Hume's Moral Ontology
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HUME'S MORAL ONTOLOGY*

My concern here is the claim, made in my recent book, that Hume is a moral realist.[1] In general terms I would describe this book as one of several that represent a sustained effort to consider Hume within an eighteenth-century context, an effort to see him not as a timeless figure, or to treat him as a brilliantly successful contemporary of ourselves, but as a brilliant eighteenth-century philosopher responding to eighteenth-century issues with, for all his timelessness, eighteenth-century conceptual tools and from an eighteenth-century perspective.[2] It would be hopelessly naive to suppose that any of us can view Hume without any hiseorical distortion, but it is equally naive to read Hume, as he is often read, without historical sensitivity. Furthermore, such insensitivity closes us off from what is uniquely valuable about Hume, for, instead of seeing his writings as the consequence of his unique efforts to confront and answer the philosophical questions posed to him, the historically insensitive read into him their own questions and their own answers. The past studied as an echo of the present is of little interest (and none of that intrinsic), nor can there be much value in the study of those who saw but through a glass, darkly, the truths now so apparent to us. Our intellectual past is important to us because it is different from our intellectual present, and not because it seconds what we presume already to know.

I was entirely serious, then, when I said that both the plausibility, and the very meaning of my claim that Hume is a common-sense moralist or a moral realist depends upon considering this claim -- and, consequently, Hume -- within a particular philosophical context.[3] It will not do to suppose that moral realism

is a term with an eternal, unchanging, and Platonic connotation, and then to reject my suggestion outright because Hume was, as I would certainly agree, virtually without sympathy for anything revealing a tincture of Platonism. Philosophical terms as well as philosophical issues are historical, changing entities; it is those who think or act otherwise who smuggle Platonism into the discussion.[4] Doubtless, however, some of the misunderstanding to which I refer is my own responsibility. I can join Hume in saying "I have found by experience, that some of my expressions have not been so well chosen, as to guard against all mistakes in the readers,"[5] and so I shall here offer some clarifications of my view.

I. To begin, I wish to bring together in one place evidence of the significant qualifications I put on my claim about Hume's moral realism. Taken together, these remarks show that my position is consistent with the widely held (and generally correct, I would say) view that Hume is in one highly important sense a naturalist, and that I ascribe to him a realism that is neither Platonic, Scholastic, Cartesian, nor Hutchesonian:

> A. If naturalism is thought to be the view "that the whole of the universe or experience may be accounted for by a method like that of the physical sciences," then Hume must certainly be called a naturalist because of his efforts to extend the "experimental Method of Reasoning into moral Subjects". ... Hume is a naturalist in that he sought to produce coherent philosophical explanations without the slightest recourse to supernatural entities or transcendental principles ... an obvious example of this kind of naturalism ... is his attempt to explain moral values as derived from human nature or from, that is, human beings as constituted and active in the world (DH 15-16).

B. By no stretch of the imagination can Hume be supposed to have borrowed this providential aspect of Hutcheson's thought, not even in morals (DH 54; also see p. 93).

C. I submit that /Hume/ holds that vice and disapprobation are not identical and that moral qualities are not merely sentiments but, rather, the objective correlates of sentiments. /Footnote :/ No rash conclusions should be drawn from this claim about objective correlates. I do not suggest that virtue and vice are objects in the ordinary sense (physical objects), or that they are transcendently existing qualities of some kind. On the contrary, I suggest that for Hume virtue and vice are publicly available aspects of man's world (specifically, particular modifications or qualities of this world), and that they are aspects which serve as the occasion or cause of specific feelings. These feelings in turn make us aware of these objective ccrrelatives and of their particular moral character (DH 111-112).

D. Hume's ontology of morals is elusive. He clearly does not believe that virtue arid vice are qualities of actions or events per se ... the ontological locus of moral qualities is (at least partially) motives or characters (DH 116n).

E. Hume attempted to provide us with a theory of morals that was suited to the post-Galilean and post-Hobbesian world in which he lived: with an objectivist account of moral distinctions, but one that avoids the characteristic ontological commitments of Scholastic and Cartesian alike (DH 246).

F. Hume tells us that we will not find moral qualities in the world, but in ourselves, and he told Hutcheson that morality "regards only human Nature & human Life", Nevertheless, he propounds a theory in which moral right and wrong are matters neither of mere individual preference nor of group preference. In Hume's opinion, there is some kind of

> objective moral standard to which our moral judgments can be made to conform more or less closely, but he apparently does not think that this standard has an existence independent of human beings or that our moral judgments are right or wrong only as they correspond to some extrahuman reality (DH 309-310).

