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The Nature of Humean Animals

ANTONY E. PITSON

Hume's account of the similarities and differences between ourselves and animals seems of obvious importance for understanding his general philosophical position. It is perhaps surprising, therefore, that Hume's remarks about animals have not received greater attention.¹ My principal interest in what follows is with the differences that Hume finds between ourselves and animals, and his explanation of those differences.² We shall see that these differences converge on the difference in moral status between humans and animals; and in considering what Hume has to say about the latter, we will encounter important questions about the nature of his account of virtue and vice. I shall also wish to emphasise, however, Hume's recognition of the fundamental similarities and continuities between human and animal nature; for this represents a philosophical revolution in which the view of man as a unique creation in God's image is replaced with that of man as a natural object differing only in degree from other animals.³

Human and Animal Minds

There is, according to Hume, a close resemblance between the "anatomy" of human and animal minds, just as there are obvious physiological similarities between men and animals (T 325). Any differences between our mental capacities and those of animals are, it appears, ones of degree only: "Animals undoubtedly feel, think, love, hate, will, and even reason" as we do, albeit in

a "more imperfect manner" ("Of the Immortality of the Soul," 592). There are, in fact, two such differences which Hume evidently regards as being of special importance. The first is our superiority in knowledge and understanding (T 326). "Men are superior to beasts," Hume says, "principally by the superiority of their reason" (T 610). If it is true that one person may obviously surpass another in the ability to reason, it appears also to be true that people collectively surpass animals in this respect (EHU 107n). Indeed, the differences that Hume finds here appear quite striking, for he reminds us of our ability to carry our thoughts beyond our immediate situation to remote places and times, and to theorise about our experience ("Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature," 82). By comparison, animals appear to be without curiosity or insight and to be confined in their thoughts to the things around them, though they not only acquire beliefs from experience but also by means of prudence and intelligence act directly on the natural world ("Of Suicide," 582).

Hume is anxious to stress, however, that we should not think of ourselves as having been especially favoured by virtue of our superior reason; for we find that our reason is proportionate both to our wants and to our period of existence ("Of the Immortality of the Soul," 593). There is, in other words, a natural explanation for the difference in reasoning powers between ourselves and animals—that nature provides us with the intelligence required to meet our needs ("The Stoic," 147)—which would make Hume's position fully consistent with an evolutionary account of the development of such powers.⁴

The other especially important point of difference between ourselves and animals lies in the area of the passions. Like us, animals are motivated to obtain pleasure and to avoid pain (T 176); they are, accordingly, liable also to experience the same sorts of passion and emotion—both "indirect," as in the case of pride and humility (T II i 12) and love and hatred (T II ii 12), and "direct," as in the case of fear and grief (T, 398). To this extent, animals will also be susceptible to the same mechanism for the communication of passions—namely sympathy, whose force is observable throughout the whole animal creation (T 363). Similarly, volition, as the immediate effect of pleasure and pain, is something we share in common with animals (T 448). Yet in spite of all this there is the crucial difference that, compared with us, animals are "but little susceptible either of the pleasures or pains of the imagination" (T 397). This point of difference is in fact directly related to the previous one: since the judgements of animals concern the things around them, their feelings will not transcend the immediate effects upon them of these things. In more general terms, animals will be less likely to experience those passions which require some effort of thought or imagination (T 398). This last point is of special significance for Hume, as we shall see later.

The Moral Sense

Hume himself evidently sees the differences to which I have referred as having a direct bearing on what is, perhaps, the crucial point of contrast between ourselves and animals, viz. the absence in animals of a moral sense (T 326). This in turn might be taken to suggest that animals cannot be regarded as *moral agents*. In order to understand why Hume would take this view, we need to consider briefly what is involved in our possession of a moral sense.⁵ The function of the moral sense is to enable us to discern the qualities of character which, on Hume's account, render actions virtuous or vicious. In brief, the way in which the moral sense operates—e.g., in regard to virtue—is this: a certain quality of mind or character is agreeable or useful to the person concerned or to others; its agreeable or useful effects are communicated to us via the mechanism of sympathy, by means of which we are able to experience the pleasure or satisfaction of the agent himself, or of others, as our own; these impressions then give rise, by association, to the pleasurable sentiment of approbation, together with the agreeable passions of love or pride. Now in order for the moral sense to operate in this way it must—like the bodily senses—be subject to a process of correction. This reflects the essentially partial nature of sympathy as the source of our approval of those qualities of character with beneficial tendencies. Thus, sympathy operates more strongly in regard to people who are acquaintances of ours, than those people, like strangers and foreigners, whose actions are unable directly to affect us (T 580–81; cf. EPM 229). Yet there is, in spite of this, a constancy in our approbation of moral qualities as there is in our perception of such characteristics as the size of an object. This is achieved by fixing on some *steady* and *general* points of view—ones which transcend those features which are peculiar to our present situation (T 581–582, cf. 472; EPM 272). It is our ability to take this general or common view of what is appraised that makes it possible to correct our moral sense as mentioned above. Indeed, it is only under these circumstances that we will be able to discern those qualities of mind or character which make a person virtuous or vicious (or those forms or qualities of objects which make them beautiful or ugly). Thus, according to Hume:

