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Introduction

Hume's moral philosophy may plausibly be construed as a version of virtue ethics. Among the central moral concepts of his theory are character, virtue, and vice, rather than rules, duty, or obligation. The importance of character focuses theoretical attention on the emotions and other affective aspects of our moral psychology that are essential to our developing an appreciation of what is worthwhile and praiseworthy. Yet a conspicuous feature of Hume's ethical theory is an emphasis on moral sentiment as the means by which we *evaluate* character as virtuous or vicious. His theory thus contrasts with another version of virtue ethics, one often associated with Aristotle. Aristotelian virtue ethics focuses on the perspective of the virtuous agent, examining how one becomes virtuous, and the role of virtue in practical deliberation and living a good life. In contrast, Hume is much more interested in how we recognize and evaluate traits of character than in how we become virtuous, or in how virtue relates to deliberation and living well.

The difference between the Aristotelian and Humean versions of virtue ethics is not simply one of emphasis, that is, of seeing deliberation as more important than evaluation, or vice versa. Rather, the two theories have different views about moral knowledge: what moral knowledge is, how we acquire it, and what it is for. The Aristotelian view focuses on the virtuous agent's ethical capacities, especially moral perception and deliberation. For Aristotle, the fully virtuous agent has the wisdom needed to deliberate well, which is in turn required in order to lead a flourishing life. The virtuous agent sets the standard for moral knowledge, and is a model for others to imitate as they cultivate their own virtuous character. The Aristotelian's emphasis on practical reason thus grounds an agent-centered view of moral knowledge. In contrast, Hume's theory explains how we recognize character traits as virtues and vices, and how we form standards for our sentiment-based appraisals of these traits. The identification and valuation of character traits is a

social process, requiring conversation, and at times, negotiation and debate. On this view, moral knowledge about which characters are praiseworthy or blameworthy is a collectively established resource.

Seeing moral evaluation as a social practice distinguishes Hume from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers with whom, because they also focus on the moral sentiments, he is often associated. Certainly part of the explanation for Hume's emphasis on sentiment and evaluation lies in the historical context in which he was thinking about morality. Hume engages directly with an important debate of his day that emerged in response to Hobbes's "selfish" theory. Those who disagreed with the "selfish" theory of Hobbes and Mandeville divided into two general camps: moral intellectualists, such as Ralph Cudworth and Samuel Clarke, and moral sense theorists, such as Francis Hutcheson and Shaftesbury. In many respects, Hume agrees with the moral sense camp, and follows Hutcheson in setting out the inadequacies of the intellectualist position as well as criticizing the selfish theory. He agrees with Shaftesbury and Hutcheson that we have strong social motives, and that our approval of these motives reinforces both our appreciation of virtue and our motivation to act virtuously (see Shaftesbury 2000; Hutcheson 2002, 2004). It is the reflexive approval of social motives that makes the emphasis on evaluation important for the moral sense theorists. But rather than appealing to an innate moral sense that reflexively approves of benevolence, Hume argues that sympathy, our natural capacity to participate in one another's pains and pleasures, is the source for our moral approbation of a variety of virtues. Hume sees it as an evident benefit of his approach that grounding the moral sentiments in sympathy can accommodate a broad range of virtues: convention-based virtues of justice and etiquette, self-regarding virtues, even some talents and some immediately agreeable virtues such as wit or eloquence, as well as the social virtues recognized by his moral sense predecessors. The appeal to sympathy also means that Hume must explain how we correct and cultivate our moral "taste." His explanation of the cultivation of our moral taste yields an account of moral knowledge as the product of shared reflection, scrutiny, and conversation.

In this essay, I first examine Hume's understanding of character and its importance for us. I then turn to our natural responses to various character traits, and Hume's account of how sympathy with those responses is the source of the moral sentiments. Hume invokes the notion of a standard of virtue in order to undercut objections that sentiments with their source in sympathy will lack an objectivity that we think our moral evaluations should have. So next I look in some detail at the kind of errors to which sympathy makes us susceptible, and at how the strategies we use to correct these errors renders sympathy self-correcting. After then considering how our moral sentiments have authority for us, particularly when they are the verdicts of those who have cultivated an active habit of moral evaluation, I consider more fully why moral knowledge is, on the Humean view, a collectively-established social resource that is important for moral education and illustration, moral motivation, and our sense of moral identity.

The Importance of Character

Hume insists that character is the proper object of moral evaluation. We may sometimes consider actions independently of motive and character, looking instead, for example, at the consequences of a certain course of conduct. But Hume argues that what really makes a difference for us is a person's character. A person's reasons for acting typically reflect the characteristic ways in which she responds to situations. Her actions thus show us the kind of character she has. Suppose two people each present me with a gift of money, with the happy result that I now have enough wealth to start a business. Yet, if one gave me the money to curry favor further down the line whereas the other genuinely cared about my being successful in the new business venture, this difference in motive, and not just the gift of money, influences how I feel about the two people. The first one acts out of self-interest and perhaps manipulatively, while the second acts from beneficence. I am not indifferent to the fact that they did not act from the same motive, and I naturally feel more good will towards the beneficent person. As Hume notes, when "a good disposition is attended with good fortune, which renders it really beneficial to society, it gives stronger pleasure to the spectator, and is attended with a more lively sympathy" (T 3.3.1.21; SBN 585). But in spite of our warmer response to such fortunate virtue, we do not say that it is *more virtuous* than the benevolent disposition without the fortune. Hence character, the quality or motive from which someone acted, has an influence on our moral responses to the person independently of the consequences of her action.

