



Hume on Blame and Excuse

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Hume's account of blame and excuse differs in fundamental respects from many contemporary ones. Many contemporary views, ultimately derived from the Kantian dictum that 'ought' implies 'can', base excuses on the nonvoluntary character of an action. For example, H. L. A. Hart argues that the basic requirements for responsibility are that a person have the capacity and a fair opportunity to do what is required.¹ A person is to be excused for an action if he lacked either the capacity or opportunity to do what was required. As these are conditions for an action being voluntary in a suitably narrow sense, Hart primarily bases excuses on the nonvoluntary character of actions. Likewise, Richard Brandt's view, which in many respects is similar to Hume's, requires that the manifestation of a character trait be subject to a high degree of voluntary control before blame is appropriate.² Hume, however, explicitly denies that either a character trait or its manifestation in conduct need be subject to voluntary control for blame to be appropriate. The nonvoluntary character of an action does not necessarily excuse one from blame.

Hume makes four key claims about blame and excuse.

- (1) The ultimate objects of praise and blame are mental qualities, not actions.
- (2) Actions are considered only as signs of mental qualities.
- (3) The possession and expression of these mental qualities may be appropriate objects of praise or blame even if they are nonvoluntary.
- (4) Persons have excuses if their actions do not indicate enduring mental qualities. These points need to be substantiated and explained.

The first two claims may be considered together. That Hume holds mental qualities are the ultimate objects of praise and blame and that actions are considered only as signs of mental qualities is indisputable.

*'Tis evident, that when we praise any actions, we regard only the motives that produced them, and consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper. The external performance has no merit. We must look within to find the moral quality. This we cannot do directly; and therefore fix our attention on actions, as on external signs. But these actions are still considered as signs; and the ultimate object of our praise and approbation is the motive, that produced them.*³

For present purposes, only two points need be noted about this passage. First, it clearly states that the ultimate objects of praise and, as he indicates in his following paragraph,⁴ blame are always mental qualities. The expression mental qualities is vague, perhaps deliberately so. Sometimes Hume uses the term motive instead. By 'motive' he does not intend any passing desire or further intention which one may have in acting, e.g., embarrassing others. For Hume, some motives are not even dispositions to act.⁵ Second, actions or external performances have no merit. They are only signs of mental qualities. Even if the concept of an action includes more than the external behavior, such as the intention, it does not include motives or desires. A difference in intention may entail a difference in action, but a difference in motive does not. The same action may be performed from different motives. Hence, actions are not logically connected with the objects of praise and blame.

Hume's claim that actions themselves have no merit, it might be objected, is incorrect. People do constantly evaluate actions. If they did not, then actions would not be considered untoward and a basis for attributing blame. However, Hume does not deny that actions may be evaluated in some way or other, only that they alone have merit or are appropriate objects of praise and blame. Actions may be evaluated without reference to mental qualities, for example, as right or wrong, useful or unuseful. Hume is

chiefly concerned with evaluating actions as virtuous or vicious. The terms virtuous and vicious as applied to actions involve an element of praise and blame, whereas the terms right and wrong, at least in most of their uses, do not. Thus, Hume is not denying that actions alone may have merit in the sense of value or utility. Rather, he is denying that actions alone are virtuous or vicious, because 'virtuous' and 'vicious' involve an element of praise and blame and so refer to mental qualities as well as actions.

Hume's reason for making mental qualities the ultimate objects of praise and blame rests upon the most basic principle of his ethical theory. Moral approval and disapproval are sentiments. These sentiments cannot take actions as their immediate objects.

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 in 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.

This reflexion 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 or morals; but only the quality or character from which the action proceeded. These alone are durable enough to affect our sentiments concerning the person.⁶

Hume's point in the preceding passage is a psychological one about the possible objects of sentiments. Only lasting entities may be the objects of sentiments. There is, perhaps, a logical reason for the same claim. A person may be blameworthy for some time after an action. He is blameworthy although the action no longer exists. Thus, there must be some present feature of the person or the person himself which is the object of blame. One might say the person is blameworthy as the cause of the untoward action. Hume agrees, but he goes further and specifies

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that aspect of the person, a mental quality, which was the cause of the action. That feature, a durable mental quality, still exists. If it did not, the person would not be blameworthy. It follows that it is not actions which are excused but persons or their mental qualities. Excuses indicate that blame is inappropriate. Since persons or their mental qualities are blamed, it is they which are excused. And when persons are excused, the actions are still untoward or wrong but not vicious.