'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 472).

Now, our ability to take the common or general view appears to reflect just those respects in which we differ crucially from animals. This emerges most clearly from what Hume says about the requirements for judging "universal beauty" in "Of the Standard of Taste" (hereafter SOT). Hume suggests in this essay that there are certain rules for judging the merits of works of art which represent generalizations from our experience of "what has been found

to please in all countries and in all ages" (SOT 231). But in order that our responses should conform to these rules there is required what Hume describes as a certain "delicacy of imagination" (SOT 231). It is this that enables us to distinguish beauty and ugliness, or the qualities which give rise to the corresponding sentiments, when, as often happens, they are not present to any great degree or are intermingled. There is a parallel once more with the bodily senses which are acknowledged to excel according to the fineness of the discriminations of which they are capable (SOT 236). Of course, there is a difference in the ways in which these refined discriminations are achieved. Thus, our judgements of beauty or ugliness reflect an ability to view the objects to which they are directed with a degree of detachment while also attending to their features of form or style (SOT 237-238). When Hume remarks on the comparative imperfections of feeling in animals, and their lack of susceptibility to the pleasures and pains of the imagination, he is surely implying the absence of that delicacy of imagination on which our aesthetic sensibilities depend.

The distinctive viewpoint associated with the operation of our aesthetic taste can be achieved only if we free ourselves from prejudice or bias. We have seen already how this also provides a condition for discriminations by the moral sense. But prejudice can interfere with any sort of judgement, evaluative or otherwise. It is therefore essentially a matter of *good sense* to check its influence in all these different cases (SOT 240). The delicacy of imagination to which Hume has referred itself depends on a "sound understanding" which enables us to discern the end or purpose of a work of art, and the degree to which it succeeds in this (SOT 240-241). I think it is clear that this is just the kind of case in which, for Hume, we display a knowledge and understanding which is superior to that of animals. It is perhaps unusual enough to find persons who are endowed with the kind of good sense and delicate imagination associated with the arbiter of aesthetic merit. But the capacity appears to be one that belongs *only* to persons and not, given their inferiority in thought and feeling, to animals.

It seems to me reasonably clear, at least, that these observations apply equally to what Hume has to say about the operation of the moral sense. They also require a kind of imaginative ability to detach ourselves from our personal relation to the agent whose mind or character is the object of our appraisal. And in doing so we obviously exercise our capacities for rational reflection. As Hume puts it, "reason pave[s] the way" for sentiments of praise and blame: in order that our moral judgements should achieve the objectivity associated with the general view distinctions need to be made, conclusions drawn, comparisons formed, relations examined, and facts ascertained (EPM 173). It is just this kind of exercise of understanding of which animals appear to be incapable; and it is also, therefore, this that would explain their lack of a moral sense.⁶

