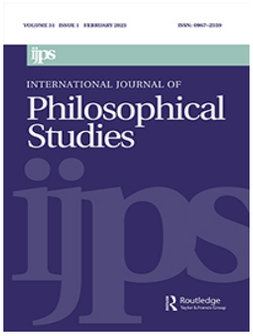

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A New Scene of Thought: On Waldow's *Experience Embodied*

Graham Clay

School of Philosophy, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland

ABSTRACT

In her book *Experience Embodied*, Anik Waldow challenges and reimagines the traditional interpretative approach to the concept of experience in the early modern period. Traditionally, commentators have emphasized early moderns' views on the first-person perspective and eschewed the relevance of our embodiment to their epistemological outlooks. My focus here is on Waldow's chapter on Hume, wherein she analyzes Hume's account of our capacity for reflective moral judgment, arguing that he understands it as natural despite the countless ways in which our embodied social experiences impinge on it. After detailing Waldow's contributions, I clarify, corroborate, and criticize them. Since I contend that Waldow is broadly successful in her interpretative efforts, I suggest that she undermines the traditional interpretative approach to experience in the early modern period, but not in the sense that she moves us away from the epistemological towards other lenses. Rather, Waldow should be understood as showing that, at least in the case of Hume's metaethics, the epistemological is embodied, is social, and is both cognitive and sentimental.

KEYWORDS Hume; naturalness; sympathy; reflective moral judgment; embodiment; social epistemology

In Anik Waldow's book *Experience Embodied: Early Modern Accounts of the Human Place in Nature*, the chapter dedicated to Hume has three main goals that correspond to its three sections. First, Waldow argues for her interpretation of Hume's position on what it is for a human attribute or capacity to be natural. Second, Waldow offers an analysis of the details of Hume's account of our capacity for reflective moral judgment 'in order to demonstrate that the emergence of the capacity to reflect and evaluate virtues counts as a natural effect of how we sympathize with others' (Waldow 2020, 100). Third, Waldow works to show that despite Hume holding that 'processes of negotiation and other forms of interpersonal interactions' (Waldow 2020, 119) play a central role in the development of our capacity for reflective moral judgment, this is compatible with the capacity being natural by his lights,

CONTACT Graham Clay graham.clay@ucd.ie

contrary to the position of some other commentators. For each of these goals, I will explain how Waldow seeks to achieve it before offering my commentary.

1. Waldow on Hume's Definition(s) of 'Natural'

In pursuing her first goal, Waldow uses our capacity for reflective sympathy as her case study, and she proceeds as follows. Waldow argues that Hume holds that the capacity for sympathy is an explanatorily basic feature of human nature; that sympathy is typically self-centered, in that we tend to sympathize more with those close and similar to us; and that this biased realization of our capacity for sympathy thereby tends to block the creation of the norm of justice, which is supposed to be unbiased. The ingredient needed for the formation of an unbiased norm of justice is an *artifice* that humans *freely* create because of how our natures interface with the conditions we face in societies. In short, we create the artifice of the 'public interest,' which is, as Hume puts it, 'a convention enter'd into by all the members of the society to bestow stability on the possession of those external goods, and leave every one in the peaceable enjoyment of what he may acquire by his fortune and industry' (T 3.2.2.9, SBN 489).[1] This convention then triggers our capacity for sympathy in a new unbiased and reflective way, such that we come to enforce the demands of justice on one another throughout our societies *as a general rule*, which benefits us by sustaining and stabilizing our societies, and is better for us than operating with only our pre-justice biased sympathy.

Even though social processes must unfold – and an artifice must be created – for us to develop the capacity for reflective sympathy, Waldow argues that this capacity is natural on Hume's view. Waldow argues that Hume holds that '[w]hat is required [for an attribute/capacity to be natural] is that this attribute/capacity is [causally] linked to something that is in fact part of [our] original make-up' (Waldow 2020, 105). In the case of our capacity for reflective sympathy, the combination of external circumstances, our needs, the affections of our minds that lead to the formation of societies, our selfish human nature, and our capacity for 'biased sympathy' *cause* 'the implementation of the relevant artifice (the invention of justice)' (Waldow 2020, 105–106) and our resultant capacity for reflective sympathy.

I broadly agree with Waldow's descriptions of Hume's views in this domain, as well as her interpretation of Hume's definition of this variety of naturalness.