Nevertheless, Hume indicates that careful judgment is needed to identify accurately traits of character. We are frequently partial towards those who benefit us, especially when it occurs on a regular basis. And just as we naturally love our benefactors, we tend to hate those who harm us. We thus may think well of our friends and allies who act with our interests in view, even if they are pernicious to others (as Hume writes, our ally's cruel conduct "is an evil inseparable from war"). And we may likewise deny a good character to our enemies, however much they benefit those in their charge; "we detest them under the character of cruel, perfidious, unjust and violent." This "method of thinking" with respect to our friends and foes is one that "runs thro' common life" (T 2.2.3.2; SBN 348). We also tend to find people disagreeable by their "deformity or folly," however unintended on their part (T 2.2.3.4; SBN 348). As Hume notes, "this is a clear proof, that, independent of the opinion of iniquity, any harm or uneasiness has a natural tendency to excite our hatred, and that afterwards we seek for reasons upon which we may justify and establish the passion" (T 2.2.3.9; SBN 351). Even accidental injuries tend to elicit a first, natural response of anger. To counter these common tendencies, we must distinguish between the pain or pleasure someone causes us and their "particular design and intention" (T 2.2.3.3; SBN 348). The intention connects the person's actions with something yet more "durable in him"

(T 2.2.3.4; SBN 348). Moreover, knowing whether someone has contempt for me or holds me in esteem influences my own love or hatred of him.

A person's attitudes, actions, and conduct show us what sort of character she has. Hume describes our actions and attitudes as "signs" of our character. Since we cannot directly "look within to find the moral quality" of an agent, we must "fix our attention on actions, as on external signs . . . but . . . the ultimate object of our praise and approbation is the motive, that produc'd them" (T 3.2.1.2–4; SBN 477–8). Not only someone's actions, but also her "words, or even wishes and sentiments," as well the responses of others to her actions and attitudes, allow us to make inferences about her character (T 3.3.1.5; SBN 575). Character consists of what Hume refers to as "durable mental qualities," settled habits of feeling and dispositions to respond and act in certain ways. Some of these are instinctive, and so will appear in some degree in most people. Hume identifies resentment, benevolence, and care of young children as among our instinctive propensities, ones we expect to move most people to respond in particular situations (T 2.3.3.8; SBN 417). He also characterizes some of the passions and what we think of as moods as traits of character. Such passions as kindness, anger, melancholy, hopefulness, or fear, can become established ways of responding to situations or other people. These become "durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character" (T 3.3.1.4; SBN 575) (McIntyre 1990; Baier 1991).

Hume presents a fourfold classification of the virtues. A virtue is a character trait that is useful or agreeable, either to the person who possesses it or to others (T 3.3.1.30; SBN 590). The socially useful virtues include both artificial and natural virtues. The artificial virtues, which include honesty, loyalty, and fidelity, are primarily those we associate with the conventions of justice that establish our legal and civil obligations and rights. Hume also counts among the artificial or convention-dependent virtues the chastity and modesty required of women to help to preserve marital unions and families; gallantry on the part of men is likewise artificial. The natural social virtues include "meekness, beneficence, charity, generosity, clemency, moderation, equity" (T 3.3.1.11; SBN 578). Among the virtues characteristic of those who are "good and benevolent" we find "humanity, compassion, gratitude, friendship, fidelity, zeal, disinterestedness, liberality" (T 3.3.3.3; SBN 603). People who are "great" rather than good possess traits such as constancy, fortitude, and magnanimity, which suit them for a life of leadership and heroism (T 3.3.4.3; SBN 608). Traits useful for their possessor include "prudence, temperance, frugality, industry, assiduity, enterprise, dexterity" (T 3.3.1.24; SBN 587). The need for modesty in our dealings with others makes an internal "due degree of pride" perhaps the most important self-regarding virtue (T 3.3.2.8; SBN 596).

The inclusion of self-regarding as well as other-regarding traits makes Hume's catalogue of virtues broader than that of moral sense theorists such as Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. For the moral sense theorists, the moral sense is almost an instinctive approval of various forms of benevolence. By grounding the moral sentiments

in sympathy, Hume is able to include all the mental qualities that produce pleasure and pain for their possessor or others. Significantly, not all virtues tend to the public good. We also experience an immediate approval for such qualities as wit or an easy manner. These qualities are pleasing to others and we sympathize with that pleasure without considering whether wit or an easy manner promote the public good.

Two other features of Hume's catalogue are also noteworthy: the inclusion of traits some might label as talents or abilities rather than virtues, and the inclusion of traits that we may not be able to acquire through our voluntary efforts. Hume notes that some people might insist that the advantageous qualities such as industry, perseverance, patience, temperance, or frugality, required for success in the world, are natural abilities rather than virtues. But he responds that "in common life and conversation," we tend to praise whichever qualities please us and blame those that make us uneasy whether they are social virtues or self-regarding ones (T 3.3.4.4; SBN 609). Someone might object that our approval of talents or abilities is different in kind from that of our moral approval, but Hume responds that there are different kinds of approval even for some of the agreed-upon virtues. A second objection might be that talents are something bestowed by fortune rather than acquired. But people may not be able through their voluntary efforts to cultivate patience, or courage, or a number of other virtues, or for that matter, overcome a quick temper or some other vice. Regardless of whether it is voluntary, the quality produces pleasure or pain, and so earns our praise or blame.