Animals and Moral Agency

I have indicated that these points about the moral sense may also help to explain why Hume would resist classifying animals as moral agents. Let's see how this connection may be established. Hume is quite clear that the actions of animals cannot be considered as virtuous or vicious. This emerges explicitly in the well-known passage in which Hume attempts to explain why—contrary to the moral rationalist—vice, for example, cannot consist in relations discerned by the understanding. In short, the explanation is that the same relations may have different characters or causes; and this is illustrated by the fact that while "incest in the human species is criminal,...the very same action, and the same relations in animals have not the smallest moral turpitude or deformity" (T 467). In what, then, does the criminality of human incest consist, and why is this not a feature of the same relations in animals? We can see, in answer to the first question, that the criminality cannot lie in the action itself if animals are indeed capable of "the very same action."⁷ In fact, Hume is quite explicit that the criminality of an action resides in the agent's state of mind: specifically, his passions or "principles" (T 412; cf. T 575).⁸ Animals, it appears, are incapable of the relevant sorts of motivating passions or principles of mind. In the case of incest, the vice of such relations in humans essentially consists in their threat to the family, on which each of us depends originally for our subsistence. It is the public disutility of such relations that gives incest its "superior turpitude and moral deformity" (EPM 208). Given that society originates in family life (T 486), we may therefore condemn someone who knowingly engages in an incestuous act for willfully violating a rule on which society, and thus the subsistence of the species, depends. But the possibility of committing incest as a vice does therefore assume the existence of a society bound together by certain rules or laws—in this instance, ones which are associated with chastity as an artificial virtue.⁹ (Though, as Hume makes clear, the precise nature of the relevant laws may vary from one kind of human society to another, according to particular circumstances [EPM 208].) Now given all this, we can see why Hume would consider animals incapable of incest as a criminal act, for this would depend on their being moved in accordance with some conception of the rule which would thereby be violated. And this is scarcely compatible with their inability to engage in the kind of imaginative detachment from immediate and individual circumstances that is required for the operation of the moral sense. The recognition of rules (and their utility) seems to depend on a capacity for taking the general view as only human beings, with their superior knowledge and understanding, are able to do.

I want to consider at this point the objection that what I have said above about Hume's attitude towards the case of incest in animals would leave his position uncomfortably close, at least, to that of the rationalist. For would the latter not agree that the non-criminality of such relations in animals has to do with their lack of certain crucial rational capacities? Superficially, at least,

there appears to be some force to this objection (which would also imply that Hume lacks an adequate alternative account to that of the rationalist of what makes certain actions vicious or criminal). In order to see how we might reply to this objection on Hume's behalf, we will need to take matters a little deeper. The first thing we should note here is that one point on which Hume and his opponent would be bound to agree is that for someone to be guilty of incest as a vice it cannot be sufficient that he engages in certain acts or relations. The familiar story of Oedipus carries the philosophical message that to commit incest as a criminal act the person must be aware of the nature of his action and its implications. His action must be one of *willful* incest.¹⁰ The moral rationalist is committed to thinking likewise. Thus, Locke's account of the conditions for moral responsibility requires that there should be an element of choice in what we will or prefer to do; but this, in turn, depends on our being able to suspend our desires in order to engage in a fair examination of the alternatives available to us.¹¹ The latter evidently demands that we are at least aware of the nature of the alternatives themselves. It is important to emphasise this point of agreement between Hume and his rationalist opponent, because it shows that neither could accept the view that human beings differ from animals in that while each is capable of vice or criminality only the former knowingly engage in such behaviour (cf. T 468).

Given, then, that someone guilty of incest must be acting in awareness of the nature of what he is doing, where does the vice or criminality of his incestuous action reside? Hume appears to see the rationalist as committed to the following view: that it is a matter of the action involving certain relations which are discerned by reason *alone*, through the comparison of ideas. There are certain respects in which Locke's position in the *Essay* might be considered to suggest such a view.¹² According to Locke, morality is capable of demonstration because discourses in morality "are about ideas in the mind" (*Essay*, III xi 17). Since these ideas have no external archetypes, "the precise real essence of the things moral words stand for, may be perfectly known" (*Essay*, III xi 16). In this way morality provides us with a kind of knowledge which concerns "the agreement or disagreement of any of our ideas" (*Essay*, IV iii 18). However, moral ideas have a special complexity (*Essay*, IV iii 19); and so far as animals are concerned, it seems clear that, for Locke, they will lack such ideas because they are incapable of the intellectual process—namely, abstraction—by means of which these, and other general ideas, are formed (*Essay*, II xi 10). If animals are incapable of incest as a vice or criminal act, it is presumably because, on this view, they are unable knowingly to engage in a relation which is discerned through the relevant ideas. Of course, the vice or criminality of an action cannot depend solely on the presence of certain ideas in the mind of the agent; rather, their possession is required for recognising the immorality involved (e.g., through grasping a rule or law of reason) and hence acting in a way that is morally blameworthy. But this immediately exposes the

