fortune” that typically accompany games.³⁶ Hume finds little pleasure in discovering truth for its own sake when truth concerns ideas that have little bearing on our lives.

So it is the other “species” of truth that becomes the focal point of Hume’s inquiry in this section. This love of truth not only concerns whatever important matters are touched upon by mathematics, but “may be extended to morals, politics, natural philosophy, and other studies, where we consider not the abstract relations of ideas, but their real connexions and existence.”³⁷ This truth matters because reality matters. Hume thus quickly invokes science as the practice which owns title to the “love of knowledge,” but even this love is a species of the love of truth, a “certain curiosity implanted in human nature.”³⁸ As evidence of its ubiquity among humans, Hume observes that some people are insatiably curious about states of affairs that could not concern them practically, and about which they will never bother to study on their own, but they are pleased to learn even when their knowledge is dependent on others.³⁹ What explains this phenomenon of curiosity?

Hume’s account is disappointing for its brevity, but it is intriguing, nonetheless. His first move is to claim that the liveliness or “vivacity” of an idea (presumably a true idea) produces a pleasing sense of security. Here, it might help to think that he is describing the manner in which a reliable belief, for instance, that the mortgage on one’s house has not been foreclosed, provides a kind of comfort. Some truths hurt, of course—suppose one comes home to discover that the house with the mortgage paid has been burglarized—and Hume explains this phenomenon by claiming that “too sudden and violent a change [in our beliefs] is unpleasant to us, and that

³⁶ Ibid., p. 452.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 453.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

however any objects may in themselves be indifferent, yet their alteration gives uneasiness.”⁴⁰

But Hume finds that the occasional unpleasant truthful discovery creates an opportunity to introduce doubt into the discussion on curiosity: “As ’tis the nature of doubt to cause a variation in thought, and transport us suddenly from one idea to another, it must of consequence be the occasion of pain.”⁴¹ Hume does not say what kind of pain (is it a lack? is it a hunger?) that doubt provokes. Moreover, the fact that it causes pain does not imply that discovery of the truth is the obvious source of pleasure for relieving that pain; humans deceive themselves about their circumstances all the time in order to avoid the pain of doubt and worry. But Hume’s point is to explain why truth pleases, and his use of such dynamic language as “wavering in the choice of its objects” and “sudden and violent” changes to refer to the force of the discovery of truth suggests that his psychological theory of curiosity and the love of truth requires that we understand that beliefs are fixed within an unfixd and changing world. The pleasure of curiosity requires the painfulness of doubt because the equilibrium that is obtained by fixing our beliefs must be paid at such a cost. As Hume explains,

This pain chiefly takes place, where interest, relation, or the greatness of novelty of any event interests us in it. ’Tis not every matter of fact, of which we have a curiosity to be inform’d; neither are they such only as we have an interest to know. ’Tis sufficient if the idea strikes on us with such force, and concerns us so nearly, as to give us an uneasiness in its instability and inconstancy.⁴²

This section appears at the very end of Hume’s treatment of the passions, so it is perhaps worth remembering that he is not presently interested in discussing what our moral responsiveness should be to those who lack such curiosity or those who deceive themselves to avoid the painfulness of doubt, uneasiness, instability, and inconstancy. Unfortunately, Hume never explicitly enjoins his readers to be curiosity seekers or lovers of truth. Perhaps it is too natural a

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

faculty to merit praise, but this would seem an odd oversight from a philosopher who so effectively wields the weaponry of doubt and skepticism.

Hume's characterization of curiosity as a response to the painfulness of doubt is still a long way from ascribing excellence of character to one's sense of wonder, and Hume provides few other resources from which to construct such an account.⁴³ Presumably, though, the conditions for such an excellence should be the same as for any other. Moreover, Hume is indifferent to the classical distinction between intellectual and moral virtues, passing it off as a verbal dispute,⁴⁴ a position that is shared by some contemporary virtue theorists.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, if the Humean extensionist is to appeal to wonder for its typical effects with respect to the more-than-human world, she appears to be at a loss. An injunction to cultivate one's sense of wonder for such an end will seem hopelessly, perhaps even dangerously aesthetic, doomed to enchant nature with romantic fantasies of its richness and diversity or inviting nostalgia for a "lost wilderness" that expresses one's current alienation from one's world more than it promises action to respond to nature's value. Hume seems to say as much even when he pauses to consider the aesthetic value of nature:

A beautiful fish in the ocean, an animal in the desert, and indeed any thing that neither belongs, nor is related to us, has no manner of influence on our vanity, whatever extraordinary qualities it may be endow'd with, and whatever degree of surprize and admiration it may naturally occasion. It must be some way associated

⁴³ There is this intriguing passage in Part XII of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, in which Philo, upon considering Galen's physiological theory, expresses wonder at nature's diversity and design: "The further we advance in these researches, we discover new scenes of art and wisdom: But descry still, at a distance, farther scenes beyond our reach; in the fine internal structure of the parts, in the economy of the brain, in the fabric of the seminal vessels. All these artifices are repeated in every different species of animal, with wonderful variety, and with exact propriety, suited to the different intentions of nature, in framing each species. And if the infidelity of *Galen*, even when these natural sciences were still imperfect, could not withstand such striking appearances; to what pitch of pertinacious obstinacy must a philosopher in this age have attained, who can now doubt of a supreme intelligence?" (*Dialogues*, 126-27). Philo, of course, is agnostic with regard to this intelligence, and in the rest of the passage he questions the logic of the design argument. His wonder still seems to be authentic, however.