In fact, further support for Waldow's account is found in passages in Hume's independent discussions of determinism, causation, and freedom. In his section of the *Treatise* '*Of liberty and necessity*,' Hume claims that '*natural* and *moral* evidence cement together, and form only one chain of argument betwixt them' (T 2.3.1.17, SBN 406). From the context of this claim, it is clear

that by 'natural' here, Hume means *physical*; by 'moral,' he means *centrally involving humans* (not *ethical*); and by this claim he means that there are chains of physical 'causes and voluntary actions' (T 2.3.1.17, SBN 406) that are as equally causally necessary as chains constituted by physical causes alone. In this section, the subsequent one, and the parallel section in the first *Enquiry* (EHU 8, SBN 80–103), Hume argues for determinism *and* for the possibility of free will – and thus his form of compatibilism – by arguing that there is a chain of necessary causes resulting in every voluntary action.[2] This supports Waldow's contention that even though, for Hume, norms of justice are an artifice that are *freely* created by us, they and their effects are nonetheless *natural* in the sense that they are the product of a necessary causal chain with human nature among the crucial prior links.

Relatedly, Waldow's analysis of this variety of Humean naturalness, though apt, could have been clarified further. One issue is how Waldow defines human nature. If human nature, or our 'original make-up,' as Waldow puts it, varies significantly across individual humans, then widely varying – and indeed contrary – attributes/capacities can result from causal chains originating in it, some of which are unique or at least *not at all typical* for the species. For instance, if my nature involves a cognitive disability that hinders my capacity to sympathize, then causal chains will lead from this nature to attributes/capacities that are not shared by others, or by typical humans. On Waldow's interpretation of Hume's definition of naturalness, these attributes/capacities would appear to be nonetheless natural, despite being opposed to other natural attributes/capacities, like perhaps those surrounding justice.

The tempting thought at this juncture is to specify human nature in a way that isolates the *typical* original qualities of members of the species, especially given that the idea of human nature itself already implies that there is a paradigm. Indeed, Waldow's discussion implicitly relies on the assumption of typicality. Throughout, Waldow uses the plurals 'we' and 'our,' like when she writes about 'our original psychological and physiological make-up' and 'our capacity for biased sympathy' (Waldow 2020, 105). I take it the idea is that there is something that *we*, the species of humans, share, in the sense that the typical members have it. This becomes explicit later in the chapter, as Waldow writes that 'for Hume something counts as natural if it is an effect of human nature's *regular* functioning' (Waldow 2020, 108; my italics); that 'an attribute/capacity is natural if it develops as a causal effect of the *regular* functioning of an original attribute/capacity of human nature' (Waldow 2020, 117; my italics); and that we should understand 'the claim that we naturally develop the capacity for impartial moral judgments as referring to the *regularity* with which humans can be perceived to acquire this capacity' (Waldow 2020, 117–118; my italics). This qualifier addresses my concern –

though it spawns further worries about a looming regress – but ideally it would have been included and discussed at the outset.

As Hume makes clear in the aforementioned sections, his determinism flows from his unified account of causation and causal necessity; namely, his view that causes and effects are those members of kinds that we observe to be constantly conjoined and that we experience with a feeling of necessity, such that we feel it simultaneous with expecting a member of the one kind upon observing a corresponding member of the other. This view applies to anything that fits the bill, whether physical, mental, or otherwise. Kind membership is crucial here, just as it is for typicality, such that if human nature *were not typified*, then the causal story Waldow attributes to Hume would not get off the ground. This adds support for Waldow's contention, as it integrates the definition of naturalness she attributes to Hume – the one that *includes* the qualifier about typicality or regularity – with his broader framework.

2. Waldow on the Naturalness of Our Capacity for Reflective Moral Judgment in Hume

In the second section of the chapter, Waldow applies her analysis of this variety of Humean naturalness to Hume's account of our capacity for reflective moral judgment. As noted, Waldow maintains that Hume holds that our sympathy is biased and must be corrected for us to make reflective judgments that are about justice. Waldow argues that Hume holds that since we cannot simply take the perspective of any individual that we sympathize with as *the* correct one, we must instead enter into a 'common' or 'general point of view' that 'overlooks' our perspective and those of others (Waldow 2020, 108). This correction process, Waldow argues, is analogous to the process by which Hume holds that our minds generate visual judgments. Like Berkeley, Hume holds that we directly visually perceive only two-dimensional arrays of colored points, and that we arrive at our three-dimensional judgments via a corrective process subsequent to experience.[3]