rationalist to Hume's charge of circularity (T 467). On the rationalist's account, the vice or criminality of an action depends on a relation discovered by reason in the form of ideas. We therefore need to distinguish the relation itself, as one which involves vice or criminality, from the ideas by which it is represented. Yet it appears that there is nothing to which the rationalist can appeal in order to account for the moral character of the relation beyond the nature of our ideas. This is why, in Hume's view, he is embarrassed by the case of animal incest.¹³ What this case shows, in effect, is that the vice or criminality of an action lies outside the action itself, in the state of mind of the agent; but the only fact about the agent's state of mind to which the rationalist can appeal is one which already assumes the presence of vice or criminality. The rationalist account therefore has no real explanation to give of such moral qualities. Hume, on the other hand, can appeal to the presence of impressions, as "original existences," in the mind of the agent which make a difference to the moral character of his behaviour insofar as they provide the motives for it (T 477).

Hume's alternative to moral rationalism is to regard the vice of an action as something that is discerned by a moral sense (in the form of certain distinctive impressions) rather than by a comparison of ideas. *What* is discerned is some feature of the agent's disposition or character: a motivating passion or principle. The fact that animals lack such a sense helps to explain why they are unable to perform incest as a criminal act, because possession of the moral sense is bound up with the perspective from which the relevant passions or principles of mind are formed. This fact about animals, in turn, is to be explained by a comparative inferiority of reason that renders them incapable of taking the general point of view required for the operation of the moral sense. The question which now arises, however, is what sort of motivating passions or principles *are* relevant to performing incest as a criminal act.

Hume's view appears to be that in performing an act of this kind, the agent exhibits a lack of self-command, a want of strength of mind (EPM 239). Hume is referring here more generally to failures of chastity as an artificial virtue, but the same remarks might reasonably be taken to apply specifically to incestuous behaviour. When we act in accordance with the rules which prohibit sexual intercourse within certain degrees of kindred we exhibit the superior influence of the calm passions, as Hume classifies them, over the immediate temptations we may encounter. These passions reflect "a general prospect of their objects" on which we form rules of conduct which enable us to achieve long-term profit or enjoyment. A criminal act of incest results from the agent's preference for a small enjoyment in preference to the more distant advantage to be gained from adherence to the rules which enable the family, and therefore society itself, to be preserved. (Hume appears to be committed to the view that someone is properly to be blamed for an act of incest only if he is the *sort* of person who is so lacking in self-command that he is liable to

yield in this way to temptation; though no one is entirely immune to the influence of momentary passion or desire. [T 418].) It is the role of the calm passions, in particular, which distinguishes Hume's account of the vice of incest from that which would be provided by his rationalist opponent (who would ascribe the acceptance of certain rules of conduct to reason rather than to passion). But we should notice that this bears also on the nature of the violent passion associated with incest as a criminal act. Hume remarks that in those cases where an object excites contrary passions, "we naturally desire what is forbid, and take a pleasure in performing actions, merely because they are unlawful" (T 421). In this respect, the state of mind of the person guilty of incest differs crucially from that of an animal involved in the same kind of act or relation. Strictly speaking, an animal cannot be *tempted* to perform incest—the violent passion by which it is excited does not reflect the appeal of the forbidden or unlawful which provides the source of temptation for a human agent in the grip of contrary passions.

While the association of the calm passions with a "general prospect" suggests that they belong to human beings in virtue of their superior understanding, it is still passion rather than reason itself which accounts for the distinctive features of moral agency. Of course, Hume recognises that the calmness of a passion may readily enable it to be wrongly taken for a determination of reason (EHU 239; cf. T 417); and this would provide him with an explanation for the rationalist's error in supposing that reason alone is relevant to the vice or criminality of incestuous actions or relations.

Animals as Objects of Approval and Disapproval

It may be suggested that the argument by means of which I have tried to show why, for Hume, animals should not be regarded as moral agents, contains a crucial gap.¹⁴ Thus, while this argument may have succeeded in establishing that animals lack a moral sense, and that consequently they are unable to take up the point of view associated with moral judgement, it has failed to rule out the possibility that animals may be considered moral agents in virtue of being objects of *our* moral approval and disapproval.¹⁵ Now, there is no doubt that Hume thinks that we may indeed approve and disapprove of animals, and even that animals may take pride in our approbation of them (T 326). It is another question, however, whether what is involved in such cases is *moral* approval (or disapproval). Hume is quite clear that our approval of some inanimate object on account of its utility is to be distinguished from our approval of moral virtue (T 617; EPM 213n). When he points out that we may approve of an animal which is useful or beneficial in some way (EPM 179), it seems possible, at least, that what he has in mind is a kind of aesthetic sentiment, bearing in mind the close connection he finds between the beauty we admire in animals and their convenience and utility (T 299). I do not wish to