It may be objected that this view cannot account for blame of a dead person. Since the person and his mental quality no longer exist, he cannot be blameworthy. However, such an objection is mistaken. When people now blame Nero for the burning of Rome, they are considering Nero as he was when alive with his various mental qualities. The object of blame is a past state of affairs which, via sympathy or the sentiment of humanity, arouses a sentiment of blame. While Hume admits that the sentiment one has towards Nero may be weaker than that which one has toward a contemporary person, this feature is irrelevant to decisions and expressions of sentiments which are made from a general point of view. Mental qualities are blamed or praised with respect to their influence upon those who associate with the persons having them.⁷ A similar process of "corrections" may be involved in making judgments about past actions. The difference, however, between evaluating Nero's action as wrong and blaming him is that one does not simply blame Nero as he was at the time of the fire, as one would have to do if actions were the object of blame, but also as he was a day, week, month, or year later.

Hume's third key claim, that the possession or expression of mental qualities need not be voluntary for them to be praised or blamed, is tied up with his contention that the distinction between virtues and vices on the one hand, and abilities and defects on the other, is a verbal dispute. In the Treatise he is much less emphatic about this matter being a verbal dispute than he is in the Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals. He has three basic reasons for denying that praiseworthy and blameworthy

mental qualities need be voluntary. First, and this point is explicitly made only in the Inquiry, there is no clear linguistic distinction between virtues and abilities with respect to their voluntary character.⁸ Involuntary mental qualities such as courage, equanimity, patience, and self-command are called virtues. His second and related point is that ancient moral philosophers treated various nonvoluntary qualities as virtues and vices.⁹ In this context he notes that the greater the degree of these qualities, the more blamable they are, yet they are also less voluntary.¹⁰

His final reason for not requiring mental qualities to be voluntary in order to be blamable is a fact about the sentiments of approval and disapproval. The sentiments do in fact take nonvoluntary mental qualities as their objects. The sentiments of approval and disapproval arise from feeling pleasure and pain. "Now I believe no one will assert," he writes, "that a quality can never produce pleasure or pain to the person who considers it, unless it be perfectly voluntary in the person who possesses it."¹¹ Hume does not deny that there may be differences in the sentiments of approval and disapproval one has toward different qualities.¹² But he does deny that differences in sentiments are sufficient to distinguish between virtues and abilities, vices and defects. All of the different sentiments, e.g., love and esteem, indicate an element of approval or disapproval.

Hume nowhere explicitly states his fourth key claim, that a person should be excused if his action does not indicate an enduring mental quality. However, it clearly follows from his other claims, and some of his comments imply it. Mental qualities are the objects of blame. Actions are considered only as signs of mental qualities. Thus, if actions do not indicate enduring mental qualities, then they cannot provide a basis for blame and a person has an excuse.

In arguing that mental qualities are the ultimate objects of praise and blame, Hume writes the following:

*After the same manner, when we require any action, or blame a person for not performing it, we always suppose, that one in that situation shou'd be influenc'd by the proper motive of that action, and we esteem it vicious in him to be regardless of it. If we find, upon enquiry, that the virtuous motive was still powerful over his breast, tho' check'd in its operation by some circumstances unknown to us, we retract our blame, and have the same esteem for him, as if he had actually perform'd the action, which we require of him.*¹³

Since the virtuous motive existed, the person's omission does not indicate an undesirable mental quality.

While in the preceding passage Hume is treating omissions, when arguing against those who think free will requires liberty of indifference, he uses the same general principle for commissions.