Waldow repeatedly labels the process by which biased sympathy is corrected to generate reflective moral judgments as *causal*, thereby taking herself to be arguing against those who hold that sympathy for Hume is the simple process by which we repeat the feelings and thoughts of others in ourselves. Waldow takes Hume's case of virtue in rags (T 3.3.1.19, SBN 584) to illustrate her interpretation nicely. Even though a person may be unable to exercise their virtue due to the circumstances they face – these are the rags – we still can judge them *as virtuous* because our causal reasoning capacities enable us to infer what they *would* do, *were* they to be in the right circumstances. Waldow emphasizes that the correction of biased sympathy to generate reflective moral judgments like these is a form of communication that requires evaluation, negotiation, and deliberation, even if all of this is

internalized in a given mind. In this way, Waldow's position is that properly moral sentiment, for Hume, is affective yet reason-like *but also* grounded in sensory and social capacities, such that the concept of reasons without those bases is somewhat incomprehensible. Given that human nature is partially constituted by these sensory and social capacities, the fact that moral sentiment is grounded in them makes moral sentiment natural for Hume according to Waldow.

I find myself agreeing with Waldow's picture at a general level of abstraction, although I would have emphasized that Hume holds that the 'common' or 'general point of view' concerns the perspective of the 'person himself, whose character is examin'd; or that of persons, who have a connexion with him' (T 3.3.1.30, SBN 591). However, at the same time, I have a serious concern. It is that, at the level of finer detail, Waldow has not made it sufficiently clear how *exactly* she understands Hume's account of causal reasoning to interface with his views on perception, on sympathy, on the process by which biased sympathy is corrected so that we can assume the common or general point of view, and on the generation of reflective moral judgments. There is often a fair bit of slippage when Waldow engages with passages from Hume's texts, and there are ambiguities in Waldow's descriptions of Hume's positions, and this slippage and ambiguity makes these things unclear. I will give two examples. Here is the first:

> Here, as much as when discussing sympathy as a capacity that is crucially implicated in moral judgment, he invokes the language of cause and effect, thereby stressing the mechanical nature of the process through which we become aware of, and participate in, the mental states of others: 'When I see the *effects* of passion in the voice and gesture of any person, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself' (T 3.3.1.7, SBN 576). On his account, sympathy regularly links a certain kind of cause (another person's expressions of her feelings and beliefs) with a certain kind of effect (the sharing of these feelings and beliefs). (Waldow 2020, 107)

Yet, when I inspect the quote provided, Hume seems to be asserting that when he observes 'the effects of passion in the voice and gesture of any person', his mind generates a 'lively idea of the passion' that is causing the changes in their voice and gesture. We know from Book 1, Part 3 of the *Treatise* (and the first *Enquiry*) that Hume is here referring to a belief with 'lively idea,' and that this belief is produced by the understanding reasoning *causally*. Then, Hume reports, his mind 'converts' this belief of the person's passion 'into the passion itself' – that is, Hume is caused to have a passion resembling the one that he believes the person has. Contra Waldow, it does not seem to be the case that it is Hume's view that it is *sympathy* that links the person's voice and gestures to the passion that Hume experiences. Rather, this quote indicates that causal inference generates the belief in their passion,

and that sympathy could *only* enter at that juncture to produce a similar passion in Hume. And this passion that Hume experiences is an impression, like all passions, not the sharing of a belief, which is an idea. This conforms with the context of the quote, too.

Another example comes when Waldow discusses virtue in rags:

> In our concrete example, Hume's reference to the existence of general rules indicates that the judge, who is able to perceive that another person's virtue is in rags, must have experienced many times before that virtuous character traits tend to produce beneficial effects. Therefore, the current situation has the following effect on her thinking: 'Where a character is, in every respect fitted to be beneficial to society, the imagination passes easily from the cause to the effect, without considering that there are still some circumstances wanting to render the cause a compleate one' (T 3.3.1.20, SBN 585). The cause that Hume here mentions (i.e. the character trait that is fitted to benefit society) would be complete if it had its usual effect: the actual benefit of society. But in our example, this effect is absent due to the particular circumstances of the person under consideration. The imagination nonetheless responds to this unusual situation by adding to the cause (beneficial character trait) the idea of the effect (actual benefit), because it follows the usual pattern of perception. In this way, our experiences turn into sources for general rules ('characters fitted to the benefit of society are virtuous') and provide us with guidance when we meet with unusual constellations of events. (Waldow 2020, 112)

