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5 Hume's anatomy of virtue

I never balance between the virtuous and vicious course of life; but I am sensible, that, to a well-disposed mind, every advantage is on the side of the former.

– David Hume, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (11.20/140)¹

In his *Treatise of Human Nature* Hume makes clear that it is his aim to make moral philosophy more scientific and properly grounded on experience and observation.² The “experimental” approach to philosophy, Hume warns his readers, is “abstruse,” “abstract” and “speculative” in nature. It depends on careful and exact reasoning that foregoes the path of an “easy” philosophy, which relies on a more direct appeal to our passions and sentiments.³ Hume justifies this approach by way of an analogy concerning the relevance of anatomy to painting. “The anatomist,” he says, “ought never to emulate the painter.” At the same time, the painter cannot afford to ignore the anatomist:

An anatomist . . . is admirably fitted to give advice to a painter . . . We must have an exact knowledge of the parts, their situation and connexion, before we can design with any elegance or correctness. And thus the most abstruse speculations concerning human nature, however cold and uninteresting, become subservient to *practical morality*; and may render this latter science more correct in its precepts, and more persuasive in its exhortations.⁴

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As these remarks suggest, Hume's anatomy of virtue is not without its own practical aims and objectives. It is advanced with a view to identifying and carefully delineating the true foundations of morality in human nature and correcting our practices in light of this. With this improvement in our understanding of the nature and basis of virtue, we can better appreciate the way in which virtue secures happiness for ourselves and others and may also avoid the distortions and corruptions of morality by religious superstition.

PASSION, CHARACTER, AND THE MECHANICS OF VIRTUE

Hume introduces his account of the nature of virtue and vice in the context of his discussion "Of the Passions" in Book II of the *Treatise*. According to Hume, the way in which virtue and vice are related to moral evaluation must be understood with reference to the causal mechanism that generates the indirect passions of love and hate, and pride and humility. The passions themselves, he claims, are pleasant or painful feelings, love and pride being pleasant and hate and humility being painful. The *object* of these passions is always a person or thinking being.⁵ In the case of love and hate it is some other person, and in the case of pride and humility it is oneself. The *causes* of these passions, although they vary greatly, must be "either parts of ourselves, or something nearly related to us."⁶ For the cause to produce the relevant indirect passion it must (a) be related to the person in the appropriate way, and (b) have an *independent* pleasant or painful tendency, one that is relevantly similar to the pleasant or painful quality of the indirect passion that it gives rise to (e.g. for a house to give pride it must itself be found pleasant and belong to me or my family). Hume describes the principles involved in the production of these passions with particular reference to the role of sympathy and the association of impressions and ideas.⁷ He then proceeds to categorize the various qualities and features of things that may serve as causes of our indirect passions.

There are, according to Hume, four main categories of objects or features of human beings that serve to generate the indirect passions: our wealth, external goods, or property; our immediate relatives or people who are closely related to us; our bodily qualities or attributes (i.e. beauty and deformity); and, most important of all, our qualities of mind or character traits.⁸ Those character traits or mental

qualities which produce an independent pleasure in ourselves and others also generate love or pride (i.e. depending on whom these qualities or traits belong to). Character traits or mental qualities of this nature are virtues. Similarly, those mental qualities or character traits which are found painful will produce hate or humility and, as such, are deemed vices. Well into Book III Hume summarizes his account:

We have already observ'd that, moral distinctions depend entirely on certain peculiar sentiments of pain and pleasure, and that whatever mental quality in ourselves or others gives us satisfaction, by survey or reflection, is of course virtuous, as every thing of this nature, that gives uneasiness, is vicious. Now since every quality in ourselves or others, which gives pleasure, always creates pride or love; as every one, that produces uneasiness, excites humility and hatred: It follows, that these two particulars are to be consider'd as equivalent, with regard to our mental qualities, *virtue* and the power of producing love or pride, *vice* and the power of producing humility and hatred. In every case, therefore, we may judge of the one by the other and may pronounce any quality of the mind virtuous, which causes love or pride; and any one vicious, which causes hatred or humility.⁹

It is Hume's view, therefore, that virtues and vices are pleasurable or painful qualities of mind. By means of the general mechanism that produces the indirect passions, these qualities of mind give rise to that "faint and imperceptible" form of love and hatred which constitutes the moral sentiments.¹⁰ It is by means of this "regular mechanism"¹¹ which generates the moral sentiments, understood as modes of the indirect passions, that human beings are able to distinguish between virtue and vice.

While it is clear that Hume holds that our character traits are capable of generating moral sentiments, whereby we distinguish them as virtuous or vicious, this still leaves us with the question of what character itself consists in.¹² Hume speaks of "character" in two quite different senses. The narrower sense refers to a specific character trait (e.g. honesty, courage, etc.). The wider sense, by contrast, means a person's complete set of moral traits and qualities – that is, her whole set of character traits. It is clear enough that when Hume is speaking of virtues and vices he is referring to specific traits of character, which he takes to be "durable principles of the mind."¹³ What, then, do character traits consist in? In certain

contexts Hume explicitly identifies virtues and vices with specific passions.¹⁴ On this interpretation it is perceptions that constitute the ontological basis of qualities of character – because passions are one kind of perception. A passion, Hume maintains, may become “a settled principle of action” and, as such, may be “the predominant inclination of the soul.”¹⁵ So considered, a passion may serve as an enduring or persisting cause of actions, such that the agent’s will and choices are governed by it.¹⁶ This observation explains the very important and evident connection between character and action.

According to this interpretation, a person’s character may be understood in terms of the structure or pattern of various passions that animate that person and direct her conduct. There are, however, at least two aspects of this account that require some further refinement or qualification. First, Hume does not construe character entirely in terms of its relation to a person’s will and actions. A person’s gestures, mannerisms, and countenance may also betray a passion, even though no intentional action is involved. Not every passion engages the will and leads to intentional action, but it may, nevertheless, be expressed or manifest and, as such, betray qualities of mind that can be found pleasant or painful. Second, Hume maintains that our natural abilities and talents (e.g. intelligence, imagination etc.) constitute important qualities of mind and that they are also liable to arouse our moral sentiments of approval and disapproval. So considered, these qualities of mind must be included among a person’s virtues and vices and as aspects of her moral character. (Hume’s views concerning the natural abilities are discussed further below, pp. 000–0.) Clearly, then, Hume’s account of character cannot be interpreted entirely in terms of the relation between passions and intentional action.

Although action is not the only evidence that we have concerning a person’s character, it is, nevertheless, the principal sign of character that we have available to us. The immediate relevance of action is that it reveals the nature of the agent’s motives and qualities of mind, and thereby arouses moral sentiments which are the basis of moral evaluation.¹⁷ In several passages Hume emphasizes the (distinct and further) point that people are responsible for their actions and the motives that produced them only insofar as they reveal *enduring* qualities of mind or character traits. In the following passage in Book III of the *Treatise* he pursues this point:

If any *action* be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character. Actions themselves, not proceeding from any constant principle, have no influence on love or hatred, pride or humility; and consequently are never consider'd in morality.¹⁸

He continues:

This reflection is self-evident, and deserves to be attended to, as being of the utmost importance in the present subject. We are never to consider any single action in our enquiries concerning the origin of morals; but only the quality or character from which the action proceeded. These alone are *durable* enough to affect our sentiments concerning the person.¹⁹

According to Hume it is a matter of "the utmost importance" for moral philosophy that our action be indicative of *durable* qualities of mind if a person is to be held accountable for it.²⁰ Although this claim is crucial to his moral philosophy – and fundamental to his commitment to virtue ethics – it is a claim that has puzzled and perplexed many of Hume's commentators, while others have simply ignored or dismissed it. What, then, is the basis of this puzzling and controversial claim? In order to understand Hume's position we need to return to his account of the indirect passions. Hume claims that for an indirect passion to be aroused in us, the cause of the passion (i.e. some item or feature which we find independently pleasurable or painful) must stand in some relevant or appropriate relations to the object of the passion (i.e. oneself or someone else). In general, the relationship between the cause and the object of the passion must be close.²¹ The quality or feature must be "part of ourselves, or something nearly related to us" if it is to produce these passions.²² Related to this point, Hume also notes that the relationship between the quality or feature which gives rise to the passion and the person who is the object of the passion must not be "casual or inconsistent."²³

