



Walter Brand, *Hume's Theory of Moral Judgment: A Study in the Unity of A Treatise of Human Nature*

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WALTER BRAND. *Hume's Theory of Moral Judgment: A Study in the Unity of A Treatise of Human Nature*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992.

The object of Walter Brand's book is to show how the account of general rules, or mental propensities, essential to Hume's theory of moral judgment, is already developed in Book I of *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Furthermore, the conflict between the rules of the imagination and the rules of the understanding which Brand contends leads to skepticism about the status of those rules in the epistemology is repeated, on his interpretation, in Hume's ethics; it results in analogous skeptical conclusions there. This book does an admirable job of tracing the development and operation of the general rules that govern belief formation in Hume's philosophy of mind, but I disagree with the final assessment of Hume's ethics as skeptical about the normative status of the regulative rules there. Despite my disagreements, I believe Brand's discussion is a stimulating contribution to a new, growing literature on "the general point of view" in Hume's moral theory.

In the first part of his book, on reason, Brand shows how for Hume the imagination has tendencies to move beyond the experiences which engender our mental habits and how the understanding develops rules that limit the imagination. The clash between Rules of the Imagination (I Rules) and Rules of the Understanding (U Rules) initiates a combat between passion and reason, Brand says, that continues into the ethics (47). U Rules are called upon to explain why we don't believe vivid fictions or disbelieve dull histories, and how we prevent forming capricious habits of association based on contingent features of causes rather than on genuine regularities. However, we also become skeptical of our powers of discerning causes, and the vivacity of those doubts is only minimized by the degree of reflection needed to produce them. Thus, by the end of Book I, to preserve our belief in causes, it looks as though the general rules of the imagination, by which belief is a matter of the vivacity with which an idea is thought, have undermined the regulative rules of reason after all. Brand argues that Hume doesn't want to rest with this conclusion, so he makes no claims about the normative status of I Rules versus U Rules (64).

In the second part of his book, on sympathy, Brand extends the conflict of general rules to the division between the calm and violent passions in

Hume's ethics. Brand sees Humean moral approval and disapproval as calm love and hatred, respectively. Hume needs to explain how we make moral judgments counter to our passions when both our passions and our moral approval and disapproval depend on our sympathies: how do we approve (feel calm love toward) those we hate? Here the understanding has us step into an "impartial point of view," Brand says, and "sympathize with...pleasures and pains which the person himself receives from his pleasant or useful qualities..., or sympathize with the pleasures and pains of persons who are likely receivers of his or her quality" (122-23). The conflict between the impartial point of view and the unregulated sympathies of love and hatred, Brand argues, is not a conflict between the moral and the premoral, but a tension between partial and impartial *moral* judgments (95). Further, if moral approval depends on sympathy with those affected by an action, how can we approve of agents whose beneficial tendencies are accidentally not realized? Here, Brand says, Hume relies on the tendency of the imagination to produce the idea of the effect in the presence of the cause.

Brand sees Hume's moral skepticism in the following: while it is unreasonable to sympathize with pleasures and pains not believed to exist, the imagination stabilizes moral evaluations by having us do just that, in order to distinguish matters of accident from real dispositions. Thus, Hume does not pronounce on the normative status of the regulative rules in moral judgment either; some people just are dominated by their violent passions (imagination), and some people are controlled by their calm passions (reason).

However, the skepticism Brand finds in Book III is minimized by some important considerations, I believe. First, while there are good reasons not to identify the moral sentiments with love and hatred (since the moral sentiments for Hume motivate, while love and hatred do not), I will not pursue that debate. It is significant, though, that if the unregulated sympathies that result in violent love and hatred are not taken to represent moral judgments, then there is no conflict *within* morality here: the tension is between the moral and the premoral. It is quite standard to think that Hume regards *only* regulated sympathies as representing moral beliefs. Second, the general point of view should be characterized less as an impartial or disinterested point of view and more as a *non-self-interested* point of view. The spectator sympathizes, without regard to her own interest, with the narrow circle of people affected by the agent. Here it looks as though the imagination and the understanding cooperate to produce a non-self-interested feeling. The former brings the "narrow circle" emotionally close to the spectator, while the latter tells the spectator what it is to keep self-interest out of the assessment when the spectator cannot lose her self-interested feelings altogether. Third, it is not obvious that it is "unreasonable" in Hume's view to sympathize with pleasures and pains believed not to exist. While it is unreasonable to believe that these feelings do

exist when they don't, one's "moral sense" can react sympathetically to a concept of an action or character without one's believing that that action or character exists.

Consequently, a reader may wonder whether regulative rules for Hume *do* have a normative status in his ethics, and conflict less with the imagination than Brand's interpretation depicts. I think a tension associated with the presence of regulative rules in Hume's moral theory might be located in a different place. The alleged motivating force of moral judgments demands explanation when regulative rules of reason, which are impotent to motivate alone, control those judgments. Brand chooses not to treat the topic of moral motivation in this discussion. However, I recommend this book as a clear and interesting study in how far the theory of judgment-formation in Book I is extended to the other books of the *Treatise*.

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