Waldow takes this to show that Hume holds that 'we consider experiences with people whom we have met in a broad range of circumstances, and incorporate these experiences into our character judgments, thereby factoring in the causal constellations characteristic of the type of situation we are currently concerned with' (Waldow 2020, 113). But the question is what *exactly* the character judgments are, for Hume, on Waldow's view. Waldow describes the imagination as 'adding to the cause,' which is a 'beneficial character trait,' 'the idea of the effect,' which is the 'actual benefit.' There are several ways to interpret Waldow here. One option is that the imagination, which is the faculty responsible for causal reasoning on Hume's view, generates a belief that the person would cause certain effects were they not in rags, and *then* a character judgment arises *subsequently* that is identical to the sentiments that arise from sympathy. A second option is the same, except that the character judgment is not the subsequent sentiments but rather a *representation* – perhaps a belief – about the character being beneficial. Yet, neither of these options fit neatly with Waldow's subsequent assertions that 'character judgments are best understood as habituated assessments of our first-order sympathies' (Waldow 2020, 116).

The details of Waldow's understanding of this part of Hume's psychology are important for several reasons, some of which are important to her project. First, Waldow asserts that judging others' moral virtues on the basis of reflective sympathy must be 'sufficiently cognitive to satisfy the

normative demands of morality' (Waldow 2020, 114), but it is not clear if this is Hume's view about the demands of morality or her own. Second, and relatedly, if Waldow holds that Hume's view is that reflective moral judgments are generated by causal reasoning, then Waldow must hold that Hume categorizes these moral judgments as *beliefs* since beliefs (so-called 'causal beliefs'[4]) are the products of causal reasoning on Hume's view (see T 1.3, SBN 69–179). This would immediately put Waldow in contrast with those who interpret Hume as a non-cognitivist about moral judgment.[5] Third, until we have a clearer picture of Waldow's account of Hume's psychology, it is hard to evaluate her claim that she disagrees with those who hold that sympathy for Hume is merely fellow-feeling (Waldow 2020, 111). Fourth, Waldow argues that she interprets Hume's account of reflective moral judgment as perceptual, but it is not clear what is being perceived or how the perceptual element differentiates her interpretation from others.

Yet, I must be clear: the sort of fine-grained analysis I would like to have seen on these fronts is *not* necessary for several key parts of Waldow's project. The core of Waldow's project is unaffected. For example, the fulfillment of what I am requesting is not necessary for Waldow to *rightly* assert that

> processes of character judgment involve a complex interplay of a variety of cognitive capacities. We do not simply judge in accordance with what we feel, when sympathizing with a virtuous person's beliefs and feelings; nor do we simply take on the opinions and feelings of the people who are affected by the person we wish to judge. Rather, we consider experiences with people whom we have met in a broad range of circumstances, and incorporate these experiences into our character judgments, thereby factoring in the causal constellations characteristic of the type of situation we are currently concerned with. (Waldow 2020, 113)

This is why I broadly agree with Waldow, despite being concerned about the granularity of her analysis in other respects.

3. Waldow Supports Her Case with an Interpretation of Hume's Essay 'A Dialogue'

Waldow tells us that her goal in the third section is to buttress her interpretation against those who maintain that Hume holds that our social interactions and negotiations are *necessary* for the development of our capacity for reflective moral judgment. Indeed, as Waldow notes (Waldow 2020, 118), some of these commentators maintain that Hume's view is that our capacity for reflective moral judgment is not natural precisely because of the role that social interactions and negotiations must play in its formation.

Focusing primarily on Hume's essay 'A Dialogue,' Waldow argues to the contrary that Hume's view is that the social capacities involved in these social interactions and negotiations are themselves 'constitutively

dependent on the operations of a well-functioning sympathetic mechanism' (Waldow 2020, 118), which is itself part of 'our originally sympathetic human nature' (Waldow 2020, 125), thereby making the social capacities natural by Hume's definition.[6] For the same reason, since the social capacities are natural, so is the capacity for reflective moral judgment, given that it arises from a 'causal process' (Waldow 2020, 125) from them. This conforms with Waldow's preceding argumentation about Hume's definition of this variety of naturalness.