Hume describes what happens when the relationship between the cause and the object of the passions is brief and temporary in the following passage (where he is specifically concerned with pride):

What is casual and inconsistent gives but little joy, and less pride. We are not so much satisfy'd with the thing itself; and are still less apt to feel any new

degrees of self-satisfaction upon its account. We foresee and anticipate its change by the imagination; which makes us little satisfy'd with the thing: We compare it to ourselves, whose existence is more durable; by which means its inconsistency appears still greater. It seems ridiculous to infer an excellency in ourselves from an object, which is of so much shorter duration, and attends us during so small a part of our existence.²⁴

The language here is closely in accord with the language Hume employs when he is arguing that moral evaluation, interpreted in terms of the generation of moral sentiment, is grounded on character and not action as such.²⁵ The reason for this is that the latter claim, relating to the importance of character for the production of our moral sentiments, is simply a particular application of the more general claim he makes in respect of the importance of the required close and enduring relationship between the causes and objects of our indirect passions. Any object or quality which bears only a casual or inconstant relation to the person or agent will be unable to arouse an indirect passion. Actions by their very nature are "temporary and perishing." Moral sentiments can be generated only when they proceed from something that stands in the required *close and lasting* relation to the agent or person concerned. Only constant and enduring principles of mind satisfy this demand, whereas actions do not. This observation explains the basis of Hume's commitment to virtue ethics as opposed to an action-based theory, and shows that this commitment must itself be understood in terms of Hume's analysis of the mechanism of the indirect passions. It is not possible to separate his virtue theory from his account of the psychology of the passions, as governed by the general principles and operations of sympathy and association.

THE VARIETIES AND VAGARIES OF VIRTUE

Hume's anatomy of virtue suggests two different ways of classifying the virtues and vices. In Book III of the *Treatise* he introduces a fundamental distinction between two kinds of virtue, natural and artificial.²⁶ Some virtues are artificial, as opposed to natural, in the sense that they depend on a contrivance or convention of some kind.²⁷ The conventions concerned, which relate primarily to property and promises, establish the basic rules and obligations of justice.

The just person is one who scrupulously adheres to these rules and fulfills her obligations in this regard. Hume explains this basic distinction in the following terms:

The only difference betwixt the natural virtues and justice lies in this, that the good, which results from the former, arises from every single act, and is the object of some natural passion. Whereas a single act of justice, consider'd in itself, may often be contrary to the public good; and 'tis only the concurrence of mankind, in a general scheme or system of action, which is advantageous.²⁸

While the particular conventions and laws invented by humans to secure peace and social cooperation vary, the basic need or requirement for some such scheme is universal and all schemes of this kind must be judged with reference to the advantages that they secure for the individuals and society concerned. By way of analogy, Hume points out that people in different times and places build their houses in different ways but all structures of this kind are universally required and can be evaluated with reference to the basic needs that they are designed to satisfy.²⁹ In the second *Enquiry* he contrasts the (natural) virtue of benevolence with the (artificial) virtue of justice by means of another analogy, contrasting a wall and a vault. The happiness secured by benevolence is like a wall “which still rises by each stone heaped upon it, and receives increase proportional to the diligence and care of each workman.”³⁰ In contrast with this, happiness secured by justice is better compared with a vault, where each stone must be supported by all the others in the structure and would otherwise “fall to the ground.” In general, Hume’s aim is to point out that there exists a crucial divide between two kinds of virtue, those that do and those that do not depend on the creation and establishment of human conventions. Although the conventions that establish justice arise originally from motives of self-interest, Hume is careful to emphasize the point that we regard these dispositions as *virtues* because of our natural sympathy with the public interest, and it is this that serves as the basis of our *moral* approval of these virtues.³¹

After he introduces the distinction between natural and artificial virtues and vices,³² Hume offers another way of distinguishing and separating the virtues in terms of four particular “sources” of personal merit.

Every quality of mind is denominated virtuous, which gives pleasure by the mere survey; as every quality, which produces pain is call'd vicious. This pleasure and this pain may arise from four different sources. For we reap a pleasure from the view of character, which is naturally fitted to be useful to others, or to the person himself, or which is agreeable to others, or to the person himself.³³

It is an important part of Hume's conception of virtue that he emphasizes that virtue has a self-regarding aspect and should not be considered solely with a view to benevolence.³⁴ Hume employs this fourfold set of distinctions to structure much of his anatomy of virtue, something that is particularly apparent in the second *Enquiry*. Among the qualities that are useful to ourselves are prudence, temperance, frugality, and industry.³⁵ With respect to qualities that are immediately agreeable to ourselves, he mentions cheerfulness, tranquility, and pride.³⁶ Qualities immediately agreeable to others include wit, eloquence, modesty (as opposed to impudence and arrogance), decency, and good manners.³⁷ Of the qualities useful to others the most obvious examples are benevolence and justice.³⁸ Throughout this analysis Hume is concerned to establish that the source of our approval of these virtues or qualities of mind is the sympathy we have for the utility or happiness which they secure for ourselves and our fellow human beings.³⁹

Hume employs his "catalogue of virtues"⁴⁰ to portray several examples or "models" of virtuous characters. In the second *Enquiry* he presents the imaginary example of "Cleanthes," who is described as "a model of perfect virtue."⁴¹ His review of Cleanthes' virtues presents him as possessing a full range of the various kinds of virtue that he has enumerated with respect to those that are immediately agreeable or useful to oneself or others. In other contexts, however, Hume cites real people taken from history – particularly the ancients.⁴² One of the more interesting examples provided is the contrast drawn between Cato and Caesar.

The characters of Caesar and Cato... are both of them virtuous in the strictest sense of the word; but in a different way: Nor are the sentiments entirely the same, which arise from them. The one produces love; the other esteem: The one is amiable; the other awful.⁴³

Hume's general point here is that virtuous individuals vary in the specific kinds of characters and qualities of mind that they may

possess. There is no *single* model or exemplar of the virtuous person, as we find a wide range of types who may satisfy the relevant standard for judging this matter. We should expect, therefore, no convergence on one ideal life of virtue. In this sense Hume may be described as a “pluralist” about virtue, insofar as he rejects any single model or uniform ideal of the virtuous person. In another passage Hume describes the mixed character of Hannibal, where “great virtues [e.g. courage, confidence, prudence, etc.] were balanced by great vices [e.g. cruelty, dishonesty, etc.]”⁴⁴ As this example makes clear, some combination of virtues and vices is generally found in most individuals (i.e. most people possess some subset of the virtues in various degrees and in combination with some subset of the vices in various degrees).⁴⁵