11. One positive feature of Hume's moral realism emerges from consideration of his moral theory in comparison to certain earlier moralists. That is, I claim (DH 150) that Hume is a common-sense moralist of a particular kind, and that the semi-conservative position he offered was a direct response to what he supposed to be the explicit moral skepticism of Hobbes and those other philosophers who denied that there are in human nature any dispositions that would allow humans to undertake either disinterested or altrustic actions. Indeed, Hobbes was widely thought to have maintained not only that each of us is entirely self-regarding, concerned only with his or her own desires and limited, ever-changing ends, but even to have claimed that there is no distinctly human nature: We too are, or are constituted by, bodies in motion, and nothing more. Further, as a consequence of these metaphysical and psychological views Hobbes went on *to* claim that the moral distinctions we appear to make -- between good and evil, virtue and vice, or actions denominated virtuous or vicious -- are not real distinctions at all, but merely the groundless reflections of arbitrarily chosen positive laws. There is in man or nature no objective foundation of a summum bonum nor any real moral good.[6]

To this particular brand of moral scepticism some philosophers -- Hume, I claim, is one -- responded on the supposition that the question, Whether virtue and vice be real or not? could be answered by determining whether human nature included genuine

dispositions to benevolent motives, which could in turn make benevolent ~~actions~~ possible. Shaftesbury clearly argues along these lines, as does Hutcheson, who explicitly set out "*to* prove what we call the Reality of Virtue" (cited at DH 62). Hume, I show, had a carefully moderated affinity for this position insofar as he claimed, contra Hobbes, Locke, and Mandeville, that we are capable of genuine, albeit limited, generosity.[7] One part of the moral realism I ascribe to Hume is just this positive conception of human nature and motivation: There is, he maintains, a human nature, and it does include a disposition to benevolent actions, and, consequently, the distinction between the virtuous (the well-intended benefit) and the vicious (the ill-intended disbenefit) is a real, objectively founded distinction. In Hume's view, Hobbes' entirely cynical conception of human action is wrong, but not entirely wrong. Hume grants that some actions may be self-interested and intentionally harmful, to others, and those actions are vicious. But that is not the whole story of human action; there are differences between actions, differences that permit us to call some, consistently and rightly, virtuous, and others, vicious. That Hume maintained such a realist moral psychology, and saw this position as a confutation of the anti-realist moral scepticism of the selfish moralists is clear:

> The most obvious objection to the selfish hypothesis is, that, as it is contrary to common feeling and our most unprejudiced notions, there is required the highest stretch of philosophy to establish so extraordinary a paradox. To the most careless observer there appear to be such dispositions as benevolence and generosity; such affections as love, friendship, compassion, gratitude. These sentiments have their causes, effects, objects, and operations, marked by common language and observation, and plainly

> distinguished from those of the selfish passions.... I shall not here enter into any detail on the present subject. Many able philosophers have shown the insufficiency of these systems. And I shall take for granted what, I believe, the smallest reflection will make evident to every impartial enquirer (E 298; see also DH **43–48**).

111. Hume's moral realism is not, however, constituted merely by what I have just termed a realist psychology. On the contrary, that psychology is paralleled by a complex and unusual realist moral ontology. It is no doubt this claim that has disconcerted some, and it is to the meaning and ground of this claim that I now turn, although with no expectation that I shall here complete the required explication. Hume's ontology of morals is elusive, and in order to elucidate it we must, as he says, "take the matter pretty deep," deeper than I have yet gone, deeper perhaps than I can yet go. Nonetheless, further clarifications are presently possible.

There is, for example, my suggestion that for Hume there are, in tandem with our moral sentiments, certain objective correlates of these sentiments, or publicly available and identifiable states of affairs. This is a second central feature of my claim that Hume is a moral realist, and one for which there appears to be a great deal of textual evidence, evidence that can be assembled and presented more informatively than previously if I restrict myself to this one issue. The aim of this exercise is to show that Hume not only maintained that our moral sentiments are causally dependent upon something (using something or thing in a very broad sense), but that he also tells us enough about these entities to enable us to answer in the affirmative such questions as, Do the entities that cause the moral sentiments constitute a distinguishable

class of things? or, Is there here evidence of membership in some genuine, recognizable kind? And, if so, Can we specify significant features of these things? and Are we equipped by nature to pick out these things, to distinguish them from other relatively different or even relatively similar things?