Finally, notice that Hume suggests that there is broad agreement on which traits of character are virtues and which are vices. This agreement spans cultures and historical epochs; so, for example, "we give the same approbation to the same moral qualities in *China* as in *England*" (T 3.3.1.14; SBN 580). In his later works, in the second *Enquiry*, "A dialogue," and some of the essays, Hume changes his views about the universality of the recognition and valuation of character traits, and argues that there are culturally and historically specific virtues and vices. But even in the *Treatise*, Hume himself surely knew that his views about what we count as virtues would not garner widespread support. Including talents is controversial for theological or other views that place a value on free will. And some would surely find it frivolous to count qualities such as wit or eloquence as virtues. Nevertheless, Hume has given us a good explanation for why we can agree on the reasons for valuing or despising these different kinds of traits: we approve of useful or agreeable traits and disapprove of those that are harmful or disagreeable.

Sympathy, the Indirect Passions, and Moral Sentiment

Traits of character comprise one element of a larger set of relatively durable features of persons that we regard as having particular importance for us. The other features

include physical appearance and abilities, wealth, power and other external advantages, or the lack of these (see T 2.1.7–10). Their importance for us is shown by our strong response to them, feelings of love or hatred when we find them in others, and pride or humility when they concern ourselves. Hume describes the passions of love, hatred, pride, and humility as "indirect" passions. The indirect passions are not simple, direct responses to pleasure or pain, but rather are complex passions, always directed towards persons and signaling our recognition and valuation of one or more of these durable features that contribute to making the person who she is (Ainslie 1999). We might think of the indirect passions as evaluative attitudes, that is, belief-informed, affective responses that express our sense of someone's worth in virtue of one or more of these features. While we may love someone just because he is related to us, the indirect passions are typically produced in response to the person's possession of some feature such as good character, to which we independently attach value. So a person's virtue, beauty, or wealth makes her lovable to us, and is something in which she appropriately takes pride.

Hume's explanation of moral evaluation draws an intimate connection between moral sentiment and these four key indirect passions. First, he suggests that our most natural response to the characters of those people closest to us, including our family, friends, and colleagues, will be an indirect passion: some form of love towards those with a virtuous character, and some form of hatred towards those exhibiting vice. In Book 2, Hume describes virtue and vice as "the most obvious causes" of the indirect passions (T 2.1.7.2; SBN 295). In Book 3, in the section on the natural virtues and vices, he writes:

> Now since every quality in ourselves or others, which gives pleasure, always causes pride or love; as every one, that produces uneasiness, excites humility or 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 or hatred. In every case, therefore, we must 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. (T 3.3.1.3; SBN 574)

We love the virtuous among our friends, family, and associates, and likewise we take pride in our own virtue. Our natural response to vice in those with whom we have dealings is hatred, while our own vices cause us to feel humility.

Second, our perception of virtue and vice depends on our capacity to sympathize with these natural responses. Hume describes sympathy as a principle of the imagination that makes it possible for us to communicate our passions, sentiments, and even our opinions to one another. Sympathy can work in an immediate way, like a contagion, causing us to laugh, for example, just because someone else is laughing. More typically, though, sympathy allows us to interpret and respond to

the passions of others. The passions are perceptions of the mind, and since we do not have access to one another's minds, we must infer the passions of others, just as we infer character traits (some of which are passions), from their "signs." We read the passions and sentiments of others from their facial expressions, conversation, demeanor, and conduct. From a person's outward signs, and drawing on our own passionate experience, we form a belief about what she is feeling. As Hume observes, there is a "general resemblance" between ourselves and others, so that "we never remark any passion or principle in others, of which, in some degree or other, we may not find a parallel in ourselves" (T 2.1.11.5; SBN 318). The similarity between oneself and others explains why the force of sympathy goes beyond that of custom. We have a lively conception of ourselves, which "is always intimately present with us," so that we conceive "with a like vivacity of conception" whatever is related to us (T 2.1.11.4; SBN 317). Sympathy conveys the vivacity from the conception we have of ourselves to the idea we have of the person's passion, converting that idea into a passion.

Sympathizing with the passions or situations of someone else does not involve imagining oneself in place of the other. Indeed, our sympathetic participation in the passionate lives of others broadens our own passionate experience. For example, sympathizing with another "takes us so far out of ourselves, as to give us the same pleasure or uneasiness" that the person experiences, which in turn frequently moves us to respond to the situations of others (T 3.3.1.12; SBN 579). This point is important with respect to moral evaluation since our sympathetic appreciation of others' responses helps us to focus properly on traits of character instead of on consequences or our own interests. Sympathy may thus be thought of as having in part an epistemological function. It helps us move beyond our own concerns and gain a clearer view of what characters are like.

We should also note that sympathetic pains and pleasures can be disinterested. For example, when we sympathize with the pleasure the rich man gets from his wealth, our sympathetically produced pleasure, which in this case is an esteem or admiration, does not depend on our expecting to benefit from his wealth. Sympathy is the source of the different kinds of disinterested approval or disapproval we direct towards others. This single source for our different sentiments has what Hume sees as a distinct advantage with respect to the moral evaluation of character since the catalogue of virtues expands to include self-regarding as well as social traits, convention-based requirements for just conduct as well as good manners, and those mental abilities that are gifts of fortune rather than acquired traits.

Moreover, without this capacity for sympathy, we would typically respond to others when their conduct and character affected ourselves (or those so close to us that we regard their pains and pleasures as bearing directly on our own). Hume makes the point more clearly in the second *Enquiry*, arguing that if we lacked this capacity to sympathize with the pains and pleasures of others, we would likewise be indifferent to vice and virtue (EPM 5.40; SBN 226). In short, sympathy is the source of the moral sentiments.