According to Hume’s account experience shows us that there is not only great variation in the way that virtues and vices may be combined and integrated in the same person, there are also complexities and subtleties in the way the individual virtues and vices may manifest themselves in a given person and in particular circumstances. These complexities and subtleties suggest that in many cases there are no simple or sharp boundaries to be drawn between virtue and vice even with respect to *particular* qualities of mind. Hume notes, for example, with respect to the natural virtues, that “all kinds of virtue and vice run inevitably into each other, and may approach by such imperceptible degrees as will make it very difficult, if not absolutely impossible, to determine when one ends, and the other begins . . .”⁴⁶ He denies, however, that the same observation applies to the artificial virtues, where the rules and obligations involved “admit of no such inevitable gradation.” Among the examples Hume offers of virtues that may become excessive and lead eventually to vice are charity and courage. A person, he notes, “is *too good*; when he exceeds his part in society, and carries his attention for others beyond the proper bounds.”⁴⁷ Courage and ambition may take the form of “excessive bravery” or even “ferocity” and result in misery and ruin for all concerned – a weakness that the “military hero” is especially prone to.⁴⁸ “Courage and ambition,” he says, “when not regulated by benevolence, are fit only to make a tyrant and public robber.”⁴⁹ Even cheerfulness, he argues, may be excessive when it lacks any proper cause or occasion.⁵⁰ Although Hume is evidently aware of and sensitive to the issue of

moderation and balance with respect to the virtues, he does not endorse a general doctrine of "the mean" of the kind that can be found in Aristotle's ethics.⁵¹ It is, on the contrary, Hume's view that the issue of moderation and balance varies depending on the specific virtues concerned, and that some virtues more than others are liable to be corrupted or take an "excessive" form when not balanced with a relevant counterpart.⁵²

Hume is also clear that the particular virtues we approve of and care about may vary considerably depending on the particular social and historical circumstances we are placed in. In this regard he contrasts the views of the ancients and the moderns concerning their different ideas of "perfect merit."⁵³ In a similar vein he also notes differences among nations on such matters,⁵⁴ as well as the importance of education and custom relating to this.⁵⁵ In different social and historical conditions, Hume maintains, different virtues will become more prominent and salient.

Particular customs and manners alter the usefulness of qualities: they also alter their merit. Particular situations and accidents have, in some degree, the same influence. He will always be more esteemed, who possesses those talents and accomplishments, which suit his station and profession, than he whom fortune has misplaced in the part which she has assigned him.⁵⁶

In general, Hume emphasizes not only the variable and fragmented nature of virtue, but also its fragility and vulnerability to fortune and contingent circumstances.⁵⁷

All these observations concerning the variation and fragmentation of virtue, as well as its vulnerability to circumstances and fortune, may encourage the view that Hume is a skeptic about virtue and rejects any fixed or reliable standard for identifying and approving of the diverse range of virtues that we encounter in the world and throughout history. Any conclusion of this kind, however, would be mistaken. One of Hume's fundamental concerns in his presentation of his moral philosophy, particularly in his two chief works on this subject, is to show how variation and diversity in our ideas of virtue are consistent with an underlying and universal standard by which we may reliably judge such matters. Although Hume is plainly skeptical about moral systems that aim to reduce the distinction between virtue and vice to a matter of reason alone, without reference to feeling and sentiment, he nevertheless emphatically

rejects any skeptical suggestion that there is no “real distinction” for us to discern.⁵⁸ All moral evaluations, Hume maintains, must be made from “the general point of view.”⁵⁹ Beyond this, our standard of morals, by means of which we may all recognize and distinguish between virtue and vice, depends on our capacity for sympathy and the importance all human beings naturally place on general considerations of utility.⁶⁰

Sympathy, we shall allow, is much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and sympathy for persons remote from us much fainter than with persons near and contiguous; but for this very reason it is necessary for us, in our calm judgments and discourse concerning the characters of men, to neglect all these differences and render our sentiments more public and social . . . The intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general unalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners.⁶¹

Granted that the general point of view enables us to form “calm judgments concerning the characters of men” about which we may reach agreement despite our diverse perspectives and interests, how can Hume account at the same time for “the wide difference” between peoples and nations with regard to their “sentiments of morals”?

Hume’s answer to this question is that we must consider “the first principles” which are shared and common to different peoples, however much their particular practices and sentiments may vary. By way of analogy, he observes:

. . . the Rhine flows north, the Rhone south; yet both spring from the *same* mountain, and are also actuated, in their opposite directions, by the same principle of gravity. The different inclinations of the ground, on which they run, cause all the difference of their courses.⁶²

In the same vein, while morals and manners in different times and among different nations no doubt vary, the basic principles which animate and govern them remain fixed and constant.

. . . the principles upon which men reason in morals are always the same; though the conclusions which they draw are often very different . . . Though many ages have elapsed since the fall of Greece and Rome; though many changes have arrived in religion, language, laws, and customs; none of these revolutions have ever produced any considerable innovation in the primary sentiments of morals, more than in those of external beauty.⁶³

On Hume's account, then, the skeptic is someone who denies that we have any relevant moral standard by which to distinguish virtue from vice. Hume clearly rejects any skepticism of this kind, since he is firmly committed to the existence of a universal standard of virtue and moral excellence grounded on human happiness and utility. Consistent with these commitments, however, Hume grants that in different social and historical circumstances there are (very) different ways of understanding which virtues and vices matter most to us and what sort of conduct or practices are consistent with this more general standard of virtue. Variation and disagreement at this higher level is not evidence, however, that there is no relevant common or shared moral standard.⁶⁴ In taking this line, Hume is able to accommodate some considerable degree of moral relativism consistent with his firm rejection of skepticism.⁶⁵

While it is evident that Hume seeks to explain the foundation of virtue and our approval of it in terms of considerations of utility to the possessor and those who may deal with her, he avoids committing himself to any simple or straight correlation between happiness and a virtuous character. The issues involved are, on his account, more complex and problematic than this. Hume does maintain that "the happiest disposition of the mind is the virtuous."⁶⁶ Two overlapping mechanisms help to sustain this correlation. In the first place, as we have noted, virtue secures love and approval from others, and vice serves to secure the opposite. Through the operation of sympathy, the love and esteem secured by virtue has a "secondary" influence on our own mind and generates a strong concern for our reputation and good name in the world.⁶⁷

By our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world, we bring our own deportment and conduct frequently under review, and consider how they appear in the eyes of those who approach and regard us.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, while the opinion of others is important to us and influences our happiness,⁶⁹ every person's "peace and inward satisfaction" depends primarily on the mind's ability to "bear its own survey."⁷⁰ Even if vice goes undetected by others it will still generate misery and unhappiness for the person who discovers it in himself.

This constant habit of surveying ourselves, as it were, in reflection, keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong, and begets, in noble natures, a certain reverence for themselves as well as others, which is the surest guardian of every virtue.⁷¹

These observations concerning the operations of the passions in human nature, guided by the influence of sympathy and our sociable nature, support the claim that there exists a generally reliable correlation between virtue and happiness, and vice and misery.

Although Hume is committed to this broadly optimistic view about the benefits of virtue for those who possess it, he is careful, nevertheless, to qualify this optimistic outlook and indicate its significant limitations. While virtue, he says, is “undoubtedly the best choice, when it is attainable; yet such is the disorder and confusion of human affairs, that no perfect or regular distribution of happiness and misery is ever, in this life to be expected.”⁷² In this context (i.e. his essay “The Sceptic”) he proceeds to itemize various ways in which our happiness is vulnerable to considerations and factors independent of virtue and vice. He points out, for example, that our bodily health and our mental dispositions may subject us to grief and sadness, even though we may be perfectly virtuous. Beyond this, he acknowledges that we are naturally vulnerable to the negative assessments and hostile dispositions of others, even though these attitudes may not be justified. Moreover, our sympathy and concern for those we are close to (family, friends, etc.) make us vulnerable to sharing any grief or sadness that may befall them.⁷³ On the other side of things, Hume is similarly aware that the vicious individual (e.g. “the sensible knave”) may escape the censure of others and may even escape any source of remorse or shame by failing to reflect on his own character and conduct.⁷⁴ There is no way to ensure the vicious will always be unhappy. In short, there is for Hume no perfect moral harmony to be expected in this life such that the virtuous can be insulated against the vagaries of fortune and the contingencies of human existence. Indeed, Hume firmly rejects any such outlook as illusory and plainly at odds with human experience. The correlations that exist between virtue and happiness and vice and misery are, nevertheless, tight enough to sustain and support moral practice and social life.