A. Causes, One. I assume there can be no serious objection to the claim that on Hume's theory our moral sentiments are perceptions (T 456), more specifically, impressions of reflection (T 470), and that our impressions of reflection are part of a sequence that begins with impressions of sensation that arise in the mind or soul "from unknown causes" (T 7-8, 275). Presumably, there is also widespread agreement that, although Hume's analysis of causation has critical or sceptical tendencies, he nonetheless supposes that there are causal links between the several kinds of perceptions: "Secondary, or reflective impressions," he says, "are such as proceed from some of these original ones, either immediately or by the the interposition of its idea" (T 275), while on other occasions he uses such terms as produces or arising from to describe this relation (e.g., T 8, 276). It seems obvious enough, then, that Humean moral sentiments have causes. Does Hume attempt to specify these causes?

Yes, he does. Nor are his efforts limited to a discussion of perceptions, or those psychological components constituting a single individual's (but any individual's) experience. Yore often than not Hume simply by-passes discussion of the antecedent impressions ok ideas that give rise *to* the sentiments, and turns instead to the objects, persons, actions, etc. which seem to be the material causes of the moral and non-moral sentiments. As when, for example, he speaks of the "actions" which are the "causes" of our

judgments of actions (T 463). Other instances of this tendency:

> ... the question only arises among philosophers, whether the guilt or moral deformity of this action be discover'd by demonstrative reasoning, or be felt by an internal sense, and by means of some sentiment, which the reflecting on such an action naturally occasions (T 466).

> ... it must be by means of some impression or sentiment they /"vice and virtue"/ occasion ... (T 470).

> Now virtue and vice ... excite either pleasure or uneasiness ... (T 473).

> It may now be ask'd in general, concerning this pain or pleasure, that distinguishes moral good and evil, From what principles is it derived, and whence does it arise in the human mind? (T 473; Hume's emphasis).

8. Effects, One. Those who accept that the moral sentiments are the effects of causes can reasonably seek to know more about these effects. Is there any point, for example, in speaking of the moral sentiments? If Hume is talking about mere approvals and disapprovals, pleasures and pains, it would be sufficient to say that our sentiments are the effects of causes. In fact, Hume is explicit in his suggestions that there are significant and noticeable differences between several kinds of Sentiments, including, specifically, differences between the moral sentiments and other sentiments.

> ... the distinguishing impressions, by which moral good or evil is known, are nothing but particular pains or pleasures.... To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character.... We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular

manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous (T 471; Hume's emphasis).

> ... under the term pleasure, we comprehend sensations, which are very different from each other, and which have only such a distant resemblance, as is requisite to make them be express'd by the same abstract term. A good composition of music and a bottle of good wine equally produce pleasure.... But shall we say upon that account, that the wine is harmonious, or the music of a good flavour? In like manner an inanimate object, and the character or sentiments of any person may, both of them, give satisfaction; but as the satisfaction is different, this keeps our sentiments concerning them from being confounded, and makes us ascribe virtue to the one, and not to the other (T 472; Hume's emphasis).

C. Causes, Two. The implication of Hume's claim about the particular and peculiar moral sentiments is the fact that these pains and pleasures have particular causes. In his most general mode of speaking Hume says that the moral sentiments arise from "durable principles of mind," by which he means motives, mental qualities, or character. He apparently thought this point important enough to be made repeatedly. in doing *so* it will be seen that he underscores the causal link noted in A above:

> ... virtue is distinguished by the pleasure, and vice by the pain, that any action, sentiment or character gives us by the mere view and contemplation (T 475).

> ... reflecting on the tendency of characters and mental qualities, is sufficient to give us tne sentiments of approbation and blame ... having found, that such tendencies have force enough to produce the strongest sentiment of morals, we can never reasonably, in these cases, look for any other cause of approbation or blame; it being an inviolable maxim in philosophy, that

> where any particular cause is sufficient for an effect, we ought to rest satisfied with it, and ought not to multiply causes without necessity (T 577-578).
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> ... certain sentiments of pleasure or disgust ... arise upon the contemplation and view of particular qualities or characters (T 581).
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> ... these /moral/ sentiments may arise either from the mere species or appearance of characters and passions, or from reflexions on their tendency to the happiness of mankind, and of particular persons (T 589).