Above, I said that there is an intimate connection between the indirect passions and the moral sentiments insofar as it is our sympathy with the former that produces the latter. It is worth noting that some commentators argue that Hume is advancing the view that the moral sentiments are themselves calm forms of love and hatred. The main textual evidence for this view includes the claim that virtue is the power of producing love (T 3.3.1.3; SBN 574); the claim that when we take up a shared moral perspective it makes possible a calm determination of the passions (T 3.3.1.18; SBN 583); and the claim that our moral approbation and blame "is nothing but a fainter and more imperceptible love or hatred" (T 3.3.5.1; SBN 614). Drawing on this evidence, Pall Árdal (1966) argues both that the indirect passions of love and hatred, on the one hand, and the moral sentiments on the other, have similar causes, namely, certain mental qualities, and that the moral sentiments are objective variants of the indirect passions. Philip Mercer (1972) endorses Árdal's argument, and adds that by taking up the general point of view (whereby we overlook our own interest and compensate for distance) we form a habit of objective judgment. Christine Korsgaard (1999) agrees with Árdal and Mercer that moral approbation is a species of love, and she also argues that Hume appeals to the shared moral perspective to establish a normative standard for love. She thinks it is possible to read Hume as claiming that virtue is *the* cause of love, and that while we do not always love the virtuous even from the common point of view, that evaluative perspective nevertheless shows us that we *ought* to love the virtuous since they are worthy of our love and entitled to our good will.

Nevertheless, the text leaves considerable room for disagreement with the interpretation of the moral sentiments as calm indirect passions. Annette Baier argues that while "moral sentiment is at least as complicated as any indirect passion," it is a "reversal" of the indirect passions scheme, since it takes characters rather than persons as its object (Baier 1991: 134). In contrast to our *loving* someone because she is witty, the moral sentiment is our *approval* of wit, whomever we find possessed of it (see also Norton 1982). Baier also argues that Hume proves more skeptical than we might have expected about the motivational influence of the moral sentiment since he claims it is sufficient merely to express our praise and blame (1991: 185–6). He does not *require* us either to love those we find praiseworthy, or to show good will to the virtuous, although sometimes we may.

Sympathy, Sentiment and Impartial Evaluation of Character

In Book 2, Hume introduces a distinction between the calm and violent impressions of reflection, writing: "of the first kind is the sense of beauty and deformity in action, composition, and external objects." The sense of beauty and deformity

in action is our sense of morality, or moral "taste." One reason for designating as calm the sentiments that arise from our sense of beauty is that they generally feel faint, even "imperceptible." "This division" of the passions is, however, "far from being exact" (T 2.1.1.3; SBN 275). Under various conditions, the violent passions may produce no felt emotion whereas the moral sentiments may be felt intensely. Indeed, our moral sentiments are sometimes among our strongest feelings: "there is no spectacle so fair and beautiful as a noble and generous action; nor any which gives us more abhorrence than one that is cruel and treacherous" (T 3.1.2.2; SBN 470). We find heroic characters "dazling," and "cannot refuse" them our admiration (T 3.3.2.15; SBN 600). Cruelty is "the most detested of all vices," and arouses in us "a stronger hatred than we are sensible of on any other occasion" (T 3.3.3.8; SBN 605). We also tend to have stronger moral sentiments towards those who resemble the people with whom we usually interact. When a virtuous character is distant from us, but he and his acquaintances resemble those in our own community, their situation "interests us strongly by sympathy" so that we correspondingly feel a strong approval of his character. In such cases, "we approve of his character, and love his person, by a sympathy with the sentiments of those who have a more particular connexion with him" (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602).

But our moral sentiments may be weak, and we may make a moral judgment about someone's character without feeling any sentiment at all. Variations in our sentiments of praise and blame occur because each of us remains confined, to some extent, to the perspective of our present situation. If confinement to our present perspective were entire, it would be impossible for us either to reach agreement with others or even to make consistent appraisals of our own actions over the course of our life. Fortunately, our capacity for reflection enables us to correct our sympathy and we can "in our thoughts place ourselves" in "some steady and general points of view" (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581). From these perspectives we "form some general inalterable standard" to which our moral sentiments should conform (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602). A second reason for regarding the moral sentiments as calm is that they arise from this process of reflection and correction, making our moral evaluations similar to the warranted judgments of the understanding.

From our present perspective, our evaluations of character vary, owing to a failure to regulate our sympathetic responses. Hume identifies three different causes of error, deriving from our natural partiality and the influence of the associative principles on sympathy. What I will designate the "remoteness" error occurs in cases where the agent is located at a distance from us so that our sympathy is too weak to produce the appropriate sentiment of praise or blame. The error of "countervailing interest" arises when our own interest or partiality is strong so that we confuse our interested love or hate of someone with moral approval or blame. The "consequentialist" error results from our evaluating the consequences of someone's having acted or not, rather than her character, so that we fail to separate the virtuous or vicious disposition from the accidental circumstances attending it.