*Men are not blam'd for such evil actions as they perform ignorantly and casually, whatever may be their consequences. Why? but because the causes of these actions are only momentary, and terminate in them alone. Men are less blam'd for such evil actions, as they perform hastily and unpremeditatedly, than for such as proceed from thought and deliberation. For what reason? but because a hasty temper, tho' a constant cause in the mind, operates only by intervals, and infects not the whole character. Again, repentance wipes off every crime, especially if attended with an evident reformation of life and manners. How is this to be accounted for? But by asserting that actions render a person criminal, merely as they are proofs of criminal passions or principles in the mind; and when by any alteration of these principles they cease to be just proofs, they likewise cease to be criminal.*¹⁴

Thus, blameworthiness and the degree of it depend upon actions indicating durable mental qualities. Actions may not, as in accident and ignorance, indicate mental qualities at all. Or they may indicate mental qualities, as in unpremeditated crimes and crimes of passion, but the qualities may not be enduring ones or they may not affect a person's whole mode of conduct as, say, the quality of dishonesty does. Finally, if one can be sure that a mental quality has been removed, then the person is no longer appropriately blamed. This last feature of Hume's account is particularly noteworthy, for it explains why a person may not now be blamed for his deeds of many years ago; he may no longer have the mental qualities of which those deeds were signs.

Hume comes closest to stating the general principles of excuses in An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding.

*For as actions are objects of our moral sentiment so far only as they are indications of the internal character, passions, and affections, it is impossible that they can give rise either to praise or blame where they proceed not from these principles, but are derived altogether from external violence.*¹⁵

In this passage he clearly derives the ground of excuses from his second key claim. Also, he indicates that the expression 'mental qualities' from the Treatise covers character, passions, and affections. Finally, one must carefully note that he does not make nonvoluntariness the ground of excuses. While actions "derived from external violence" may be nonvoluntary, not all nonvoluntary actions are "derived from external violence." Hume is only insisting that the actions be caused by, and thus be signs of, mental qualities of the person. Nonvoluntariness per se is not an excuse. When excuses are appropriate with respect to nonvoluntary actions, it is not because they are nonvoluntary but because they do not indicate enduring mental qualities.

Two complications in Hume's view must now be considered. The first develops from his contention that actions are deemed virtuous (vicious) because they indicate a virtuous (vicious) motive or mental quality. It follows from this claim that the sense of the morality of actions cannot be the only virtuous motive. If virtuous motives were desires to perform virtuous actions, then the whole view would be circular. Virtuous actions would be those which indicate virtuous motives, i.e., desires to perform virtuous actions. Hence, Hume enunciates as a fundamental maxim "that no action can be virtuous, or morally good, unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it, distinct from the sense of its morality."¹⁶

This maxim means that in a very extended sense Hume accepts the principle that 'ought' implies 'can'. It cannot be the case that one ought to perform an action, that it be a virtuous action, unless one can have a motive for performing it. But one need not have the motive on any specific occasion. Indeed, an individual may never have that motive. All that is required is that the motive be one which is found "in human nature." Of course, by this phrase Hume means that most people have the motive, but there may be isolated individuals, e.g., psychopaths, who never do. Moreover, whether one has that motive and whether it influences one on any given occasion need not be within one's voluntary control.

The second complication in Hume's view is more involved. He wishes to explain why modern philosophers distinguished between moral virtues and natural abilities when ancient philosophers did not. Men have noted, he says in the Treatise, that while natural abilities are practically invariable, moral virtues, "or at least, the actions, that proceed from them, may be chang'd by the motives of rewards and punishments, praise and blame."¹⁷ Legislators, divines, and moralists busied themselves attempting to regulate these voluntary actions. They knew, he says, that punishment would have little effect in making a person prudent, but might have some in making him just. However, men in their daily lives do not

have the same goal as moralists, so they praise and blame nonvoluntary traits as well as voluntary ones.