Waldow argues that the 'Dialogue' finds Hume relying on the same account of our capacity for reflective moral judgment from the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry*, except that his focus in the 'Dialogue' is on the different social and cultural environments that we find ourselves in, as well as how they impact our judgments. The 'Dialogue' is where Hume 'is concerned with our capacity to judge moral practices as they occur across different times and places, thereby providing us with the materials needed to evaluate the significance of social interactions and the communication of historically and culturally situated norms for the development of our moral capacities' (Waldow 2020, 119). Waldow clarifies that it is her position that sympathy in its biased form is never wholly replaced by an entirely austere reflective mechanism; rather, biased sympathy is progressively refined through our engagement with history and culture – 'sympathy effectuates a development through which more refined moral capacities naturally arise' (Waldow 2020, 126).

Along the way, Waldow explains 'how Hume can plausibly claim that the contents of virtue can vary across different historical and cultural contexts, while at the same time claiming that the principles of morality are universal' (Waldow 2020, 120). With supplementation from his essay 'Of the Standard of Taste,' Waldow argues that Hume argues that 'the way in which we respond to the qualities of agreeableness and usefulness is universal; variation only arises with respect to the *contents* of what we deem agreeable and useful in our judgments of virtue' (Waldow 2020, 123).[7]

On my view, Waldow's analysis of Hume's 'Dialogue' is plausible and corroborates her interpretation in the ways she notes. However, given that Hume's 'Dialogue' does not provide decisive evidence about Hume's views on what constitutes naturalness, I would expect that Waldow's interlocutors – those who worry about whether Hume holds that our capacity for reflective moral judgment is natural for the aforementioned reasons – would seek to reject Waldow's prior argumentation as their primary method of rebuttal. I do not think any of the claims that Waldow makes about the 'Dialogue' *that are relevant to her overall aims* could be rebutted without heavy support from the other texts where Hume more explicitly develops his account of our capacity for reflective moral judgment, his views on naturalness and artifice, and so on.

To conclude, Waldow's chapter on Hume in *Experienced Embodied* has several core contentions. First, it is *natural* by Hume's lights for humans to be able to make reflective moral judgments via their capacity for reflective sympathy, and it is natural in a way that is neither merely instinctive nor merely acquired. Second, Hume holds that human *social experience*, which requires (apparent) embodiment, is necessary for the capacity for reflective sympathy and moral judgment, but this does not undermine its naturalness. Third, it is Hume's view that we are thoroughly causally enmeshed and yet *free* to determine ourselves as *moral agents*. And fourth, Hume argues that our *sentimental* capacities and our (causal) *cognitive* capacities are both required for us to judge morally and thus come to possess *reasons*.

Waldow does *not* succeed in rejecting the 'traditional epistemological route so dominant in treatments of early modern conceptions of experience' (Waldow 2020, 1) but only because she effectively shows that Hume's epistemology of morals is embodied, is social, and is both cognitive and sentimental. This should open up 'a new Scene of Thought' (HL 3.2) for those of us working on these issues who are too wedded to the traditional first-personal interpretative approach to Hume's epistemology.[8]

Notes

1. References to Hume's *Treatise* are to Hume (2007b), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, hereafter cited in the text as 'T', followed by book, part, section, paragraph number, and to Hume (1978), *Treatise*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, 2nd ed., cited as 'SBN', followed by page number.
2. References to Hume's first *Enquiry* are to Hume (2007a), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican, here cited in the text as 'EHU', followed by section number, and to Hume (1975), *Enquiry*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, 3rd ed., cited as 'SBN', followed by page number. By 'compatibilism', I mean any view according to which fully determined actions can be free.
3. For a summary of Hume's position, see T 1.3.9.11 (SBN 112), as well as T 1.2.5 (SBN 53–65).
4. For discussion, see Enç (1985), Sainsbury (2005), and Owen (2008).
5. Such as J.L. Mackie (1980), Simon Blackburn (1993), and James Chamberlain (2020). For rejections of the non-cognitivist interpretation, see Garrett (1997, ch. 9), and Cohon (1997).
6. References to Hume's essay 'A Dialogue' are to Hume (1975), 'A Dialogue' in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, eds. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, 3rd ed., 324–343.
7. This reference to Hume's essay 'Of the Standard of Taste' is to Hume (1985), 'Of the Standard of Taste,' in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, 226–249.
8. This reference to Hume's *Letters* is to Hume (1932), *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig, here cited in the text as 'HL', followed by letter, page number.

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