The Errors of Remoteness and Countervailing Interest

Let us look at the remoteness error and the error of countervailing interest together, since Hume offers the same solution to them. We have seen that our moral sentiments arise when we sympathize with the pains and pleasures of those affected by the character of an agent. Although the general resemblance between others and ourselves makes sympathy possible, sympathy is influenced by the associative principles of resemblance, cause and effect, and contiguity. The influence of these principles makes sympathy "very variable." So we sympathize more easily with the passions and opinions of people who resemble us, and with those to whom we are related (Hume regards familial relationship as a "species" of causation). Others' nearness or distance, whether physical or temporal distance, or a more figurative distance based on culture, interests, or values, frequently affects our sympathy: "we sympathize more with persons contiguous to us, than with persons remote from us: With our acquaintance, than with strangers: With our countrymen, than with foreigners" (T 3.3.1.14; SBN 580). We naturally sympathize more easily with, and so feel a more lively praise or blame for an agent who is near to us than we do for someone who is physically or temporally remote from us. The problem is that when an agent and the people affected by her character are distant from us, "our sympathy is proportionably weaker, and our praise or blame fainter and more doubtful" (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602). But it would be inconsistent to approve of a character trait in the agent close to us while not finding as admirable the same trait in a person who is distant from us. Hume acknowledges that we *judge* the two characters to be equally admirable, even if our sympathy is stronger and so produces a stronger sentiment in the case that is closer to hand. So he must explain how sympathy and sentiment can be the source of our moral admiration if our sympathy-based sentiments vary with distance.

A second failure in moral evaluation occurs when we fail to put aside a concern for our own interest or the interests of those to whom we are partial, and judge only from our own narrow perspective. As we saw in the section "The Importance of Character," failure to correct self-interest or partiality may prevent us from seeing the vices of our friends or acknowledging the virtues of our enemies. We generally think of courage as admirable whether we are reading about it in a historical narrative or witnessing it in the local heroes of our own community. But self-interest and prejudice lead us to find displeasing the bravery of our enemy and condemn it as blameworthy, even though others find it praiseworthy. In such cases, the passions of love and hate that arise from our interested perspective "are apt to be confounded" with moral sentiments, since these passions and sentiments "naturally run into one another." In other words, we mistake our *interested* hatred for *moral* blame: because the person is our enemy and her bravery works in opposition to our own interest, we tend, in our uneasiness, to think of her actions as

villainous. But it does not follow that the two different kinds of disfavor, interested and moral, are not distinct. The difficulty is sufficiently real, however, that it takes a person "of temper and judgment" to avoid "these illusions" (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 472).

Hume's emphasis on temper as well as judgment indicates the importance of both feeling appropriately and reasoning soundly. Responses of admiration or condemnation based on our partiality or prejudice do not count as moral evaluations. "'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil" (T 3.1.2.4; SBN 472). The solution to the remoteness error requires us to reconstruct imaginatively the agent's circle of associates, making the moral picture more vivid so that we sympathize more readily. Hume suggests that the corrective process for the remoteness error is as natural as correcting our judgment about the size of an object viewed from a distance in spite of the apparent sensible evidence. He notes, "such corrections are common with regard to all the senses; and indeed 'twere impossible we cou'd ever make use of language, or communicate our sentiments to one another, did we not correct the momentary appearances of things, and overlook our present situation" (T 3.3.1.16; SBN 582). In the case of countervailing interest, the moral evaluator remains focused on his own interest. When we find ourselves doing this, we must "loosen" ourselves from our "first station," that of self-interest, and make the moral picture more inclusive (T 3.3.1.18; SBN 583). Again, we sympathize with the effects of an agent's character on himself and his circle of acquaintances. And we

> consider not whether the persons, affected by the qualities, be our acquaintance or strangers, countrymen or foreigners. Nay, we over-look our own interest in those general judgments; and blame not a man for opposing us in any of our pretensions, when his own interest is particularly concerned. (T 3.3.1.17; SBN 582)

When we make the effort to broaden or reconstruct imaginatively the agent's circle of acquaintances, the immediate feelings that arise from our present perspective may nevertheless remain unchanged. We may continue to feel angry or humiliated, and so feel hatred for our enemy since her bravery opposes our interest. But by taking up this more general point of view, by discounting the strength of our own interest, and considering instead the effects of her bravery from a wider perspective than that of our own, we come to recognize that our immediate response is interested rather than moral. We can thus express verbally, if not through sincerely felt sentiment, praise for the merit of our enemy's bravery. In this way, we *judge* the two characters to be equally admirable, even if our sympathy is stronger and so produces a stronger sentiment in the case to which we are partial.

To correct both the remoteness error and the error of countervailing interest, we must adopt a shared perspective on the agent's character. Hume identifies two problems with this variability of sympathy that he thinks motivate us to correct it

by taking up a shared perspective. First, our own situation "is in continual fluctuation," so that an individual currently distant from us may in time become a familiar acquaintance. Second, our own situation frequently differs from that of others, leading to conflict with one another. Rather than relying on our own "peculiar" perspective, we need to find a common point of view with others if we want to "converse together on any reasonable terms" (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581). We fix our view of what someone's character is like by adopting what Hume refers to as a "common point of view." Here is a succinct description of the process of taking up a common perspective.

> Every person's pleasure and interest being different, 'tis impossible men cou'd ever agree in their sentiments and judgments unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all of them. Now in judging of characters, the only interest or pleasure, which appears the same to every spectator, is that of the person himself, whose character is examin'd; or that of persons, who have a connexion with him. And tho' such interests and pleasures touch us more faintly than our own, yet being more constant and universal, they counter-ballance the latter even in practice, and are alone admitted in speculation as the standard of virtue and morality. They alone produce that particular feeling or sentiment, on which moral distinctions depend. (T 3.3.1.30; SBN 590)[1]

The common point of view helps us to move beyond our present and particular situation, and so to disregard the variations in sympathy and sentiment due to vivacity or distance. By sympathizing with the responses of those whose interests are affected by someone's character or with the person's own sense of pride or humility with respect to his character, we extend our concern to the perspective of those most familiar with the character. Their responses are "more constant and universal," so that they "counter-ballance" our own interests "even in practice." Taking up this shared perspective has a steadying or stabilizing effect on our judgment. The responses of the agent and her acquaintances "are alone admitted in speculation as the standard of virtue of morality," since they fix our view of what the agent's character is really like and thus help us to calibrate our sense of someone's praiseworthiness or blameworthiness. By following this method of evaluation, we gradually form a "general unalterable standard" to which our moral sentiments should conform, so that our moral evaluations become correspondingly "constant and establish'd" (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602).