VIRTUE, VOLUNTARINESS, AND THE NATURAL ABILITIES

An important and controversial feature of Hume's account of virtue is his particular understanding of the relevance of voluntariness for virtue and vice. This aspect of Hume's account is, obviously, intimately connected with his views on the subject of free will and moral responsibility.⁷⁵ There are two basic issues that arise in this sphere that need to be carefully distinguished.

- (1) Does Hume hold that all aspects of virtue for which a person is subject to moral evaluation (i.e. approval and disapproval) must be voluntarily *expressed*? That is to say, are virtues and vices to be assessed entirely on the basis of an agent's deliberate choices and intentional actions?
- (2) Granted that virtues and vices are to be understood in terms of a person's pleasant or painful qualities of mind, to what extent are these traits of character voluntarily *acquired* (i.e. acquired through the agent's own will and choices)?

Hume's answer to both questions is clear. He denies that voluntary or intentional action is the sole basis on which we may assess a person's virtues and vices. Furthermore he also maintains that moral character is, for the most part, involuntarily acquired. The second claim does not, of course, commit him to the first. Nor does the first commit him to the second, since a person could voluntarily acquire traits that, once acquired, may be involuntarily expressed or manifest. Plainly the combination of claims that Hume embraces on this issue commits him to a position that radically deflates the significance and importance of voluntariness in relation to virtue – certainly in comparison with some familiar alternative accounts (e.g. as in Aristotle).

Let us consider, first, the relevance of voluntariness to the expression of character. As we have already noted, Hume does take the view that actions serve as the principal way in which we learn about a person's character.⁷⁶ Action is produced by the causal influence of our desires and willings. The interpretation and evaluation of action must, therefore, take note of the particular intention with which an action was undertaken. Failing this, we are liable to attribute

character traits to the agent that he does not possess (and consequently unjustly praise or blame him).⁷⁷ Although intention and action do have a significant and important role to play in the assessment of moral character, Hume also maintains that there are other channels through which character may be expressed. More specifically, a virtuous or vicious character can be distinguished by reference to a person's "wishes and sentiments," as well as by the nature of the person's will.⁷⁸ Feelings, desires and sentiments manifest themselves in a wide variety of ways – not just through willing and acting. A person's "countenance and conversation,"⁷⁹ deportment or "carriage,"⁸⁰ gestures,⁸¹ or simply her look and expression, may all serve as signs of character and qualities of mind that may be found to be pleasant or painful.⁸² Although we may enjoy some limited degree of control over our desires and passions, as well as how they are expressed, for the most part our emotional states and attitudes arise in us involuntarily and may even be manifest or expressed *against* our will.

We may now turn to the further question concerning Hume's understanding of the way in which virtues and vices are acquired and, in particular, to what extent they are shaped and conditioned by our own choices. It is Hume's view that, by and large, our character is conditioned and determined by factors independent of our will. In the passages entitled "Of liberty and necessity"⁸³ he argues that not only do we observe how certain characters will act in specific circumstances, we also observe how circumstances condition character. Among the factors that determine character, he claims, are bodily condition, age, sex, occupation and social station, climate, religion, government, and education.⁸⁴ These various causal influences account for "the diversity of characters, prejudices, and opinions."⁸⁵ Any accurate moral philosophy, it is argued, must acknowledge and take note of the forces that "mould the human mind from its infancy" and which account for "the gradual change in our sentiments and inclinations" through time.⁸⁶ The general force of these observations is to establish that "the fabric and constitution of our mind no more depends on our choice, than that of our body."⁸⁷

Critics of Hume's position on this subject will argue that if a person has little or no control over the factors that shapes her character then virtue and vice really would be, in these circumstances,

matters of mere good or bad fortune and no more a basis for *moral* concern than bodily beauty or ugliness. If people are responsible for the characters their actions and feelings express, then they must have *acquired* that character voluntarily.⁸⁸ Hume's reply to this line of criticism is that we can perfectly well distinguish virtue and vice without making any reference to the way that character is acquired. Our moral sentiments are reactions or responses to the moral qualities and character traits that people manifest in their behavior and conduct, and thus need not be withdrawn simply because people do not choose or voluntarily acquire these moral characteristics. Hume does recognize, of course, that we do have some limited ability to amend and alter our character.⁸⁹ In particular, Hume acknowledges that we can cultivate and improve our moral character, in some measure, through self-criticism and self-understanding. Nevertheless, the points he emphasizes are that all such efforts are limited in their scope and effect and that, beyond this, "a man must be, before-hand, tolerably virtuous" for such efforts of "reformation" to be undertaken in the first place.⁹⁰

Hume's views about the relationship between virtue and voluntariness do much to explain one of the most controversial aspects of his theory of virtue: his view that the natural abilities should be incorporated into the virtues and vices.⁹¹ With respect to this issue he makes two key points. The first is that natural abilities (i.e. intelligence, imagination, memory, wit, etc.) and moral virtues more narrowly understood are "equally mental qualities."⁹² Second, both of them "equally produce pleasure" and thus have "an equal tendency to produce the love and esteem of mankind."⁹³ In common life, people "naturally praise or blame whatever pleases or displeases them and thus regard penetration as much a virtue as justice."⁹⁴ Beyond all this, as already noted, any distinction between the natural abilities and moral virtues cannot be based on the consideration that the natural abilities are for the most part involuntarily acquired, since this also holds true for the moral virtues more narrowly conceived. It is, nevertheless, Hume's view that the voluntary/involuntary distinction helps to explain "why moralists have invented" the distinction between natural abilities and moral virtues. Unlike moral qualities, natural abilities "are almost invariable by any art or industry."⁹⁵ In contrast with this, moral qualities, "or at least, the actions that proceed from them, may be chang'd by the motives of rewards and

punishments, praise and blame."⁹⁶ In this way, according to Hume, the significance of the voluntary/involuntary distinction is largely limited to our concern with the *regulation of conduct* in society. To confine our understanding of virtue and vice to these frontiers is, however, to distort and misrepresent its very nature and foundation in human life and experience.

MORAL SENSE, "MORAL BEAUTY," AND
MORAL DEVELOPMENT

On the face of it, Hume's understanding of the relationship between virtue and moral sense (i.e. our ability to feel moral sentiments and draw moral distinctions on this basis)⁹⁷ seems straightforward. As we have noted, Hume defines virtue and vice as qualities of mind that give rise to moral sentiments of approval and disapproval.⁹⁸ Hume's account of virtue leans heavily on the analogy of "moral beauty."⁹⁹ The suggestion that virtue may be understood in terms of "moral beauty" presents a number of puzzles about how exactly Hume understands the relationship between virtue and moral sense. According to Hume's analysis, both beauty and virtue affect people pleurably, and that pleasure gives rise to some form of love or approval. Clearly, however, a beautiful person need not herself have any sense of beauty or deformity in order to be beautiful or become and object of love produced by the pleasure she occasions. These observations raise the question of whether a person can be virtuous if they lack *moral sense*? That is, for a person to be capable of virtue must she possess moral sense? Surprisingly, Hume does not provide any clear statement about where he stands on this important issue.

This puzzle relates to another more general concern about identifying those individuals who may or may not be capable of virtue or vice (and who are appropriate objects of our moral sentiments). Hume points out that "animals have little or no sense of virtue and vice."¹⁰⁰ It does not follow from this, however, that animals lack pleasant or painful qualities of mind. Moreover, Hume makes clear that animals "are endow'd with thought and reason as well as men"¹⁰¹ and that they are no less capable of sympathy and passions such as love and hate.¹⁰² It cannot be Hume's view that animals are incapable of virtue and vice simply because they acquire their mental traits involuntarily, since Hume denies that voluntariness

serves as a relevant basis for attributing virtues or vices. Finally, while it is true that human beings are superior to animals in respect of reason, Hume maintains that differences of this kind can also be found from one person to another.¹⁰³ In light of this we may also ask if Hume's account of virtue includes "mad-men"¹⁰⁴ and small children. These individuals are obviously people and, as such, according to Hume's principles, they too possess mental qualities that may be found pleasant or painful and could be regarded as legitimate objects of moral sentiment – however incapacitated or limited they may be in respect of reason, moral sense, and so on.