In the Inquiry Hume's comments upon this point are slightly different. First, he appears to use 'voluntary' in a somewhat different sense from the Treatise. In the Treatise, Hume nowhere explicitly defines 'voluntary', but in the passage cited above he appears to use it to mean 'alterable'. However, in the Inquiry he appears to use it to mean 'dependent upon choice or will'.¹⁸ This latter usage conforms to his definition of liberty of voluntary actions-- "a power of acting or not acting according to the determinations of the will."¹⁹ These two uses may perhaps be reconciled if one assumes that only actions and mental qualities which are dependent upon choice or will may be altered. In any case, that which is voluntary is not free in the sense of being uncaused.²⁰

Second, in the Inquiry he blames only theologians for distinguishing moral virtues from natural abilities by their voluntariness. Third, he ascribes this ground for the distinction to "treating all morals on a like footing with civil laws guarded by the sanctions of reward and punishment ..."²¹ He does not mention praise and blame as affording motives for action, only reward and punishment.

At least in the Inquiry Hume distinguishes reward and punishment from praise and blame. Reward and punishment are intended to encourage or alter people's behaviour and are, therefore, restricted to that which is voluntary (but not uncaused). As he remarks in the Treatise, "'Tis indeed certain, that as all human laws are founded on rewards and punishments, 'tis suppos'd as a fundamental principle, that these motives have an influence on the mind, and both produce the good and prevent the evil actions."²² However, praise and blame occur in contexts other than those in which the intention is to modify behaviour. Theologians disguised as philosophers have mistakenly tried to restrict praise and blame to that which is voluntary and treat the entire sphere of morality on a par with civil laws as designed to modify behavior.

Hume is at least dimly aware of the distinctions between punishing, having a sentiment of blame, and expressing blame. Punishment is clearly restricted to contexts in which the intention is to alter a person's conduct. Thus, it is appropriate only for voluntary actions. But having a sentiment of blame does not necessarily involve any intention to alter a person's behavior. Moreover, if one has a sentiment of blame, one need not express it.²³ Even if one does express it, the intention need not be to alter the blameworthy person's conduct. For example, one's intention may be to warn others about a person. (A similar analysis applies to rewarding, having a sentiment of praise, and expressing praise.)

Hume is perhaps unclear about praise and blame as motives for actions. Either the expression of the sentiments or the having of them may afford another a motive for action. A person may be motivated simply to avoid others having a sentiment of blame towards him regardless of whether or not that sentiment is expressed--"I know she would blame me for it although she would never say so." Hence, the expression or the mere having of the sentiments of praise and blame as well as reward and punishment, may afford a person a motive for action even though the person who has or expresses a sentiment of praise or blame may not intend to alter the other's conduct.

These distinctions are crucial for the interpretation and classification of Hume's view of blame and excuse. His rejection of the requirement of voluntariness for praise and blame clearly distinguishes his view from a Kantian one. But his emphasis upon blame as a sentiment also makes his account quite different from utilitarian views. A simple utilitarian view is that blaming is an action to be evaluated like any other action, by its utility. Hume clearly does not hold this view. He does not take blaming to be an action; rather, it is primarily the having of a sentiment which may or may not be expressed.

Hume's view is also different from more sophisticated utilitarian views such as Nowell-Smith's. Nowell-Smith maintains two theses which Hume denies. First, he holds that "the point of blame is to strengthen some motives and weaken others."²⁴ Second, on the basis of his first thesis, he contends that moral traits of character are distinguished from others by the fact that they can be modified by praise and blame, reward and punishment.²⁵ Hume, however, does not hold that the point of blame is always to affect motivation. To blame is primarily to have a sentiment of disapproval; one may have a sentiment of disapproval towards persons without attempting to change their conduct. Consequently, Hume does not restrict virtues to traits which can be modified by praise and blame. Some virtues are "almost invariable."²⁶ At best, Nowell-Smith's view can apply only to expressing the sentiment of blame.²⁷

While Hume's key claims cannot be thoroughly evaluated herein, some brief remarks may be made about them. When qualified, the first claim, that mental qualities are the ultimate objects of praise and blame, is correct. Both 'praise' and 'blame' have several uses. Both terms may be used with respect to nonhuman objects; a defective tire may be blamed for a wreck, and a painting may be praised. But Hume is interested in those uses connected with personal merit and with respect to which excuses are appropriate. Excuses are given for wrongful or untoward actions; they do not deny the inappropriateness of actions but their reflection upon the merit or worth of the actors. Although Hume's term mental qualities is vague and imprecise, it is persons or their characteristics which are praised, blamed, and excused, not their actions. Actions are the grounds for praise and blame; they indicate something about a person. Thus, the relation between actions and mental qualities or character traits is crucial to an account of praise and blame.