suggest that Hume would deny the very possibility of an animal possessing virtue.¹⁶ On the contrary, he evidently accepts that the idea of some particular kind of animal and that of virtue are quite *consistent* with each other—so that, for example, we may conceive of a virtuous horse simply by uniting the idea of virtue with that of “the figure and shape of a horse” (EHU 19). Animals do, after all, possess many of the attributes which in human beings are associated with the presence of moral virtue. But it is equally clear, I think, that Hume no more believes that there is such a thing as a virtuous horse than that our ability to join together the ideas of gold and mountain establishes the existence of any golden mountains.

Human and Animal Selves

Hume’s view that we are distinguished from animals by virtue of our status as moral agents reflects an important feature of his concept of person or self. This is that he shares with Locke the view of person as a *forensic* concept.¹⁷ In other words, the actions of persons are associated with the notion of responsibility, and also with attendant notions such as those of praise and blame, punishment and reward. What this requires is that actions should proceed from features of persons which are “durable or constant” (T 411), which, in a word, belong to their *characters*. While animals share many of our mental capacities, they appear to lack just those features which are associated with our possession of moral character. For character, in this sense, has to do with the possession of moral qualities—virtues and vices—which in turn is bound up with the capacity for moral distinctions. Being able to discern virtue and vice depends upon taking what Hume calls the general view, and something of this sort is certainly implied by the possession of the artificial virtues which rest upon a general sense of common interest (T 490).¹⁸ The reason why animals fail to possess the kind of character which may be a cause of passions like pride or humility, and hence of the moral sentiments, is precisely that they lack the kind of understanding or knowledge required for the distinctive point of view associated with morality (T 326; cf. 610). (This last point, as we have seen above, is related also to the inability of animals to be motivated in accordance with the calm passions which play such an important role in Hume’s account of virtue and vice.)

It might be appropriate to say a little more here about the differences, on Hume’s account, between human and animal selves. If we thought that Hume was committed to the view that there is no essential difference between the two, then of course it would be hard to see how he could refuse to regard animals as moral agents. After all, if animals really are *persons* they must surely share with human beings the capacity for virtue and vice.¹⁹ We have already seen that according to Hume animals do indeed share a great deal in common with human beings, and there is certainly not the difference in kind supposed

by the rationalist. But we should not, I think, infer from this that Hume is committed to the view that animals are, like us, persons. I do not believe, for example, that Hume's use of the notion of a person reflects any such view.²⁰ Still, there might appear to be important features of Hume's philosophical position which do nevertheless commit him to such a view. There are two, in particular, that come to mind.

The first concerns Hume's account of the indirect passions of pride and humility which, as we have seen, play a crucial role in the operation of the moral sense and are supposed also to be common to humans and animals. The object of these emotions, according to Hume, is the self, as a succession of related ideas and impressions (T 277)—we are proud of something, for example, only if there is an association in the mind between the idea of that thing and that of ourself. Thus pride involves an idea of self and to this extent it might be thought that its occurrence in animals is indicative of their status as persons. It is difficult to see, however, why Hume should be committed to the view that the sense of self in animals should correspond to that in humans. Hume indicates that the relevant idea of self in humans comprises both mental and bodily qualities (T 303), while the causes of pride and humility in animals are to be located solely in the body (T 326). It seems, therefore, that it is the animal's idea of its body which is linked associatively with that in which it takes pride, as Hume's summarizing remarks on the subject would suggest (T 326–327); so that the idea of self involved is relevantly different from that which belongs to human pride or humility.

The other factor which seems to bear importantly on the question of whether Hume regards animals as persons is what he has to say about the mechanism of sympathy. As noted above, Hume certainly thinks that animals are susceptible to this mechanism for the communication of passions. Yet sympathy is supposed once more to involve the idea of the self; in this case, because the idea so enlivens the idea we form of the other being's mental state that we come to share it with them (T 319). The real question here, I think, is just how *self-conscious* this process is supposed to be—especially in the case of animals. I think it is evident that Hume accepts that sympathy may be a pretty unreflective process even in the case of human beings, so that what is involved may be little more than a kind of emotional contagion which allows passions to pass “with the greatest facility” from one person to another (T 605). This is certainly how he seems to regard the communication of passions in animals. Thus, “affections” such as fear and anger may be communicated from one animal to another quite independently of any knowledge of their original causes—as in the case of the “howlings and lamentations of a dog,” which produces “a sensible concern in its fellows” (T 398). But this makes a striking contrast with the kind of “corrected” sympathy which is associated with the occurrence of the moral sentiments. For sympathy in this case requires an awareness of self which enables one to recognise those features

