

Questions about *Treatise* III.ii.1–5

1. What does Hume mean by the claim (p. 478) that ‘all virtuous actions derive their merit only from virtuous motives, and are consider’d merely as signs of those motives.’ Is this claim true?
2. In the same paragraph on p. 478, Hume argues from this premise to the conclusion that ‘the first virtuous motive, which bestows a merit on any action, can never be a regard to the virtue of that action.’ What does this conclusion mean? How does the argument work, exactly?
3. On p. 479, Hume allows that some actions are motivated only by a ‘sense of morality or duty’. What does this motivation consist in, according to Hume. Is this a virtuous sort of motivation? Why couldn’t this be the only motivation that ever leads us to act morally?
4. On pp. 480–483, Hume argues against three proposals according to which the original motive for acts of justice and honesty is a natural one: the candidate motivations are self-interest, ‘regard to the public interest’, and ‘private benevolence’. What are these motivations? What are the most important of Hume’s reasons for rejecting them?
5. On p. 483, Hume draws an analogy between our judgments of virtue and vice and our judgments about the ‘beauty of animal bodies’: ‘In like manner we always consider the *natural* and *usual* force of the passions, when we determine concerning vice and virtue; and if the passions depart very much from the common measures on either side, they are always disapprov’d as vicious.’ What is Hume claiming here? Does it follow from this claim that a virtuous person is just a statistically normal one? Wouldn’t someone who was exceptionally benevolent and unusually lacking in self-interest be virtuous?
6. Hume proposes (p. 489–490) that the rules of property are constituted by a ‘convention’. What does he mean by ‘convention’? What is our motivation for abiding by this convention? Does this motivation apply in a situation where one could infringe on the rules of property without anyone ever knowing that the infringement had taken place?
7. On p. 495, Hume claims that ‘’tis only from the selfishness and confin’d generosity of men, along with the scanty provision nature has made for his wants, that justice derives its origin.’ What does this claim mean? How does Hume argue for it? How does he use it to argue against his opponents?
8. What is Hume trying to explain in the final part of III.ii.2, on pp. 498–501? How does the explanation work?
9. What does it mean, finally, to claim that a virtue is ‘artificial’?