Hume is also careful to emphasize a closely related point: Although we may have a tendency to suppose that it is particular actions that give rise to the moral sentiments, actions are in fact not the real causes of these sentiments, but only the apparent or at most proximate causes of them. Actions, he insists, are accurately described as signs of the real causes:

> '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 /the actor/ 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 produc'd them (T 477).
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> Actions are at first only consider'd as signs of motives: But 'tis usual, in this case, as in all others, to fix our attention on the signs, and neglect, in some measure, the thing signify'd. But tho', on some occasions, a person may perform an action merely out of regard to its moral obligation, yet still this supposes in human nature some distinct principles, which are capable of **producing** the **action,** and **whose** moral

> beauty renders the action meritorious (T 479).
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> If any action be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character. Actions themselves, not proceeding from any constant principle, have no influence on love or hatred, pride or humility; and consequently are never consider'd in morality (T 575; Hume's emphasis).[10]

D. Effects, Two. The effects of these causes can be specified still further. That is, particular durable principles of the mind produce in us particular and peculiar pains or pleasures, the moral sentiments. At the same time these **causes** have the further effect of stimulating in us one of the four indirect passions, pride and humility, love and hatred:

> Now virtue and vice are attended with these circumstances. They must necessarily be plac'd either in ourselves or others, and excite either pleasure or uneasiness; and therefore must give rise to one of these four passions; which clearly distinguishes them from the pleasure and pain arising from inanimate objects, that often bear no relation to us: And this is, perhaps, the most considerable effect that virtue and vice have upon the human mind (T 473).
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> 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 575; Hume's emphasis. See also note 16).

E. Some Consequences. According to Hume, our moral sentiments have specific, identifiable causes, namely, certain durable principles of mind. He also says that these causes have specific, distinguishable effects: they cause, directly, particular sentiments (approbation, disapprobation); they cause, indirectly, as corollaries, the four indirect passions.11 Some may doubt that our moral sentiments are *so* unique or particular as to be clearly distinguishable from other sentiments, especially, say, other sentiments apparently also caused by durable principles of mind. However well-founded such scepticism may be, Hume is relatively optimistic on this matter. True, we may confuse our sentiments, or we may in our moral assessments under- or over-value. But these are not, in Hume's opinion, entirely insurmountable problems:

> Nor is every sentiment of pleasure or pain, which arises from characters and actions, of that peculiar kind, which makes us praise or condemn. The good qualities of an enemy are hurtful to us; but may still command our esteem and respect. '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. 'Tis true, those sentiments, from interest and morals, are apt to be confounded, and naturally run into one another. It seldom happens, that we do not think an enemy vicious, and can distinguish betwixt his opposition to our interest and real villainy or baseness. But this hinders not, but that the sentiments are, in themselves, distinct; and a man of temper and judgment may preserve himself from these illusions (T 472; Hume's emphasis).
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> This partiality, then, and unequal affection, must not only have an influence on our behaviour and conduct in

> society, but even on our ideas of vice and virtue ... /but/ nature provides a remedy in the judgment and understanding, for what is irregular and incommodious in the affections (T 488-489).
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> We make allowance for a certain degree of selfishness in men; because we know it to be inseparable from human nature, and inherent in our frame and constitution. By this reflexion we correct those sentiments of blame, which so naturally arise upon any opposition (T 583).[12]

The consequence of Hume's position is, as he himself argues, that we can correct our assessments of moral praise and blame. We may at first consider a man vicious because, observing his actions, we take those as signs that he has acted from malicious motive or bad character. But then, as a result of further observation or reflection, we change our assessment: our sentiments, our unreflective response to these same actions, change, and the resulting assessment is said to be corrected. It is, according to Hume, corrected in the sense that it is more appropriate, more accurate, a better or truer reflection of the motives or character that underlay the action we have observed. Nothing like a full statement of this position can be given here, but Hume's remarks suggest that the corrections that are possible include the discovery that one has thoroughly misperceived in the sense of miscategorizing: One has mistakenly blamed an action by or as a consequence of a sentiment which seemed to be a moral sentiment, but was in fact a sentiment of interest.[13] Or, one has misjudged in the sense that a man who claims the sun is smaller than a car tire has misjudged. Such a man could be said *to* know what he is talking about, but to have misjudged the relative size of these things. Our moral assessments are open to analogous misjudgments of true worth, according to

Hume, as when we suppose that, because of the strength of the sentiments produced by two *so* differently located characters, a proximate but ordinary person has a moral character equal to or greater than some remote person of great moral worth.

Among the anti-realist distortions of Hume's moral theory there are those who claim that, for Hume, virtue and vice are simply the moral sentiments themselves, and that Hume is the paradigm eighteenth-century non-cognitivist. Whether a subjectivist or proto-emotivist or whatever, Hume is held by some to suppose that the pleasures and pains, approvals and disapprovals that we feel just do constitute, entirely, virtue and vice. On this view, if Hume says, "Brutus was virtuous" he has at most claimed that he, Hume, is pleased when he takes note of what Brutus has done, and so too will others be pleased if they take note of these things. On the other hand, he may only have expressed his pleasure, while, perhaps, also hoping to elicit a similar response from others. In neither case would it be reasonable to look for objective manifestations of virtue or vice.