It may be argued, consistent with Hume's commitments, that there is more to be said about the absence of moral sense in animals, the insane and human infants as this relates to their incapacity for virtue. More specifically, it may be argued that there is a deeper and more intimate connection between virtue and moral sense than Hume's remarks appear to suggest. Our general capacity of moral sense (i.e. to generate and entertain moral sentiments of approval and disapproval) has an important role to play in the way that we *acquire* the virtues and *sustain* them. Hume's own remarks relating to the way in which the artificial virtues are established and maintained provides some basis for seeing why this may be so. As already noted, Hume describes in some detail how the conventions of justice arise through an original motive of self-interest and the way in which we come to *moralize* them. According to Hume, children quickly learn the advantages of following the established conventions of their society and the importance of their "reputation" for justice.¹⁰⁵ Children learn, through the influence of custom and education, to see any "violations as base and infamous."¹⁰⁶ It is, therefore, through the channel and mechanism of moral sentiment that the artificial virtues are established and secured.

Although Hume has less to say about the role of moral sentiment in relation to the natural virtues, similar observations would seem to apply. As a child grows up and matures, she is made aware that her mental qualities, as they affect others and herself, will inevitably give rise to moral sentiments in the people she comes into contact with. When a person is generous and benevolent, not only will she be treated well by others, she will become aware that she is being treated well *because* other people approve of her virtue. Through the influence of sympathy, the approval of others will itself

become an independent source of her own happiness and provide further grounds for feeling proud or approving of herself. This entire process of becoming aware of the moral sentiments of others, and then “surveying ourselves as we appear to others,” serves to develop the natural as well as the artificial virtues.¹⁰⁷ According to Hume this disposition to “survey ourselves” and seek our own “peace and satisfaction” is “the surest guardian of every virtue.”¹⁰⁸ In light of these considerations, it may be argued that moral reflection, where we direct our moral sense at ourselves and review our own character and conduct from a general point of view, serves as a master virtue, whereby a person is able to cultivate and sustain other, more particular virtues. An agent who entirely lacks this disposition will be shameless and such a person will inevitably lack all those virtues that depend on moral reflection for their development and stability.¹⁰⁹

Having established that there is an intimate relationship – we may describe it as an “internal” relationship – between virtue and moral sense, whereby the development and reliability of the former requires a capacity for the latter, we may now return to the question of why animals, the insane, and human infants are incapable of virtue and vice (and, as such, inappropriate objects of moral sentiment). If moral sense is required for the full development and stability of a virtuous character, we must ask what is required to develop and preserve moral sense. Although Hume is often read as presenting a “thin” account of moral sense, taking it to be constituted simply by pleasant and painful feelings of a peculiar kind,¹¹⁰ this reading does not do justice to the full complexity and subtlety of his position.¹¹¹ In a number of contexts, most notably in the first section of the second *Enquiry*, Hume argues that the moral evaluation of character and conduct involves the activity of both reason and sentiment.

The final sentence, it is probable, which pronounces characters and actions amiable or odious, praiseworthy or blameable . . . depends on some internal sense or feeling; which nature has made universal in the whole species . . . But in order to pave the way for such sentiment, and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions should be made, just conclusions drawn, distinct comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained.¹¹²

Hume explains this feature of his moral system by returning to the analogy of "moral beauty."

The kind of beauty we associate with the "finer arts," in contrast with natural beauty where our approbation is immediately aroused without the aid of any reasoning, also requires a considerable amount reasoning "in order to feel the proper sentiment; and a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and reflection."¹¹³ Hume argues that in a similar manner "moral beauty . . . demands the assistance of our intellectual faculties, in order to give it a suitable influence on the human mind."¹¹⁴ The sort of "intellectual" activities required include, not only learning from experience the specific tendencies of certain kinds of conduct, as well as the ability to distinguish accurately among them, but also the ability to evaluate character and conduct from "some steady and general point of view."¹¹⁵ Our ability to enter this general point of view and evaluate a person's character and conduct from this perspective, is essential, on Hume's account, if we are to be able to formulate a "standard of merit" that we can *all* share and refer to.¹¹⁶

The significance of this account of how our moral sense depends on the activity and influence of our "intellectual faculties" in relation to virtue is clear. Insofar as the cultivation and sustenance of virtue depends on moral sense, it follows that virtue also requires the intellectual qualities involved in the exercise of moral sense. An animal, an infant, or an insane person obviously lacks the ability to perform the intellectual tasks involved in producing moral sentiment. Such an individual will not be capable of acquiring those virtues that depend on moral sentiment. It follows that we cannot expect the virtues that are so dependent to be present when the relevant psychological capacities and mechanisms are absent, damaged, or underdeveloped.

The account provided of the relationship between virtue and moral sense, drawing from material provided by Hume, suggests a revision of his account of virtue is required. Virtues and vices should be understood not simply in terms of pleasurable and painful qualities of mind that arouse moral sentiments in the spectator, as this fails to explain the relevant dependency of virtue on moral sense (i.e. the genesis of virtue through the activity of moral sense). Among its failings, the broader account, as we have noted, requires Hume to include the natural abilities as being on "the same footing"

as the moral virtues and leaves him unable to provide a plausible, principled distinction between those individuals who are or are not appropriate objects of our moral sentiments. A revised account of virtue would narrow its scope: virtues and vices are those pleasurable or painful qualities of mind that are capable of being cultivated or diminished, sustained, or inhibited, through the activity and exercise of moral reflection and moral sense. This way of delineating virtue and vice, and narrowing its scope, provides a principled way of distinguishing between natural abilities and moral virtues, as well as distinguishing between those individuals who are capable of virtue and vice and those who are not.¹¹⁷

The account provided of the disposition to moral reflection, considered as a “master virtue” and dependent on moral sense, fills what is otherwise a problematic gap in Hume’s theory of virtue. It is often claimed that what is missing from Hume’s theory is any plausible account of moral capacity along the lines of Aristotle’s account of practical wisdom (itself understood as a master virtue). It may be argued, on the basis of the revised account that has been provided, that Hume’s master virtue of moral reflection fills this gap. Using an analogy suggested by Aristotle, our moral sense, as Hume understands it, may be described as functioning like the rudder on a ship, which keeps us sailing in the direction of virtue, away from the rocks of vice.¹¹⁸ This rudder, however, cannot guide us by means of either reason or feeling alone. On the contrary, for moral sense to guide us in the direction of virtue we must first exercise those “intellectual faculties” that “pave the way” for our sentiments of approval and disapproval. Our moral sense, therefore, operates effectively to promote and sustain virtue only through the *fusion* of reason and sentiment.

VIRTUE, VICE, AND SUPERSTITION: IRRELIGION AND PRACTICAL MORALITY

In the introduction, we noted Hume’s concluding remarks in the *Treatise* where he suggests that his anatomy of virtue may be put to some practical use.¹¹⁹ On the face of it, these remarks could be read as a straightforward part of his broadly “naturalistic” program and his project of a “science of man.” On this reading, Hume believes that he has extended “the experimental method of reasoning into moral

subjects" (as indicated by the subtitle of this work) and he is leaving it to others to put this advance in science to practical use in common life. Hume's anatomy of virtue, so interpreted, serves to place moral philosophy on scientific foundations that presuppose a necessitarian and wholly naturalistic understanding of human nature as a seamless part of the causal fabric of the world. A theory of virtue, constructed along these lines, has no need for a metaphysics of immaterial agents, governed by a transcendent being and laws of reason that operate and apply independently of the (mechanical) natural order. Nor does Hume's theory of virtue require a teleological conception of human nature that presupposes virtuous agents must acquire some rational insight into their essential nature or the ends or purposes that this may involve. Hume's naturalism, considered as a foundation for his account of virtue, is systematically skeptical about all metaphysical outlooks of these kinds.