Hume's view of the relation between actions and mental qualities, that actions are external signs of mental qualities,

may, however, be thought to be open to a devastating criticism. He appears to assume that one can know mental qualities independent of actions. Actions are to be evaluated as being of a type caused by virtuous or vicious motives. Thus, mental qualities cannot be defined by the types of actions to which they lead. But it is a commonplace in contemporary philosophy that one cannot know mental qualities independent of their behavioral manifestations, for that would require private access to objects of knowledge and a private language. Thus, Hume's view appears to collapse due to a mistaken belief that passions can be defined solely by their private feeling.

However, Hume's view can be defended without subscribing to private knowledge and language. His account of the nature of one's knowledge of passions may indeed be wrong, but that does not necessarily invalidate his view of blame and excuse. First, his view does not require that mental qualities be independent of all actions. They need only be definably independent of those actions for which one may be praised and blamed. Second, words and facial expressions are also significant criteria of mental qualities. Many mental qualities are better indicated by how one does something (cheerfully, carefully, furtively) than what one does. Third, even if the actions for which one may be praised or blamed are criteria of mental qualities, it is only classes of actions which are so, not particular ones. It may be a criterion of a benevolent person that he performs actions helpful to others, but not all actions helpful to others indicate that a person is benevolent. (The same action can be performed from a variety of motives.) Hence, there is no necessary connection between a person performing a particular action of a certain type and his having a certain mental quality or character trait.

Hume is not completely unaware of the close connection between actions and mental qualities; indeed, his theory requires it. He allows that one cannot find mental qualities directly, so people focus their attention upon actions.²⁸

And actions are, he admits, better indications of mental qualities than words.²⁹ All his view requires is that a person be able to perform, say, an action helpful to others, without being benevolent or benevolently motivated. As such conduct is certainly possible, Hume's view is not defective at this point.

Undoubtedly, Hume's most controversial claim is that virtues and vices need not be voluntary. His characterization of 'voluntary' is at least inadequate; not all voluntary conduct is under the immediate control of choice or will. Moreover, his reconciliation of liberty and determinism is probably inadequate inasmuch as he claims actions are necessitated. However, one can still consider his general claim about virtues and vices not needing to be voluntary without adhering to his analysis of what that means. Whatever the correct analysis of voluntary, it may be said that Hume's rejection of the distinction between virtues and vices on the one hand, and natural abilities and defects on the other, is incorrect. If one thing is certain, it is that the sphere of morality is restricted to the realm of voluntary conduct.

Hume, however, is at least correct on the specific point he is making. His point is not about the sphere of morality narrowly conceived. He is concerned with the whole realm of personal merit depending on mental qualities. Most contemporary philosophers note that blame may be appropriate in nonmoral contexts and then focus on moral blame.³⁰ While this procedure is perfectly acceptable, one must keep clearly in mind that the account given is only for a subclass of blameworthiness. However, Hume's view is not so restricted.

Hume is correct in asserting that ancient moral philosophers did not use voluntariness as a criterion of virtues and vices. His comment suggests an even more important point. If the sphere of morality is confined to that which a person can voluntarily control, that is due to a substantive moral principle which has become accepted only in rather

modern times. In the ancient and medieval world, it was not uncommon to blame and punish animals. A classic case is the conviction and execution in 1386 of the sow of Falaise for biting a child.³¹ Requiring voluntariness as a necessary condition for blame and punishment is relatively modern. Hume, as suggested above, accepts it for reward and punishment but not praise and blame.