On at least one celebrated occasion Hume clearly does encourage his readers to suppose that pronouncing a "character to be vicious" means merely that one has "a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it," but he himself suggests that this is an overstatement of his position. The sheer weight of textual evidence against the anti-realist reading confirms that Hume was right to think his statement at T 469 is "too strong" (see DH 110n). Hume's further description of the moral sentiments reveals them to have specifiable, recognizable causes, and to be themselves of such particularity, even uniqueness, that their presence within us can be taken as a signal of the presence without us of precisely these particular,

unique causes -- and *so* far is this the case that we can correct our moral assessments. We can alter both our sentiments and our ensuing pronouncements, thus eliminating outright misperceptions of reducing the level of misjudgment. Incorrect assessments are replaced by improved or correct assessments.

It would make very little sense for Hume to have propounded this somewhat complex account of the correction of our sentiments if these same sentiments just are the virtue and vice to which reference is made. Our sentiments could be changed, of course, but that would not constitute a correction. Rather, a feeling of approval (say) would be substituted for a feeling of disapproval, so that one would cease to blame and begin to praise. But the blame would be right (insofar as talk of right and wrong would make any sense) when it was felt, and the praise equally right when it was felt, quite independently of any actual or objective state of affairs. Vice and virtue are said to be the feeling of disapproval or approval, respectively, that I have. So long, then, as I have a feeling or, if I express myself on the matter, *so* long as I have the feeling I (indirectly) say that I have, the possibility of correction does not arise because the possibility of error does not arise. There is no judgment of external fact that could be in error or could be corrected. Of course such meta-ethical theories have been propounded, and some of them may even be tenable. They are not any of them, however, the theory of a philosopher who offers, as Hume does, a thorough-going causal account of the unique moral sentiments or, if you will, a causal theory of moral Perception: As he says, "it must be by means of some impression or sentiment they occasion, that we are able to mark the difference" between virtue and vice. (T 470). Such a claim is entirely consistent with Hume's

more general view, namely, that "in the production and conduct of the passions, there is a certain regular mechanism, which is susceptible of as accurate a disquisition, as the laws of motion, optics, hydrostatics, or any part of natural philosophy,"[14] and the claim is repeatedly confirmed by remarks of the kind cited earlier.

F. Complicative Realism. At the close of Treatise 3.1.2 Hume says that by the preceding discussion we are "brought back to our first position," namely, that virtue and vice are distinguished by the pleasure, or pain, that arise from the view or contemplation of actions, characters, or sentiments. This, he thinks, a benefit, for it leaves us with a single question to answer in order to show the origin of "moral rectitude or depravity," but without the necessity of "looking for any incomprehensible relations and qualities, which never did exist in nature, nor even in our imagination, by any clear and distinct conception" (T 475-476).

Hume is obviously proud of his resolution of this issue, but we need to be clear about the source of his pride. He is not proud because he believes he can explain our moral perceptions without recourse to any relations or qualities, but because he can explain them without the incomprehensible relations posited by the rationalists, and the incomprehensible, non-existent qualities posited by the Scholastics. Hume does not deny that moral perceptions depend on relations, nor, as has already been seen, does he deny that certain qualities are essential to the moral distinctions we make. But these qualities are such comprehensible ones as qualities of mind -- qualities of agents whose actions, characters, or sentiments may be divided into at least two classes, the virtuous and the vicious.[15]

And the relations are those comprehensible relations which do exist in nature in the sense that they are the relations between individual agents, their individual actions, and still further individuals affected by these actions. The origin of moral rectitude and depravity lies in a complication of circumstances: virtue and vice are relational, but nonetheless real, properties.

To see that this is not in any sense an unHumean suggestion one needs only to call to mind Hurne's analysis, occupying two-thirds of Treatise, Book 2, of the four indirect passions, pride, humility, love, hatred. There are differences, of course, between these passions on the one hand, and virtue and vice on the other, but it can be said that these passions are also dependent upon a complication of circumstances involving causes (qualities inhering in subjects or specifiable entities, in fact), objects (our selves or others) and the relations between these subjects and objects. Furthermore, some (but not all) of the causes of the indirect passions are also the causes of moral sentiments, and are the actual virtues and vices whose mode of existence becomes, in Treatise, Book 3, of more than passing concern to Hume: By pride, he wrote, "I understand that agreeable impression, which arises in the mind, when the view either of our virtue, beauty, riches or power makes us satisfy'd with ourselves... "[16] (T 297).