which are peculiar to one's own situation and which fail to contribute to its moral character. There seems no reason why sympathy in animals should involve any such self-conscious process. Thus, while it may be true that in virtue of the passions they experience, and their susceptibility to sympathy, animals share some of the features which make us moral agents, Hume is justified, I think, in seeing relevant differences which deprive animals of that status.

In opposition to what I have just said, however, a case may be made for the view that Hume's account of the natural virtues and vices would commit him to accepting the status of animals as moral agents.²¹ If virtue, for example, consists in the possession of a useful or agreeable quality whose effects are communicated to us by the mechanism of sympathy, then animals might indeed appear to be capable of virtue. Hume himself is of course aware that virtue cannot simply be identified with the possession of some useful or agreeable quality. We may approve of a convenient house, for example, but as Hume says this is not the kind of approval associated with a virtuous character (T 617). In the case of inanimate objects, this may have to do with the fact that the relevant kinds of passion are not aroused (EPM 213n); but animals, as "rational beings," plainly are the objects of such passions. We have seen already that, on Hume's view, animals are capable of such qualities as kindness, so what prevents them from possessing this kind of quality as a trait of character which constitutes a social virtue? The problem, I think, is that Hume does not say enough about what the conditions are under which a certain kind of disposition would qualify as a virtue or vice (although he insists that this has nothing to do with its voluntariness or otherwise [T 608]). He sometimes writes loosely as though any mental quality that produces love or pride is, as such, virtuous (e.g., T 591); elsewhere, he restricts the category of virtues to those qualities of mind that manifest *personal* character (T 575). But the question remains of why an animal which displays kindness would not, for Hume, be counted as virtuous. The answer I want to suggest, admittedly with some diffidence, is that a trait of this kind becomes a social virtue, on Hume's considered view, only when it is exercised with a certain *discrimination*.²² Hume himself indicates that the kind of generosity associated with a natural virtue like beneficence can, in some circumstances, be considered a weakness (i.e., if its foreseeable consequences are themselves undesirable); likewise, an indiscriminating generosity which benefits those who have no need of it is not regarded as a mark of beneficence (EPM 180–181).²³ What these remarks suggest is that to possess a trait as a virtue, the agent must be able to assess its likely effects so as to exercise it in favour of those who will truly benefit from it. I imagine that this is a capacity which Hume would regard as belonging exclusively to persons on account of their superior understanding; and, if so, this would provide some rationale for his reluctance to treat animals as moral agents, capable of virtue and vice. But the whole question of what, for Hume, it is to be a moral agent, and to exercise traits of

character as virtues and vices, is clearly of sufficient importance in its own right to demand separate treatment (which I hope to provide elsewhere).

The various points referred to above have a direct relevance to another crucial point of difference, on Hume's account, between humans and animals. This has to do with man's status as a *social* being. (There is an evident connection here with Hume's view of the vice associated with human incest). Our essentially social nature is reflected in such institutions as property and the associated social virtues and vices. In this sense also, character as a property of persons or selves reflects their public or social aspects: even those qualities of character that belong to the mind rather than the body depend on the relations of persons with each other (see, e.g., EPM 313, 316). Animals, on the other hand, are incapable of such relations as those of right and property (T 326), and hence the restriction of pride and humility, in their case, to causes which lie in the body. Hume in fact has an explanation for this difference in the status of men and animals which has to do with the fact that the "uniting principle" in animals is provided entirely by instinct as opposed to reason and forethought (EPM 307n). The result, for Hume, is that our relations with animals cannot themselves be social ones, for that would presuppose a degree of equality which, as we have seen above, fails to obtain. Thus, it would appear that on Hume's account we could not strictly speaking enjoy relations of friendship with animals to the extent that such relations lie principally among equals ("Of the Middle Station of Life," 547). This is not to say that animals themselves are incapable of any kind of social organisation; but Hume's point is, I take it, that animals are incapable of sharing the *same* community as that to which humans belong. In Hume's view, therefore, if we have any obligations to animals they cannot be of the kind associated with justice, whose rules precisely reflect our human condition. But even if we do find ourselves masters of animal creation (Dialogues, 168)—so that animals may themselves be counted among our possessions (see, e.g., T 279)—this does not mean that we may simply treat animals as we please. For their combination of a degree of rationality, with their inferior mental and bodily powers, binds us "by the laws of humanity to give gentle usage to these creatures" (EPM 190–191). They are appropriate objects of our compassion and kindness, given our sympathetic awareness of their pains and pleasures, even if they are strictly unable to make any claims upon us.