The terms virtue and vice, especially virtue, apply outside the sphere of morality narrowly conceived. Hume notes that there are virtues of different kinds.³² As it is not redundant to speak of moral virtues, there must be non-moral virtues. Some nonmoral virtues are qualities the possession and exercise of which are not voluntary. It is perfectly sensible to say of a fullback in football that speed is not one of his virtues. One may also say that quick-wittedness is not one of a man's virtues, yet whether or not he is quick-witted generally or on a particular occasion is not something he can voluntarily control.

It may be objected that Hume has gone astray in treating praise and blame on an equal footing. There are contexts in which praise is appropriate but blame is not. One can praise a woman for her beauty, but it is, in Nowell-Smith's phrase, logically odd to blame a woman for her ugliness. Blame is more closely restricted to the realm of the voluntary. However, it is not clear that one does actually praise a woman for her beauty. One may praise a woman's beauty, but not her for her beauty. While Hume recognizes that physical traits may give rise to pride and humility, love and hatred, and are based upon the same general principles as virtues and vices, he does not treat physical traits as virtues and vices.³³ He apparently takes it to be an inexplicable fact that the sentiments produced by mental and physical qualities are different.³⁴ However, one might account for the difference on the ground that physical qualities are not influencing motives of the will and so do not have the close connection with actions which mental qualities have. But even if the sentiments of praise

and blame do extend to physical traits, one need not express them. Hence, one may express one's approval of a woman's beauty but out of politeness refrain from expressing one's disapproval of another's ugliness.

In any case, involuntariness (and so nonvoluntariness) is not always an excuse from blame in nonmoral contexts. Consider a second baseman who fumbles a moderately hard ground ball allowing the winning run to score. He will be blamed for the loss and charged with an error. If he says, "I couldn't help it; I'm a poor fielder and can handle only slow grounders," has he presented an acceptable excuse? It may be argued that he is blameworthy only if he fell below some standard of skill he could have met. In so arguing one is simply opting for the voluntariness requirement for blameworthiness. Yet it is perfectly appropriate to blame him even if he could not have fielded the ball provided a second baseman of normal capacity and skill could have. His lack of capacity is not an excuse in this context.³⁵ Hence, Hume is at least correct to maintain that involuntariness is not an excuse in all contexts. Since Hume is concerned to present a view of blame and excuse appropriate for all relevant contexts, his principle that a person is to be excused if his action does not indicate an enduring mental quality may present the only general ground of excuses.

Space does not permit a detailed consideration of whether Hume is also correct in claiming involuntariness per se does not excuse from blame in moral contexts. However, in conclusion a few remarks can be made to support his contention. First, involuntariness cannot be shown to be an excuse from blame on linguistic grounds. It has already been suggested that historically it was not even accepted as an excuse. If it has since become embedded in language, it can be dug up. Nor does the alleged principle that 'ought' implies 'can' support it. Indeed, admitting involuntariness as an excuse would refute the claim that 'ought' implies 'can'. When one has an excuse (as opposed to a justification), it is still the case that one ought not have done what one did. So

if involuntariness were an excuse, then one ought not have done something even though one could not have done otherwise. Hence, if involuntariness is an excuse, it is so because of a substantive moral principle.

Second, if the ultimate objects of the sentiments of praise and blame are mental qualities or character traits, it is much less plausible to maintain that involuntariness is an excuse. While some character traits may be changed by hard work, many are not usually so modifiable. A person who is quick-tempered may learn not to express his anger, but it is another thing for him to cease to feel anger quickly. Yet the possession of any such traits would have to be voluntary if involuntariness were always an excuse from blame. Moreover, as the sentiments of praise and blame are not necessarily directed to producing changes, they do not imply that anyone ought to do anything. That is, one may have a sentiment of blame towards a person's character without intending that he act to change it for the better. Consequently, there is no need for the objects of these sentiments to be voluntary and so modifiable.

Third, Hume accepts involuntariness as an excuse from punishment. His central moral insight in this context is that accepting involuntariness as an excuse from punishment does not entail accepting it as an excuse from a sentiment of blame. Blame, as a sentiment or attitude (this difference does not affect the point) of disapproval towards someone, does not necessarily involve doing anything to him--punishing him or even expressing one's blame. Involuntariness is an excuse from punishment because of a substantive moral rule about how one ought to treat others; one ought not make them suffer for that which they cannot control. To disapprove of others because of mental qualities or character traits which they cannot control, even to avoid their company, is not to intentionally make them suffer.