The Consequentialist Error

Lastly, Hume discusses cases where our sympathy is not activated at all. What I am calling the consequentialist error reflects our tendency to respond to the results of someone's action, rather than her character, so that we fail respond to an agent's

character when she is prevented from acting as she characteristically would. It is true that admirable or harmful character traits, when manifested in action, tend to produce valuable or harmful results, respectively. But it is the character trait towards which we direct our moral admiration or blame. So it is a mistake to regard the results of someone's action as harmful or beneficial independently of the character that produced it. Similarly, it is a mistake to disregard someone's character just because she was unable to act as she characteristically would, and there are no consequences – those effects comprising the responses of her acquaintances to her character – with which to sympathize. Now so far, we have focused on cases where a moral evaluator uses imagination to reconstruct the agent's circle of acquaintances, and sympathy to participate in the responses of all the members of the circle. But Hume's discussion of this third error shows that reconstructing and sympathizing with the whole of the agent's circle may not by itself be sufficient to produce the appropriate moral assessment, since in cases involving the consequentialist error there are few, if any, "effects" or "signs" of character in evidence for us to sympathize with.

The solution to the consequentialist error lies in adopting another kind of "steady and general" perspective. In Book 1, Hume argued that we distinguish the "superfluous" or "accidental" circumstances of an event from the properly efficacious causes by employing the general rules associated with the understanding and sound reasoning (T 1.3.13). We also rely on these general rules in the cases involving the consequentialist error, although in this case they produce a moral sentiment rather than a judgment of the understanding. From experience, we know the usual effects of benevolence and so are able to judge the benevolent disposition as if it were a "compleat" cause, even when it cannot be exercised to produce the action usual to such a disposition. Because the "character is . . . 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 compleat one" (T 3.3.1.20; SBN 584). On reflection, we still approve of the benevolent person even though she is currently in reduced circumstances. As Hume puts it, "virtue in rags is still virtue" (T 3.3.1.19; SBN 584). One might object here that you cannot be benevolent without something to give, but that is not really right. If you are poor but benevolently disposed you would give if you could, and you can certainly express benevolent affections; in the same way, if no one stands in need of your beneficence that does not mean you do not have the trait, but rather that you have no reason to exercise it. It is on the other hand usually true that if you have something to give and you lack the benevolent trait, then beneficence will not result.

In cases involving the consequentialist error, Hume argues that the moral evaluator's sentiments are among a set of passions belonging to the imagination. In Book 2, Hume describes desires and inclinations "which go no farther than the imagination, and are rather the faint shadows and images of passions, rather

than any real affections" (T 2.3.10.5; SBN 450). For example, we will be pleased with the utility of a well-built city, arising from a sympathy with the pleasure of the inhabitants, even though we have no affection for them. In cases where the signs of character are not in evidence, the moral sentiments depend on envisioning in our imagination the typical efficacy of a particular character trait, an efficacy not actually in evidence, so that we are "mov'd by degrees of liveliness and strength, which are inferior to *belief*, and independent of the real existence of their objects (T 3.3.1.20; SBN 584). By imaginatively representing to ourselves the effects of benevolence, the sentiment aroused does not feel the same as those elicited by actual benevolent action, but it is "of a like species." The feeling of these two species of sentiment is sufficiently different, however, that they can be contrary, yet coexist without destroying each other: "These emotions are so different in their feeling, that they may often be contrary, without destroying each other." Hume characterizes these sentiments of the imagination as not forceful enough to "controul our passions" and actions, but as capable of influencing "our taste." Notice that because they arise from the corrective effects of general rules on the imagination, and are thereby rendered more stable and consistent, their influence on our taste is authoritative in a way the immediate and unreflective passionate response to the actual consequences is not; as Hume observes, "the imagination adheres to the general views of things, and distinguishes betwixt the feelings they produce, and those which arise from our particular and momentary situation" (T 3.3.1.23; SBN 586).

The Authority of the Moral Sentiments

In correcting each of these three kinds of error – remoteness, countervailing interest, and consequentialist – we often continue to experience those feelings arising from our particular and present perspective: whatever is near to us, affects our own interest, or is perceived vividly, and has an immediate influence on our passions. In our natural and immediate consideration of the consequences, we may, for example, feel disappointment about the ineffective virtuous agent; or we may feel strong love for a benevolent companion but not be moved by an equally benevolent person who is a stranger to us. Attention to the passages where Hume talks about correcting our responses from a general point of view shows him repeatedly making clear that it is not necessarily our passions or sentiments that get corrected. "The passions do not readily follow the determination of our judgment," and "the heart does not always take part" with our corrections, "or regulate its love and hatred by them" (T 3.3.1.18; SBN 583; T 3.3.3.2;SBN 603). Our present situation keeps us to some extent self-interested or partial, or focused on the immediacy of what happens before us. In "our thoughts," however, we adopt a more general perspective, and although "the passions do not always follow

our corrections . . . these corrections serve sufficiently to regulate our abstract notions, and are alone regarded, when we pronounce in general concerning the degrees of vice and virtue" (T 3.3.1.21; SBN 585).