⁴⁴ *Enquiry*, pp. 312-23.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*.

with us to touch our pride. Its idea must hang in a manner, upon that of ourselves; and the transition from the one to the other must be easy and natural.⁴⁶

Yet perhaps Hume is leaving more options available to the extensionist than not. Suppose that wonder (even as surprise) is the source of an easy and natural transition of a quality in which humans can take pride. One of the more “vivacious” ideas made possible by contemporary science is that the fish in the ocean and the animal in the desert are not so unrelated to us. As wondrous and surprising as the natural world is for so many human beings, it is also a world that, lest we become alienated from it through indifference or beliefs in its utter difference from us, is a world that we can also see as “our own,” a world in which we can take pride even if humility is needed as well to prevent us from thinking that we simply own it.

Such thinking is not at all new to environmental ethics, and neither are the problematic implications that it produces. Consider this passage from Holmes Rolston:

We might sum up a major task in environmental ethics in the injunction *Keep life wonderful!*... Nature is a wonderful life support, resource, cultural base; further, it is a wonderland when approached scientifically, aesthetically, dialectically, historically, philosophically, religiously. But is the admonition to keep life wonderful a humanistic or naturalistic one? From one perspective it might seem that there is no wonder present apart from the human coming, since we do not believe that *Rhododendron* shrubs or mouse lemurs have the capacity for wonder. That would make nature an instrument of human wonder, valued for its capacities to elicit these experiences. Humans desire an environment sophisticated enough to match their wonderful brains. From another perspective, we ask whether such wonder (taking place in wonderful brains) can be generated except in the presence of something worthy enough to induce it, which suggests that nature is intrinsically a wonderland. Such a natural wonderland would generate duties when moral agents encounter it....

Or we can count it a value that nature breeds a creative discontent, keeps a distance from us, supplies a further question with each answer, and is so rich and demanding as to be at length inaccessible in the whole, knowable only in part. We are kept pilgrims and pioneers on a frontier, and to travel hopefully is better than to arrive. Meanwhile, this much at least we do value: that nature is endlessly stimulating to the mind and bores only the ignorant or the insensitive.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Treatise*, pp. 303-4.

⁴⁷ Holmes Rolston, III, pp. 26-27. The ellipsis after the first line of this quote covers the sentence, “Each of the fourteen preceding values is tributary to this greater commandment.” Those values, “carried by nature,” are: 1) life-

Rolston's conjectures for wonder, like Hume's for curiosity, invite the problematic implication that a cultivated sense of wonder could be praised primarily for its aesthetic effects. These effects are troubling not only for their anthropocentrism, suggesting that wondrous human civilization could be a better substitute for a wondrous more-than-human world, whose creations are more distantly associated with us than the institutions and artifacts for which human beings can legitimately take credit. More worrisome might be the anti-heroic sensibilities of the Humean account of virtue that threaten to oppose a cultivated sense of nature's wonder. As with Hill's humility, an agent lacking a sense of such wonder is surely not blameworthy if this excellence can be possessed short of its having environmentally friendly effects.

The suspicion lingers, however, that parents and other educators have failed if wonder is to be cultivated within limits that confine it to the purely human. If it is not blameworthy to wonder only at what is near and familiar, it is nonetheless consistent with the effects of wonder to appreciate it for the apparent boundlessness of its effects. Wonder may be responsible as well both for liberating the objects of our desires from our claims on them as ends and for informing us of potential ends for our desires. In making the case for wonder's importance for love, Luce Irigaray claims that the object of wonder remains "impossible to delimit, im-pose, identify (which is not to say lacking identity or borders): the atmosphere, the sky, the sea, the sun."⁴⁸ The value in inculcating a sense of wonder in children is, for Martha Nussbaum, relevant for informing them of potential objects of love and compassion: "Wonder, as non-eudaimonistic as

support; 2) economic; 3) recreational; 4) scientific; 5) aesthetic; 6) genetic-diversity; 7) historical; 8) cultural-symbolization; 9) character-building (Rolston here claims that humility, simplicity, frugality, serenity, and independence are better learned in one's encounter with rural nature than in the town); 10) diversity-unity; 11) stability; 12) spontaneity; 13) dialectical; and 14) life. The passage on wonder occurs in a discussion of a fifteenth value, nature's religious value.

⁴⁸ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans., Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 81.

an emotion can be, helps move distant objects within the circle of a person's scheme of ends."⁴⁹

For his own part, Rolston has been a champion of the view that scientific and aesthetic engagement with the natural environment is not only a consequence of wonder but an activity that enhances wonder, bringing with it increased possibilities for value. In short, if wonder has these effects, not only is wonder thereby important for freeing us from life's "tiresome" scene, but wonder is a virtue especially critical for fitting its possessor to discern the kinds of value that underwrite the extensionist stance in environmental virtue ethics.

⁴⁹ Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 55. Nussbaum, notably, attributes concern for the plight of animals to an effect of wonder's extensiveness. See pp. 321-22.