Finally, by denying that involuntariness per se is an excuse from blame, one can provide a more accurate account of excuses. Accident, ignorance of fact, and compulsion are

still excuses from blame because actions in such conditions do not indicate enduring mental qualities. Moral ignorance is not an excuse from blame because it reflects, at least in adults, the presence of undesirable mental qualities. If involuntariness were the ground of excuses from blame, then ignorance of moral rules would be on the same footing as ignorance of available facts. Finally, certain forms of mental illness, such as psychopathy, do not excuse one from blame. Surely one has a strong disapprobation of a severe psychopath. One disapproves of the character of a person so lacking in sympathy for other persons that he can strangle people in order to hear the gurgling sounds they make as they expire.³⁶ But one's disapproval or blame of such a person's character does not commit one to punishing him. If his conduct is involuntary, then there is a good reason for not punishing him and providing psychiatric treatment instead. It is one thing to disapprove of his character and avoid his company, and another to cause him needless suffering. It is this fundamental point which Hume dimly perceived when he held that mental qualities need not be voluntary to be blameworthy and also held that at least their manifestation must be voluntary if a person is to be punished. Because he saw this point and others like it which most philosophers have not seen, Hume is to be praised even if his insights were not voluntary.

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1. Punishment and Responsibility (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 152.
2. "Blameworthiness and Obligation," in Essays in Moral Philosophy, ed. A. I. Melden (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), p. 19.
3. A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), p. 477.
4. See text at note 13.
5. See Páll S. Árdall, Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1966), p. 166.
6. Treatise, p. 575.
7. Treatise, p. 582.
8. An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. Charles W. Hendel (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957), p. 129. In the Treatise, he merely claims that deciding which qualities are virtues is a problem for grammarians rather than philosophers and that it is not as easy a task as one might at first imagine. Treatise, p. 610.
9. Principles of Morals, pp. 134-38; Treatise, p. 608.
10. Treatise, p. 608.
11. Treatise, p. 609.
12. Treatise, pp. 607-08; Principles of Morals, pp. 132-34.
13. Treatise, pp. 477-78.
14. Treatise, p. 412. This passage also occurs, with only slight changes to improve the style, in An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Charles W. Hendel (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955), p. 107.
15. Human Understanding, p. 108.
16. Treatise, p. 479; italics omitted.
17. Treatise, p. 609.
18. Principles of Morals, pp. 129, 138.
19. Human Understanding, p. 104; italics omitted.

20. Human Understanding, p. 104; Treatise, p. 609.
21. Principles of Morals, p. 138.
22. Treatise, p. 410.
23. Árdal, Passion and Value, p. 160.
24. P. H. Nowell-Smith, Ethics (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 296.
25. Ethics, pp. 303-04
26. Treatise, p. 609.
27. See Árdal, Passion and Value, p. 160.
28. Treatise, p. 477.
29. Treatise, p. 575.
30. See, for example, John Hospers, Human Conduct (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), p. 477.
31. Ives, History of Penal Methods, p. 257, cited in Nicholas N. Kittrie, The Right To Be Different (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 23n 67. Views like that of Nowell-Smith are open to the objection that they permit praise and blame of animals. See C. A. Campbell, "Is 'Freewill' a Pseudo-Problem?" in Free Will and Determinism, ed. Bernard Berofsky (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 114. Hume does not believe animals are objects of praise and blame because sympathy or the sentiment of humanity does not extend to them. In point of fact, however, many people do appear to have and express sentiments of praise and blame towards animals.
32. Principles of Morals, p. 129n., a note to the 1760 edition; and p. 132n., a note in earlier editions.
33. Treatise, p. 614.
34. Treatise, p. 617.
35. These comments on nonmoral blameworthiness have benefited from an unpublished paper by Jules Coleman, "Morally Culpable Conduct." The example is his.
36. Richard B. Brandt, Ethical Theory (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959), p. 522.