Concluding Comments

There are further differences which Hume finds between human beings and animals; I have space to mention them only briefly. There is, for example, our possession of language which depends on the possibility of taking the general view and so appreciating the common interest which is served by this institution. There is also the distinctively human phenomenon of religious

belief, which is a reflection of the imaginative curiosity that distinguishes us from animals (see, e.g., NHR 62). In each case we encounter a distinctive feature of human nature which is also associated with our possession of virtue and vice. But we should note that for Hume none of this would justify us in attaching any special kind of cosmic significance to our existence, and in many ways the similarities between ourselves and animals remain of greater importance than the differences. "The lives of men depend upon the same laws as the lives of all other animals," and "the life of man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster" ("Of Suicide," 582–583). Hume's choice of the example of the oyster is striking in view of the contrast he draws in the *Treatise* between our minds and that of the oyster, which he evidently regards as being one of the lowest forms of life (T 634). Whatever superiority we possess in relation to animals is to be ascribed to nature, whose essentially impersonal laws govern our lives just as they do those of other animals.²⁴

REFERENCES

The writings of Hume to which I will be referring are these: *A Treatise of Human Nature* (T), edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, (Oxford University Press, 1978); *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (EHU) and *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (EPM), edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford University Press, 1976); *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, (parenthetical references to individual essays by title and page number in the text), edited by E. F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985); and *The Natural History of Religion* (NHR) and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Dialogues), from *Hume on Religion*, edited by R. Wollheim (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1963).

1. Two recently published articles which do concern themselves with what Hume has to say about animals are Annette Baier's "Knowing Our Place in the Animal World," in Baier, *Postures of the Mind* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 139–156; and Michael Seidler's "Hume and the Animals," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 15 (1977): 361–372. There are brief discussions of some of the issues raised here in Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 76–7, and Annette C. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), esp. 79. David Fate Norton's *David Hume, Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 38–40, contains some useful discussion of Shaftesbury's comparison between human and animal nature.

2. It would of course be more precise to speak here, and elsewhere, of the relation between ourselves and other animals. Throughout the paper it is understood that it is the relation between human and non-human animals that is in question, though in general I shall speak loosely of humans and animals.

3. See, for example, Edward Craig, *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 70.

4. In this context I note W. B. Huntley's "David Hume and Charles Darwin," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33 (1972): 457-470, which contains an interesting discussion of the possible influences of Hume upon Darwin. Also worth noting here is T. H. Huxley's *Hume* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1879), which draws attention to the break with tradition involved in Hume's view of the continuity between our mental states and those of animals (see especially chapter V, "The Mental Phenomena of Animals").

5. The following is based on the account I give of Hume's moral sense theory in "Projectionism, Realism and Hume's Moral Sense Theory," *Hume Studies* 15 (1989): 61-92, especially 76-89.

6. Even if animals lack a moral or aesthetic sense it remains true that they do have the emotional prerequisites for the possession of such a sense, as Baier points out in "Knowing Our Place in the Animal World," 147.

7. One might of course query whether an animal can engage in "the very same action" as that of a human being who commits an act of incest, on the ground that reference to the action involved would normally assume a certain social and legal context. Hume appears to identify "the action" here with a certain set of external bodily occurrences and, similarly, to treat "the relation" involved as one which is external to such contextual considerations.

8. This much is in fact implied in the account provided above of the operation of the moral sense.

9. In this context it is worth noting the following:

...it is impossible for men so much as to murder each other without statutes, and maxims, and an idea of justice and honour. War has its laws as well as peace; and even that sportive kind of war, carried on among wrestlers, boxers, cudgel-players, gladiators, is regulated by fixed principles. Common interest and utility beget infallibly a standard of right and wrong among the parties concerned. (EPM 210-211)

It is, at least in part, their inability to attain the perspective which provides an appreciation of "common interest and utility" that would prevent animals from committing the wrong associated with the criminal act of murder (or, one might add, that of incest).