Also helpful, of course, would be detailed analysis of Hume's comments about the manner in which relational moral entities of this sort are constituted. In my book I cite the brief analysis of ingratitude found in the second Enquiry and refer also to what may or may not be a parallel account of beauty. Here I must restrict myself merely to mentioning Hume's brief but suggestive discussion of property, where once again

relations which are considered real and comprehensible prove essential to Hume's positive theory:

> ... this quality, which we call property, is like many of the imaginary qualities of the peripatetic philosophy, and vanishes upon a more accurate inspection into the subject, when consider'd a-part from our moral sentiments. 'Tis evident property does not consist in any of the sensible qualities of the object. For these may continue invariably the same, while the property changes. Property, therefore, must consist in some relation of the object. But 'tis not in its relation with regard to other external and inanimate objects. For these may also continue invariably the same, while the property changes. This quality, therefore, consists in the relations of objects to intelligent and rational beings. But 'tis not the external and corporeal relation, which forms the essence of property. For that relation may be the same betwixt inanimate objects, or with regard to brute creatures; tho' in those cases it forms no property. 'Tis, therefore, in some internal relation, that the property consists: that is, in some influence, which the external relations of the object have on the mind and actions (T 527).[17]

IV. I have suggested (DH 116-117) that Hume's moral ontology might be compared to the ontology of emergent properties. I believe this suggestion merits further consideration, but I also believe it would be appropriate to begin such consideration with a survey of Hume's predecessors and contemporaries, for there is some possibility of finding in them accounts of properties that arise along the lines suggested more recently by emergenticists.[18] Perhaps we would not be able to establish that these accounts had any direct influence on Hume, but working from such sources would eliminate one blatant form of anachronism by providing

us with eighteenth-century ways of thinking about such issues.

A less demanding means of clarifying my reading of Hume, and one that can be sketched here, lies in the writings of his close friend, Adam Smith. Part VII of The Theory of Moral Sentiments is an account, "Of Systems of Moral Philosophy."[19] There are, Smith writes, two questions to be considered when treating of the principles of morals: "wherein does virtue consist?" and "by what power or faculty in the mind is it, that this character, whatever it be, is recommended to us?" In answer to his first question Smith argues that there have been systems of morals of four types: Those that see virtue as consisting in propriety; in prudence; in benevolence; and those that he calls "licentious" (TMS 265, 305).

Smith's work is replete with connections to Hume; there are no sound reasons for supposing that he has omitted to classify his friend's moral theory. Nor is there any reason to suppose that Smith has subsumed Hume's theory to the class of licentious systems, or to, that is, the "system of Dr. Mandeville," the system that "seems to take away altogether the distinction between vice and virtue" by supposing that whatever a man may appear to do he always acts "from vanity" or "from the same selfish motives." Smith did find defects in Hume's system, just as he found, more generally, defects in each form of non-licentious system, but the principles that make Mandeville's system the paradigm of licentiousness are, Smith would well appreciate, actively opposed by Hume (TMS 308).

It is of great relevance, then, that following his accounts of three non-licentious systems, Smith writes: "All those systems, which I have hitherto given an account of, suppose that there is a real and essential distinction between vice and virtue, whatever

these qualities may consist in" (TMS 306). It is also relevant to note, especially given present confusions about cognitivism and non-cognitivism, that Smith goes on to suggest that the answers given to his second question (concerning the mode of moral perception) do not, in fact, bear on the question of moral realism. A philosopher may believe and argue "that there is a real and essential distinction between vice and virtue" without being committed to a particular account of how that distinction is made. Smith notes that some have thought that the distinction is dependent upon the operation of self-love, others that it is dependent upon reason, while "according to others this distinction is altogether the effect of immediate sentiment and feeling, and arises from the satisfaction or disgust with which the view of certain actions or affections inspires us" (TMS 315).[20] Whatever we have been taught by recent meta-theory, neither Smith nor Hume, I submit, found any necessary incompatibility between moral realism and those particular forms of moral sentimentalism to which they and Hutcheson subscribed.