While it is certainly true that Hume's theory of virtue should be placed in the wider context of his naturalistic ambitions, this raises the more general question of whether Hume's overall philosophical intentions throughout his philosophy should be read in these naturalistic terms (along with their related skeptical commitments). One important corollary of reading Hume in this way has been to take his concern with questions of religion as being of marginal or minor concern in his earlier work in the *Treatise*, becoming more pronounced and prominent only in his later works (i.e. particularly in the first *Enquiry* and the *Dialogues*). On this general reading, Hume's concern with the relationship between religion and morality is not central to his aims and objectives in the *Treatise* and remains of peripheral concern even in the second *Enquiry*. Clearly this way of reading Hume will encourage the view that his theory of virtue, although no doubt relevant to problems of religion, is nevertheless a matter that we can set aside as only of derivative interest – not part of Hume's main program.

While this is not the place to engage in a full examination of Hume's fundamental philosophical intentions, and how they evolved and developed over time, this general picture of Hume's philosophy as it relates to his theory of virtue should be challenged and questioned. I have argued elsewhere that the skeptical and naturalistic themes found in Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise*, as well as in his later works, must be understood and interpreted

with reference to his deeper irreligious or anti-Christian motivations and objectives.¹²⁰ What animates and structures Hume's arguments throughout the *Treatise*, I maintain, is his (skeptical) effort to discredit the doctrines and dogmas of religion and to provide an alternative secular, scientific account of moral and social life. These irreligious features of Hume's *Treatise* also serve to guide and shape the development and evolution of Hume's thought in his later works (i.e. irreligious aims and ambitions serve to unify, structure, and direct his thought not only in the *Treatise* but throughout all his major philosophical works). According to this general interpretation of Hume's philosophy, it is crucial that we consider his theory of virtue in light of his core irreligious objectives and concerns.

In the most general terms, it is a basic aim of Hume's moral philosophy to strip away the metaphysical commitments and distortions of theology and religious philosophy. Hume's specific views about the virtues reflect these core concerns. Among the most significant of the various observations and claims Hume makes along these lines is his critique of the efforts of the Christian moralists and apologists to present humility as a virtue and pride as a vice – a view that Hume claims reverses the truth about this matter.¹²¹ Related to this, Hume employs his (constructive) account of virtue to criticize and ridicule religious morality, presenting it as both corrupting and pernicious in its influence. The natural and universal standard of morals, based on considerations of utility, Hume claims, "will ever be received, where men judge of things by their natural, unprejudiced reason, without the delusive glosses of superstition and false religion."¹²²

Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues; for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose . . .¹²³

These "monkish virtues," he continues, not only fail to serve any of the desirable ends of virtue, they "stupefy the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper." Hume concludes these observations regarding the real effect of the "monkish virtues" inspired by religion, by suggesting that we should "transfer them to the opposite column, and place them in the catalogue of vices."¹²⁴ Observations of this general kind, relating to the way

in which religion corrupts and distorts moral standards and moral practice, are laced throughout Hume's 'writings.'¹²⁵

While the pronounced tendency of religion is to corrupt and pervert morality, Hume makes clear that virtue is attainable without any support from superstition. He addresses this issue directly in the first *Enquiry*, where he allows "Epicurus" to speak on his behalf. Although Epicurus/Hume may well deny providence and the doctrine of a future state, he does not deny "the course itself of events, which lie open to every one's inquiry and examination." He continues:

I acknowledge, that, in the present order of things, virtue is attended with more peace of mind than vice, and meets with a more favorable reception from the world. I am sensible, that, according to the past experience of mankind, friendship is the chief source of joy in human life, and moderation the only source of tranquility and happiness. I never balance between the virtuous and vicious course of life; but I am sensible, that, to a well-disposed mind, every advantage is on the side of the former.¹²⁶

It is, then, Hume's considered view that a careful anatomy of virtue, displaying its foundations in human sympathy and consideration of utility, can serve to guide our practice and structure our institutions in a manner that will free them of the corrupting and pernicious influence of superstition. To this extent it is indeed the case that Hume's "cold and unentertaining" dissection of virtue serves the purposes of a "practical morality" by discrediting religious morality and putting in its place a secular morality based on the secure and credible foundations of a proper understanding of human nature and the human condition.

NOTES

- 1 Abbreviations for references to Hume's works are
D *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (Hume [1779] 1993)
Dial. "A Dialogue" (published with *EM*)
DP *A Dissertation on the Passions* ([1757] 2007)
EM *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* ([1751] 1998)
ESY *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary* ([1777] 1985)
EU *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* ([1748] 2000, ed. Beauchamp)
LET *The Letters of David Hume* (1932)

NHR *Natural History of Religion* ([1757] 1993)

T *A Treatise of Human Nature* ([1739–40] 2000, ed. Norton and Norton)

TA *An Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature* ([1740] 2000). References are also provided to the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch editions of the *Treatise* (1978) and *Enquiries* (1975). Following the convention given in the Nortons' *Treatise* (and Beauchamp's *Enquiry*), citations are to book.part.section.paragraph, followed by page references to the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch editions. Thus T 1.2.3.4/34 will indicate *Treatise* bk. 1, pt. 2, §3, para. 4/Selby-Bigge/Nidditch p. 34. The citations of *EM App.* are by appendix number.section (e.g. *EM App.* 1.2, Appendix 1 §2); and those of *EM Dial.*, by section – each followed by the corresponding Selby-Bigge/Nidditch page reference.

- 2 T Intro 4–10/xix–xxiii; TA 1/645; see also *LET* 1 13 (no. 3); *EM* 1.10, 517/174, 219.
- 3 T Intro 3/xviii; T 3.1.1.1/456; *EU* 1.1–2, 1.7/5–6, 9.
- 4 T 3.3.6.6/621, Hume's emphasis; cf. TA 1–2/645–6.
- 5 T 2.1.2.2, 2.1.5.3, 2.2.1.2, 2.2.1.6/277, 286, 329, 331.
- 6 T 2.1.2.5, 2.1.5.2/279, 285.
- 7 For further details relating to Hume's description of the indirect passions see Árdal 1966, chap. 2, and P. Russell 1995, chap. 4.
- 8 T 2.1.2.5, 2.1.7/279, 294–5.
- 9 T 3.3.1.3/575, Hume's emphasis; cf. T 3.1.2.5/473; *DP* 2.14–16, 3.1.
- 10 T 3.3.5.1/614. Hume takes the moral sentiments to be calm forms of love and hate. In support of this interpretation see Árdal 1966, chap. 6.
- 11 *DP* 6.19.
- 12 On Hume's views concerning the nature of character see Baier 1991, chap. 8, and Pitson 2002, chap. 5.
- 13 T 3.3.1.4/575.
- 14 E.g. *EU* 8.7/83, where ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, etc., are described as “passions”; see also *EM* 9.5/271; T 3.3.3.3–8/603–4.
- 15 T 2.3.4.1/419.
- 16 Exactly how passions are understood to “endure” is a matter requiring some further interpretation and analysis. We need, for example, to distinguish “types” and “tokens” of a given passion. While Hume may be read as holding that specific *tokens* of the passions are more “durable” than other perceptions, on another interpretation he may be read as claiming that a person has a given character trait only insofar as a particular *type* of passion regularly appears in her mind and influences her behavior and conduct.