10. We may note here that Hume illustrates the difference between what he calls a mistake of fact and a mistake of right—where the latter has to do with criminality—by reference to Oedipus' killing of Laius in ignorance of the nature of their relationship (EPM 290).

11. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (hereafter, *Essay*), edited by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford University Press, 1975), II xxi 47-52.

12. One might naturally think here of philosophers like Samuel Clarke and William Wollaston as exponents of the kind of rationalist view which Hume rejects in *Treatise* III i 1. Especially worthy of note here, for example, is Clarke's remark that "from the different relations of different persons one to another, there necessarily arises a fitness or unfitness of certain manners of

behaviour"—see "A Discourse of Natural Religion," in *British Moralists 1650–1880*, edited by D. D. Raphael (Oxford University Press, 1969), 192. But it seems to me that the view of morality which Locke develops in his *Essay* is a clear illustration of the kind of rationalist position which Hume has in mind, and invites just the kind of critical comment which Hume goes on to make about this position.

13. Ted Morris in "Why Moral Distinctions Aren't Based on Reason: Hume's Refutation of Moral Rationalism"—a paper presented to the 18th International Hume Conference, Eugene, Oregon, August 1991—points out that, contrary to Hume, the rationalist position does not seem straightforwardly circular. The rationalist himself would, after all, agree that the turpitude of a relation belongs to it independently of the ideas by means of which that relation is discerned. But then Hume's point, as I see it, is that the rationalist is unable to explain how it is possible for a relation to possess such a quality except by reference to the ideas by means of which we are supposed to discern this feature of the relation.

14. Just such a suggestion has been made by an anonymous reader of an earlier version of this paper; a similar criticism has also been made by my colleague, Antony Duff.

15. In fact Charlotte Brown's "Humean Animals"—a paper presented to the 18th International Hume Conference, Eugene, Oregon, August 1991—argues precisely in this way that Hume is committed to the view of animals as moral agents.

16. That Hume is committed to this possibility by the continuity he finds between human and animal nature is well argued by Jane McIntyre in "Virtues and Lovable Qualities," a paper presented to the 18th International Hume Conference, Eugene, Oregon, August 1991, in response to Brown.

17. I have developed this theme in "Hume on Character, the Self and Moral Agency," a paper presented to the 18th International Hume Conference, Eugene, Oregon, August 1991.

18. We should note an additional feature of the artificial virtues and vices: viz., that we are an inventive and imaginative species for whom it is natural to establish the rules of justice, etc. (T 484), and in this respect we differ once more from animals.

19. The suggestion that Hume is committed to the view that animals are—like us—persons (and, accordingly, moral agents) appears in Brown's "Humean Animals." The thoughts of the following few paragraphs were stimulated by reflection on this paper.

20. Hume almost invariably uses the word "person" in the *Treatise* in contexts where reference to human beings seems obviously to be intended. Thus, persons are referred to as such in relation to the use of language (T 23), the influence of general rules (T 151), the division of mankind into the vulgar and the philosophical (T 222), the relations which arise from property (T 309), and the institution of artificial virtues like promise-keeping (T 524). What is more, there appear to be a number of cases in which Hume intends an implicit contrast, at least, with animals—for example, where he refers to the analogy

between the identity of persons and that of animals (T 253)—as well as those cases where the contrast is quite explicit (as in the observation that the causes of pride in animals lie solely in the body [T 326]). It is also worth noting that when Hume is talking more generally about the objects of emotions like love and hatred, he refers not only to persons but also to “sensible beings” (T 329) and “thinking beings” (T 331, 367), and “creature[s] endowed with thought and consciousness” (T 411). This last point suggests that when Hume has animals in mind as well as human beings, he does not use the term “person” to include both.

21. This case is made by Brown.

22. This would provide a kind of counterpart to the point that the moral sentiments themselves depend on a correction of the natural bias associated with sympathy.

23. Somewhat similarly, perhaps, Hume appears to suggest elsewhere that courage can be exercised as a virtue only when it is accompanied with discipline (“Of Refinement in the Arts,” 274).

24. A version of this paper was read at the 19th International Hume Conference, University of Nantes, June 1992. I am grateful to my commentator, Maria Montes, for her remarks on that occasion. I am grateful also to anonymous referees of an earlier draft of this paper for their comments.