V. A final suggestion. Much of the genius of Hume as moralist, and much of what makes him an important modern moralist, lies in his humanism, by which I mean his carefully articulated conviction that authentic and objective values may be developed without reliance on any suprahuman or transcendental foundation. Briefly and in historical terms Hume can be thought to have attempted to provide, comprehensively and in detail, a purely humanistic moral theory of the sort presaged by Grotius and Bayle -- the former when he suggested that there could be a system of natural law even if there is no God, the latter when he suggested that a law-abiding society of atheists is possible.[21] Furthermore, within the context of early

modern moral theory, Hume would have found precedents for supposing that a humanism of this sort constituted one possible response to moral scepticism, for that is precisely what Grotius had supposed it to be.[22]

This underdeveloped historical point is not crucial, however, to my claim that Hume is a moral realist of a purely humanist sort. His belief that man can construct a valid and viable moral world without recourse to transcendent beings or principles, and the manifestation of this belief in the comprehensive moral theory he offers us is the decisive evidence for my claim, while the difficulty has been to see this evidence for what it is. It is not evidence that Hume had, as it were, gone to school with twentieth-century noncognitivism, nor is it evidence that he joined forces with those of his contemporaries that he considered moral sceptics. It is, rather, evidence that one can grant that morality is of human making while yet remaining convinced that there are real, objective differences between right and wrong. Hume did not accept the cynical analysis of the selfish moralists, but neither did he counter the cynics with a further misanthropism, the view that man can do nothing valid (at least not in morals) without the help of suprahuman powers or principles, the view that our values must be certified by transcendental realities if they are to be valid, real, genuine. On the contrary, Hume thought humans to be morally self-sufficient and, as he reads the facts, significantly *so.* In his view, humans have no reliable access to suprahuman beings or principles, nor even any reliable evidence that such entities are there to be accessed, as one might now put it. Nonetheless, we have put together a generally orderly moral world; we have created real and lasting structures of **value,**

In this regard Hume is, again, more optimistic than many of us are likely to be. But making allowance for this optimism, Hume offers us an insight which I believe to be of lasting significance -- morals are, after all, man's concern alone -- and a provocative articulation of how it is that morals are, after all, these same merely human morals. It is the recovery of such insights and such articulations that repay the effort to read the past as past and Hume as more than just another precursor.

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1. David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); reprinted with minor corrections, 1984. Cited hereafter as DH. Reviewers of this work who have commented on my interpretation of Hume's moral philosophy include Knud Haakonssen (Australasian Journal of Philosophy), Russell Hardin (Ethics), Alasdair MacIntyre (Nous), and M.A. Stewart (Hermathena). Also relevant is Kenneth Winkler, "Hutcheson's Alleged Realism," and my "Hutcheson's Moral Realism," Journal of the History of Philosophy (forthcoming).

2. Other recent studies reflecting such an effort include Peter Jones, Hume's Sentiments (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982) and John Wright, Hume's Sceptical Realism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983). Neither my book nor these others attempt to reconstruct the full intellectual context of Hume's philosophy, nor should such a complete synopsis be expected in the near future.

3. "I believe that Hume is a sceptical metaphysician and a common-sense moralist, but I also believe

that the assertion of such a belief outside a particular and ample context is largely pointless and the claim itself virtually meaningless." (DH, p. 8. See also p. x.)

4. Hume himself notes the "caprices of language, which are so variable in different dialects, and in different ages of the same dialect." Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 314. Hereafter cited as E.

5. A Treatise of Human Nature, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P.H. Nidditch. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 623. Hereafter cited as T.

6. For an expanded discussion of Hobbes and moral scepticism, see DH, pp. 21-54, 59-69.

7. Mandeville is mentioned by name only in the Introduction to the Treatise, but his views are clearly discussed elsewhere. See, e.g., pp. 500 and 578-79. At E 296 Hume notes that, of the modern philosophers, "Hobbes and Locke, who maintained the selfish system of morals, lived irreproachable lives...."

8. These questions are variations of those asked by John McDowell in a discussion of moral realism. See his "NonCognitivism and Rule Following," in Wittgenstein: To Follow A Rule, ed. S. Holtzmann and C. Leich (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 141-162, esp. P. 157.

9. Unless otherwise noted, I have added the emphasis in citations from Hume.

10. Hume makes the same point in a letter to Hutcheson (Letter of September 17, 1739), and suggests that the Treatise is not as clear as it should have been about this matter. A similar but modified view of the relation of durable principles of mind and the character of actions is expressed at E 297.

11. Any one such cause would presumably result in no more than two such corollary effects, pride and love, or humility and hatred, and these passions would arise in at least two different persons.

12. *See* also the preceding paragraph, where a correction allowing for "nearness or remoteness" is claimed to be "common with regard to all the

senses," including the moral sense, the topic of the discussion, and T **603.** In the following paragraph (at T **583)** Hume grants that while "the general principle of our blame or praise may be corrected by those other principles," these other principles "are not altogether efficacious." We must be content to say that "reason requires such an impartial conduct, but that 'tis seldom we can bring ourselves to it... ."