Hume's phrase "abstract notions" is one of several that make moral judgment sound more like the verdict of reason than of moral taste or sentiment. For example, we disregard the variations in sympathy and sentiment "in our general decisions, but still apply the terms expressive of our liking or dislike." We learn to correct "our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn or inalterable." In attempting to "over-look our own interest in those general judgments; and blame not a man for opposing us in any of our pretensions," and making "allowance for a certain degree of selfishness in men," we arrive at "the general principle of blame or praise." If these reflections fail to correct our passions, we say "that reason requires such an impartial conduct" on our part. Or when a sympathetically produced sentiment is weaker than interest or partiality, it nevertheless is "equally conformable to our calm and general principles," and "'tis said to have an equal authority over our reason, and to command our judgment and opinion" (T 3.3.1.16–18; SBN 582–3).

But Hume insists, "the approbation of moral qualities most certainly is not deriv'd from reason, or any comparison of ideas; but proceeds entirely from a moral taste" (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581. See also T 3.3.1.27; SBN 589). And although he uses the language of reason, he links our reflection-informed moral judgment with the calm passions and sympathy rather than reason. He reminds us of "what we formerly said concerning that *reason*, which is able to oppose our passion; and which we have found to be nothing but a general calm determination of the passions, founded on some distant view or reflection" (T 3.3.1.18; SBN 583). Our use of the terms expressing praise or blame indicates a judgment informed by reflection about how we *would* feel if we were affected by the agent's character. Sympathetic consideration of the love or hate of the person's acquaintances for him is for us a guide to his praiseworthiness or blameworthiness. Hume's reference to what was formerly said about improperly calling *reason* the calm determination of the passions is to his discussion, in the section on the origin of government, of the strategy we use to correct our direct passions (in this case self-interest) and determine "what is in itself preferable," or most choiceworthy (T 3.2.7.5; SBN 536). Our passions tend to "solicit" us and "plead in favor of whatever is near and contiguous," which, if we yield to them, leaves us satisfying a very short-term interest at the expense of what is best for us in the long run (T 3.2.7.2; SBN 534). When we consider the objects of our passions at a distance, from a more dispassionate perspective, those vagaries that make the short term good seem so tempting disappear, and we instead prefer what is most choiceworthy. Here, it is through our passionate response, in this case, a reflective form of interest, or long-term interest, that we determine what is really preferable. In the case of moral evaluation, Hume's claim that we *would* find the virtuous person lovable if we were an acquaintance in her circle, suggests that from the reflective, shared

point of view we *do* find her admirable and praiseworthy (even if we don't feel love for her).

Hume draws some initial parallels between the calm passions and the traditional conception of reason in the third part of Book 2. I want to survey some of those points briefly because they point to the possibility of constructing an account of good moral judgment as itself a virtue. Hume does not explicitly set out such an account in the *Treatise*, although he does in the second *Enquiry* and in the essay "Of the standard of taste" (Taylor 2002). We already noted in the section "Sympathy, the Indirect Passions, and Moral Sentiment," that some of our passions are naturally calm and so are mistaken for the conclusions of reason. As he wraps up his discussion of the will and the passions in T 2.3.8, Hume reviews the distinction between the calmness and violence of the passions, now explicitly associating the calm passions with how we use the term "reason" when we are talking about choosing good and avoiding evil.

> What we commonly understand by *passion*, is a violent and sensible emotion of the mind, when any good or evil is presented . . . By *reason* we mean affections of the very same kind with the former; but such as operate more calmly, and cause no disorder in the temper: Which tranquillity leads us into a mistake concerning them, and causes us to regard them as conclusions only of our intellectual faculties. (T 2.3.8.13; SBN 437)

Hume characterizes the calm passions here as like reason because they motivate us without producing emotional agitation. But he argues that some of our calm passions are also like reason both because they are *stronger* than, and hence able to oppose their violent counterparts, and because they *are reflection-informed* responses. These claims are critical to seeing how the reflective moral evaluations we make are strong enough "to controul our taste," if not our actions.

The account of the calm passions in Book 2 deals with the direct passions that move us to action. These passions do not influence the will "in proportion to their violence, or the disorder they occasion in the temper." Rather, through custom and its "own force," a passion can "become a settled principle of action" and "the predominant inclination of the soul," which no longer produces sensible agitation. A calm passion can thus be strong, while a violent one can be weak, a "momentary gust" that quickly subsides once it meets with opposition or uncertainty (T 2.3.4.1; SBN 418). Echoing Joseph Butler's distinction between active, practical habits and passive ones, Hume also argues that custom makes it easier and more pleasant to engage in active habits, in turn giving them "new force" (T 2.3.5.5; SBN 424). The imaginative *effort* involved in making moral judgments, either from the common point of view or by relying on general rules, and the *importance* of our moral judgments, together make it plausible to regard moral evaluation as an active habit.

Finally, some of the settled calm passions that may be mistaken for reflective reason comprise the virtue of strength of mind. Hume describes strength of mind

as "the prevalence of the calm passions above the violent," a prevalence which depends on the peculiar temper and disposition of the individual (T 2.3.3.10; SBN 418). Although "the violent passions have a more powerful influence on the will . . . the calm ones, when corroborated by reflection, and seconded by resolution, are able to controul them in their most furious movements" (T 2.3.8.13; SBN 437). The moral evaluator with strength of mind will find it easier to set aside her own interests, bring the distant characters closer, and disregard consequences in favor of character. Her moral praise or blame is informed by reflection on the vagaries of her passions and the imagination, on the commonality of interest among humankind, on the naturalness of being more concerned with the characters of those who affect one, and on our tendency to get caught up in the present and what is actually happening around us. Her resolution to stabilize her own internal judgments of others and to converse intelligibly with others will lead her to form an active habit of moral evaluation, and in turn cultivate a strong and authoritative moral taste.