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- 17 *T* 3.2.1.2/477: "'Tis evident that when we praise..."; see also *T* 2.2.3.4/348–9.
- 18 *T* 3.3.1.4/575, Hume's emphasis.
- 19 *T* 3.3.1.5/575, Hume's emphasis. See also Hume's remarks to Francis Hutcheson: *LET* 1 34. Earlier in the *Treatise* Hume claims that intentional action always reveals or manifests some durable principle of mind or a character trait of some kind (*T* 2.2.3.4/349). Although Hume provides little support for this claim, he does, as I explain, provide more substantial support for the (distinct) claim that only durable principles of mind give rise to moral sentiments. For a more detailed discussion of this point see P. Russell (1995), 98, 112–3.
- 20 See e.g. *T* 2.3.2.6/411.
- 21 *T* 2.1.6.3/291.
- 22 *T* 2.1.5.2/285; see also *T* 2.5.5.5, 2.2.1.7/286, 331.
- 23 *T* 2.1.6.4/293.
- 24 *T* 2.1.6.4/293; cf. *DP* 2.11, 2.42.
- 25 *T* 2.2.3.6, 2.3.2.6, 3.3.1.4/349, 411, 575.
- 26 For more detailed accounts of this distinction see e.g. Ballie 2000 and Cohon 2006.
- 27 *T* 3.1.2.9/474–5.
- 28 *T* 3.3.1.12/579.
- 29 *EM* 3.44–6/202–3.
- 30 *EM* App. 3.5/305.
- 31 *T* 3.2.2.23–4, 3.3.1.12/498–500, 579–80.
- 32 *T* 3.2.
- 33 *T* 3.3.1.30/591; cf. *T* 3.3.2.16/601.
- 34 In this respect Hume's system contrasts sharply with that of his (Scots-Irish) contemporary Francis Hutcheson (Hutcheson [1726] 2004, 11 §§ii–vii).
- 35 *T* 3.3.1.24/587; *EM* 9.2/269.
- 36 *EM* 9.2/269–70.
- 37 *EM* 9.2/269.
- 38 See Beauchamp for a more extensive list of Hume's catalogue of the virtues (*EM* editor's introduction, pp. 30–7). In a letter to Hutcheson Hume remarks that he takes his "Catalogue of Virtues from *Cicero's Offices*, not from the *Whole Duty of Man*." (*Whole Duty of Man* was a seventeenth-century Calvinist tract, which is discussed relation to Hume in Kemp Smith 1947, pp. 4–6.) Among other possible sources for Hume's views about character is Theophrastus' *Characters*, and also French writers such as La Bruyère (who translated Theophrastus' *Characters*).

- 39 *T* 3.3.6.2/618–9; *EM* App. 1.18, Dial. 37/293, 336. Hume acknowledges that this analysis may suggest that the ultimate source for our approval of virtuous characters is no different from what we experience when we contemplate a house, furniture and other such inanimate objects (*T* 3.3.1.20, 2.2.5.6/584, 617; *EM* 2.10, 5.1/179, 212). He maintains, however, that while the general source may be the same (i.e. considerations of utility) the specific feelings involved (i.e. the felt sentiments in our mind) are not (*T* 3.3.5.6/617; *EM* 5.1 n. 17/213 n.). For a criticism of this aspect of Hume's system see A. Smith [1790] 1976, pp. 188, 327.
- 40 *T* 3.3.4.2/607.
- 41 *EM* 9.2/269–70; cf. *T* 3.3.3.9/606.
- 42 Hume's *History of England* is another good source of examples of virtues and vices as they appear throughout history. Dees (1997) discusses several illuminating examples taken from this source.
- 43 *T* 3.3.4.2/607–8; *EM* App. 4.6/316.
- 44 *EM* App. 4.17/320.
- 45 *ESY* 594. Hume's observations and examples relating to models of virtue suggest that he is committed to two distinct but closely related claims: (1) pluralism – where this is understood as the view that there exists a wide variety of models of a virtuous person and that virtuous individuals may possess very different combinations of virtue and lead very different kinds of life; and (2) fragmentation – where this is understood as the observation that few, if any, individuals are wholly virtuous or wholly vicious, since almost everyone possesses some mixture or combination of virtues and vices. These two claims (pluralism and fragmentation) lend some support to what may be described as Hume's tacit "anti-perfectionism." Understood this way, Hume is resistant to the (optimistic) ideal that suggests that all the virtues may coexist in one individual who is free of any taint of vice. Hume's examples and observations suggest that the virtues and vices are so related to each other that any ideal of this kind is not just difficult to attain, but illusory or impossible. For the purposes of human ethical life, and its associated limitations, we are better served by (credible) examples such as Caesar and Cato than by any ideal "perfect being" (e.g. Jesus Christ).
- 46 *T* 3.2.6.7/529.
- 47 *EM* 7.22/258, Hume's emphasis; cf. *EM* 2.18, 6.12/180, 238.
- 48 *T* 3.3.2.15/600–1, *EM* 2.3, 7.24/177, 258.
- 49 *T* 3.3.3.3/604.
- 50 *EM* 258 n.
- 51 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (cited as *NE*) 11.6. For present purposes, I take the Aristotelian doctrine of "the mean" to be

understood as claiming that all the virtues are traits of character that lie between two extremes of excess and defect, on each side of which we find a corresponding vice. On this reading, the virtues must be interpreted and understood in relation to the relevant vices that they fall between. (There are, of course, significant ambiguities in Aristotle's remarks concerning this doctrine and interpretations of his views vary.)

- 52 For Hume "moderation" is primarily a matter of the calm as opposed to violent passions governing our conduct and disposition and, related to this, acquiring "strength of mind," whereby (violent) passions and desires, aroused by a present or nearby object, are restrained with a view to longer term interests and concerns (*T* 2.3.4.1/417; *EM* 6.15/239–40; *DP* 5.4). There is a sense in which people with dispositions and traits of these kinds may be described as possessing the general virtue of "reasonableness," consistent with Hume's basic principles. On Hume's views about calm passions and "strength of mind" see Árdal 1966, chap. 5; and also Árdal 1976.
- 53 *EM* 6.19, 6.26 n. 31, App. 4.11, Dial. 25/241, 245 n., 318, 321, 333.
- 54 *EM* 6.35/248–9; see also his essay "Of National Characters."
- 55 *EM* 5.3/214.
- 56 *EM* 6.20/242; see also Hume's remarks about Fabius and Scipio at *EM* 6.9/237.
- 57 There is a degree of instability or an unsettled tension in Hume's overall position on this matter. On one side, Hume wants to argue that when evaluating a person or character we should exclude "external circumstances" that may frustrate or obstruct the full beneficial effect or influence of a given trait in producing happiness (*T* 3.3.1.20/584–5; see in particular his remarks about "virtue in rags . . ."). On the other hand, Hume also wants to insist that a virtuous person must be one whose character is in fact suitable to his particular circumstances and social conditions (*EM* 6.9, 6.20/237, 241–2). On the second interpretation, a person whose character is ill-suited to his historical circumstances and social station will be found wanting from the point of view of virtue, even when considered from a more disinterested and distant point of view. See P. Russell 1995, pp. 130–3.
- 58 *T* 3.3.1.15–23, 3.3.1.30, 3.3.3.2, 3.3.6.3/581–7, 591, 603, 619; *EM* 1.2, 5.39, App. 1.3/169–75, 225–9, 286.
- 59 *T* 3.3.1.15–8/581–4; *EM* 5.39–42/225–9.
- 60 *T* 3.3.6.1–3/618–9; *EM* 5.42 n. 25, App. 1.10/229 n., 289.
- 61 *EM* 5.42/229; see also *T* 3.3.1.18, 3.3.1.30, 3.3.3.2/583–4, 591, 603.
- 62 *EM*, Dial. 26/333.