13. There is an ambiguity about the notion of blame. To feel the sentiment of disapprobation is to feel the blame, but we may subsequently express this feeling by means of language, so that to say that X blamed *y* can mean either "x thought and felt y was responsible" or "x said y was responsible." My locution, "blamed by or as a consequence of" reflects a recognition of this ambiguity, which may also be found in Hume's discussion of blame.

14. These are the closing words of A Dissertation on the Passions, cited from David Hume: The Philosophical Works, ed. T.H. Green and T.H. Grose. 4 vols. (Darmstadt: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1964; reprint of the edition of 1886), IV, 166.

15. Presumably some qualities are, sometimes, morally indifferent, and *so* there are three classes.

16. It is on the previous page that Hume, in a single paragraph, appears to align himself with those "who maintain that morality is something real, essential, and founded on nature," while at the same time saying that "uneasiness and satisfaction are not only inseparable from vice and virtue, but constitute their very nature and essence" and that "pain and pleasure" are "the primary causes of vice and virtue." Between these extremes, if you will, he writes:

> The most probable hypothesis, which has been advanc'd to explain the distinction betwixt vice and virtue, and the origin of moral rights and obligations, is, that from a primary constitution of nature certain characters and passions, by the very view and contemplation, produce a pain, and others in like manner excite a pleasure (T 296).

Hume did, of course, lament (to his friend Gilbert Elliot) that he had published the Treatise too hastily, leaving it flawed, and that may be the best explanation of what is, I believe, an inconsistency. One should in general be very wary of explaining Hume's apparent inconsistencies by appeal to this

comment to Elliot, but there are instances in which there is corroborating evidence, and this is one of them. The paragraph beginning near the bottom of Treatise 296, and the two that follow it, appear in a modified but recognizable form in A Dissertation on the Passions. In replacement of the phrases emphasized above, Hume there writes that the "uneasiness and satifaction, produced in the spectator, are essential to vice and virtue" and that "pain and pleasure" being "in a manner, the primary source of blame or praise, must also be the causes of all their effects" (emphasis added). To the following paragraph of the Treatise Hume also makes minor modifications, and then adds another important clarification: "Virtue, therefore, produces always a pleasure distinct from the pride or self-satisfaction which attends it: Vice, an uneasiness separate from the humility or remorse." These changes tend to support my view that Hume is a realist who believes that there are moral qualities that are clearly distinguishable from the sentiments we feel, and also show that virtue and vice are probably not indirect passions. See Works, IV, 146-147.

17. The remainder of this paragraph links the notion of property to that of justice, while continuing to maintain that the relations that create property add nothing to external objects. Neither would the relations that create justice add anything to external objects, and yet justice is the foundation of property.

18. In this regard see Robin Attwood, "Clark, Collins and Compounds," Journal of The History of Philosophy, XV (1977), 45-54. I am indebted to Paul Wood for reminding me of Attwood's discussion.

19. Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1976). Hereafter cited as TMS.

20. The editors of TMS suppose Smith to have classified Hume's system among those that make virtue to consist in propriety (TMS 305-306), and those that make sentiment (by means of the operation of sympathy) the principle on which moral distinctions rest (TMS 327). To this one might hazard to add that Smith appears to think that Hume's theory is closer to his own than to that of Frances Hutcheson, who has been Smith's teacher at Glasgow. If so, Smith is certainly correct in important respects, and perhaps especially *so* of the theory found in the Enquiry concerning the Principles of

Morals. Nevertheless, the theory of moral perception that Smith ascribes to Hutcheson comes very close, if one excises a reference to a distinct moral faculty, to being a schematic account of Hume's theory as found in the Treatise. Smith wrote:

> According to some the principle of approbation is founded upon a sentiment of a peculiar nature, upon a particular power of perception exerted by the mind and at the view of certain actions or affections: some of which affecting /us/ in an agreeable and others in a disagreeable manner, the former are stamped with the characters of right, laudable, and virtuous; the latter with those of wrong, blamable, and vicious. This sentiment being of a peculiar nature distinct from every other, and the effect of a particular power of perception, they give it a particular name, and call it a moral sense (TMS 321).

21. On this point see James Moore and Michael Silverthorne, "Natural Sociability and Natural Rights in the Moral Philosophy of Gerschom Carmichael," in Philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, ed. V. Hope (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984).

22. See Richard Tuck,, "Grotius, Carneades and Hobbes," Grotiana, New Series, Vol. **4 (1983), 43-62.**