Moral Knowledge as a Shared Resource

Let us return now to the point I made in the introduction to this essay about moral knowledge being a shared resource. The Humean appeal to moral sentiment is to a *cultivated* form of moral response, and signals a particular way of theorizing about the social development and character of our sense of morality. We might regard moral evaluation as a social practice in which, ideally, everyone participates. Because we direct our moral attention to what about a person's character, manifested in her attitudes or conduct, has a special relevance for how well or badly our lives go, it is important to us that others in our moral community endorse and agree with our judgments. The standards for appropriately praising or blaming, admiring or condemning, arise from what Hume calls an "intercourse of sentiments," that is, from conversation and debate among the members of the moral community (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602). From the common point of view, we give a fair hearing to the views of others, thereby facilitating intelligible conversation. Moral evaluators also subject their attitudes to mutual scrutiny and attempt to reach agreement in outlook. The moral sentiments thus exhibit shared reflection on the value of a broad range of character traits and qualities, as well as social policies and practices, that make a difference to how well people live.

The agreement aimed for is not sheer consensus, however, but agreement in *judgment* about the worth of particular traits or kinds of character. Such judgments incorporate reflective beliefs about which character traits are virtues and which vices. Additionally, sympathetic concern for the effects of character traits on the interests, commitments, and lives of the agent herself or others introduces an affective quality, a felt sentiment of pleasure or uneasiness, to moral judgment. The common point of view and the practice of moral evaluation thus enable moral

evaluators to develop a moral taste, a *sense* of the value of particular traits or kinds of characters.

Hume has stressed the need for internal stability, which we achieve when moral evaluation becomes an active habit and when we are able to converse on intelligible terms with others. The point about conversing intelligibly relates to the social purpose served by our moral evaluations, and the importance of seeing moral knowledge as a shared resource. As Hume puts it, our exchange of mutually intelligible sentiments "in society and conversation, makes us form some general unalterable standard," and our moral evaluations are renderered "sufficient for discourse, and serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools" (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602). The moral sentiments attest to judgments about the worth of various character traits, and these judgments differ from our personal loves and hates. We are interested in educating our children, in our homes and in the schools, and in some cases from the pulpit. We want the kind of moral education, and the institutions fostering it, to shape children's characters and allow "the sentiment of honour . . . [to] take root in their tender minds," so that they can become useful and agreeable, to themselves and others (T 3.2.2.26; SBN 500). We want our public exemplars, for example, those on the stage and those with social or political power, to reflect our values and shared sense of what is good. Far from being merely subjective reactions, our moral evaluations have a real influence on what our society looks like. It is, as Hume recognizes, crucially important for us to make accurate identifications of character and to have a proper appreciation of virtue and an abhorrence of vice.

The moral sentiments have a productive rather than a representative function, and Hume famously describes them, in the second *Enquiry*, as "gilding and staining all natural objects" and raising "in a manner a new creation" (EPM Appendix 1.21; SBN 294). We direct these sentiments towards certain aspects of persons, their "mental qualities" or character traits, as these are exhibited in conduct, attitudes, or policies. We noted earlier that character traits have a special relevance for how well we attend to a range of needs and concerns important to our living together with some degree of success. Through our actions and attitudes we establish our character and earn a reputation with others. As the *Enquiry* claim about the moral sentiments gilding or staining characters suggests, the appraisal of our character and conduct by others not only contributes to our reputation, but also informs our sense of our own character. Those of us who are trustworthy and do our part in society will merit admiration, and may sometimes receive the love and good will of others. Hume suggests that "the most considerable effect that virtue and vice have upon the human mind" is, in the case of virtue, to elicit love and pride as well as admiration, and in the case of vice, to arouse hatred and humility in addition to moral disapproval (T 3.1.2.5; SBN 473).

In cultivating the proper appreciation for what is praiseworthy about someone's character, we can also turn the practice of moral appraisal on our own character. Virtuous character is a particularly durable source of pride. Our "peace and inward

satisfaction" depend on our cultivating a virtuous character, as well as moral taste, so that our mind can "bear its own survey" (T 3.3.6.6; SBN 620). Our appreciation of virtue and blame of vice may thus be deployed as practical attitudes that influence our own choices and conduct.

Note

1   See also the discussion at T 3.3.1.14–18; SBN 580–3. At T 3.3.3.2; SBN 602, Hume describes slightly differently the process of taking up a common point of view. He is here considering the qualities that make someone a "good" person. These are the qualities that make us useful and agreeable to those in our "narrow circle" of friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues. Hume notes that we expect most people to be concerned about those closest to them. When we sympathize with the narrow circle of an agent distant from us, our sympathy is less lively than the concern we feel for those in our own circle. Nonetheless, we extrapolate from our own situation or that of those with whom we easily sympathize. When we encounter cases resembling those with which we're familiar, we know from reflection that we would find someone equally as worthy or harmful were we a member of the distant agent's circle. By this strategy of extrapolation, we "arrive at a more constant and establish'd judgment" about the value of various characters. Again, our judgments may fail to regulate our sentiments and, yet the former are "sufficient for discourse, and serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools."

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