- 63 *EM*, Dial. 36/335. Hume, of course, emphasizes throughout his writings the parallels that hold between morals and aesthetics. I return to this analogy further below.
- 64 See, in particular, Hume's various remarks and observations about incest, suicide, adultery, infanticide, homosexuality, dueling, and other such matters of moral disagreement and divergence in his "A Dialogue."
- 65 While it is evident that Hume rests his (universal) standard of morals on the general foundation of utility, there is some debate about the precise nature and extent of his "utilitarian" commitments as they relate to his virtue theory. See e.g. Crisp 2005 and Swanton 2007a. Suffice it to note that Hume does not embrace utilitarianism insofar as this is understood in terms of a requirement to *maximize* this good (in contrast with Hutcheson [1726] 2004, II §3, no. 8).
- 66 *ESY* 168.
- 67 *T* 2.1.11.1, 2.2.5.21/316, 365.
- 68 *EM* 9.10/276; see also *T* 3.2.2.26/500-1.
- 69 *T* 2.1.11.1, 2.1.11.9, 2.2.1.9/316, 320, 331-2.
- 70 *T* 3.3.6.6/620; *EM* 9.23/283.
- 71 *EM* 9.10/276; cf. *EM* 9.23/283; and also *T* 2.1.11.1, 3.3.5.4, 3.3.6.6/316, 615, 620.
- 72 *ESY* 178.
- 73 From Hume's perspective we have no more reason to assume that the virtuous must always be happy than we have reason to expect that the beautiful or rich will always be happy. Nevertheless, while there are multiple factors that influence the happiness or misery of every individual, virtue remains an especially weighty factor in securing and preserving our happiness.
- 74 *EM* 9.22/282-3.
- 75 A full examination of this aspect of Hume's philosophy is presented in P. Russell 1995.
- 76 *T* 3.3.1.5/575.
- 77 For Hume, behavior that is not caused by an agent's will and is wholly involuntary is not, strictly speaking, action at all. If a person's behavior is produced by external causes then it does not reflect on the mind of the person and cannot serve as a basis for moral assessment with respect to virtue and vice. However, what matters here is not simply that the behavior in question is involuntary but that it does not reflect on the person's qualities of mind or character.
- 78 *T* 3.3.1.5/575.
- 79 *T* 2.1.11.3/317.
- 80 *EU* 8.15/88.

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- 81 *EU* 8.9/85.
- 82 Hume observes, for example, that a person may conduct himself in a wholly honorable way, and with "great integrity," and yet still have a gloomy and melancholy disposition which is "to our sentiments, a vice or imperfection" (*ESY* 179).
- 83 *T* 2.3.1-2; *EU* 8.
- 84 *T* 2.3.1.5-10/401-3; *EU* 8.7-15/83-8; see esp. *EU* 8.11/85-6: "Are the manners . . ."
- 85 *EU* 8.10/85. See also Hume's essay "Of National Characters," where he distinguishes between physical and moral causes (*ESY* 198).
- 86 *EU* 8.11/86.
- 87 *ESY* 168; see also *T* 3.3.4.3/608; *ESY* 140, 160, 579.
- 88 See Reid 1969, p. 261: "What was, by an ancient author, said of Cato, might indeed be said of him. *He was good because he could not be otherwise*. But this saying, if understood literally and strictly, is not praise of Cato, but of his constitution, which was no more the work of Cato, than his existence" (Reid's emphasis).
- 89 He takes up this issue at some length in his essay "The Sceptic," where he emphasizes the limits of philosophy in promoting virtue (*ESY* 168-80).
- 90 *ESY* 169.
- 91 *T* 3.3.4; *EM* App. 4.
- 92 *T* 3.3.4.1/606.
- 93 *T* 3.3.4.1/606-7.
- 94 *T* 3.3.4.4/609. See Hume's sardonic observation at *EM* App. 4.5/315: "It is hard to tell . . ." See Vitz 2009 for a discussion of Hume's rejection of the (Aristotelian) distinction between intellectual and moral virtues.
- 95 *T* 3.3.4.4/609.
- 96 *T* 3.3.4.4/609.
- 97 *T* 2.3.2/470-6; *EM* 1/169-75.
- 98 *T* 3.1.2.5, 3.3.1.3, 3.3.5.1/473, 575, 614; *EM* 8.1 n. 50, App. 1.10/261 n., 289.
- 99 *T* 2.1.7.7, 2.1.8, 3.2.2.1, 3.3.1.15, 3.3.1.27, 3.3.6.1/297, 298-303, 484, 576-7, 589-90, 618; *EM* 1.9, 6.24, App. 1.13/173, 244, 291; *ESY* 153. This analogy is prominent in Shaftesbury ([1711] 1964) and Hutcheson ([1726] 2004). The analogy between beauty and virtue has a deep basis in the details of Hume's system. With reference to the individuals who are the objects of evaluation, both beauty and virtue are pleasurable qualities and, as such, engage the general mechanism of the indirect passions (as described above). With regard to those evaluating beauty or virtue, in both cases the relevant standard of evaluation presupposes a judge with the requisite experience and discrimination required for

reliable evaluation. These structural similarities are fundamental to Hume's understanding of "moral beauty."

- 100 *T* 2.1.12.5/326.
101 *T* 1.3.16.1/176.
102 *T* 2.2.5.15, 2.2.12, 2.3.9.32/363, 397–8, 448; *EM* App. 2.13/302.
103 *T* 3.3.4.5/610.
104 *T* 2.3.1.13/404.
105 *T* 3.2.2.4, 3.2.2.26, 3.2.6.11/486, 500–1, 533–4; *EM* 3.21/192.
106 *T* 3.2.2.26/500–1.
107 *T* 3.3.1.8, 3.3.1.26, 3.3.1.30, 3.3.6.6/576–7, 589, 591, 620; *EM* 9.10, App. 4.3/276, 314.
108 *EM* 9.10/276.
109 The presence of moral sense, and the associated master virtue of moral reflection, is not a *perfect* guarantor that a person will always act in a morally admirable manner. It is, however, a reliable sign that this person will be strongly motivated to virtue, and that whenever she departs from this standard she will aim to reform her conduct accordingly.
110 *T* 3.1.2.4/472.
111 Hume's presentation in the *Treatise* does differ in emphasis in that he places greater weight on "moral taste" in contrast with "reason" (*T* 3.3.1.15, 3.3.1.27/581, 589).
112 *EM* 1.9/172–3.
113 *EM* 1.9/173. On this see Hume's essay "The Standard of Taste."
114 *EM* 1.9/173.
115 *T* 3.3.1.15/581–2; *EM* 5.41–2/227–8.
116 *T* 3.3.1.18, 3.3.3.2/583, 603.
117 On this account of the "internal" relationship between virtue and moral sense it is not only a matter of the former depending on the latter for its development or production, moral sense is also required for the exercise and operation of virtue. More specifically, (a) the virtuous person is one who recognizes and appreciates relevant moral considerations or reasons as having a certain salience and significance, and thereby possessing motivational weight; and (b) the virtuous person is someone who has appropriate (emotional) responses to character and conduct (i.e. his own as well as others'). In both these aspects moral sense is essential to the exercise and operation of virtue – it is not just an extrinsic or "external" feature of the virtuous person. (In contrast with this the natural abilities lack this "internal" relationship with moral sense and are *insensitive* to its operation and exercise.)
118 Aristotle, *NE* x.1, 1172a21. For further elaboration on this theme see P. Russell 2006.

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123

- 119 *T* 3.3.6.6/621.
120 P. Russell 2008.
121 *T* 3.3.2.13/599–600; *EM* 8.11, App. 2.12/265–6, 301; *ESY* 86. Hume's views on this subject allow for some important qualifications concerning the extent to which we may manifest or show our pride or sense of self-worth, consistent with due regard for the feelings of others. Nevertheless, the meek and humble person is not one whom Hume finds admirable, in contrast with the evident dignity of the duly proud person.
122 *EM* 9.3/270.
123 *EM* 9.3/270.
124 *EM* 9.3/270.
125 See e.g. *EM* 5.3, App. 4.21/214, 322; *D* 123–5; *NHR*, chap. 14.
126 *EU* 11.20/140.