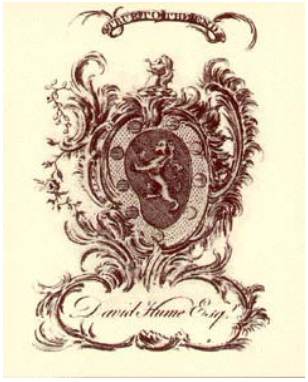

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From Spectator to Agent: Hume's Theory of Obligation

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Hume's initial objection to moral rationalism, and one that he takes to be decisive, is that the rationalists, by locating conscience in reason, locate it in an inactive part of human nature.[1] Of course, the rationalists themselves took reason to be active. Samuel Clarke, Hume's main target, objected strenuously to Hobbes' idea that there are no moral obligations without a sovereign empowered to enforce them.[2] According to Clarke, the good person is not someone prodded by sanctions to do what is right. Genuinely virtuous action is rational action and we do not need sanctions to do what we have a reason to do. We may be motivated simply by the rational intuition that an action is right, fitting, or obligatory.[3] Thus, both Hume and his rationalist opponents agree that the moral faculty must be active. Hume, however, thinks that his arguments in Book II of the *Treatise* on the influencing motives of the will establish that reason by itself is perfectly inert (T 413–418). So Hume concludes that "reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals" (T 458).

That conscience is active is overwhelmingly apparent to Hume.[4] According to Hume, common experience informs us that individuals are "often govern'd by their duties, and are deter'd from some actions by the opinion of injustice, and impell'd to others by that of obligation" (T 457). He also observes that philosophy is commonly divided into the speculative and the practical and, since morality is classified as practical, it is "supposed to

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influence our passions and actions" (T 457). As Hume explains elsewhere, practical moralists—parents, teachers, divines and legislators—aim to make us good by making virtue appealing. If morality had no influence on our passions and actions, it would be vain for us to take such pains to inculcate it. He also notes that "nothing wou'd be more fruitless than the multitude of rules and precepts, with which all moralists abound" (T 457).

Hume offers two arguments to show that the rationalists, by locating conscience in reason, locate it in an inactive part of human nature. His first argument, sometimes called the argument from motivation, is simply this: moral judgments excite passions and produce or prevent actions, but rational judgments by themselves never move us to action (T 457). Since all parties to the debate agree that conscience has an influence on passions and actions, it follows that if Hume is correct in claiming that reason is inactive, then reason is not the source of moral concepts and judgments. As Hume comments,

> An active principle can never be founded on an inactive; and if reason be inactive in itself, it must remain so in all its shapes and appearances, whether it exerts itself in natural or moral subjects, whether it considers the powers of external bodies, or the actions of rational beings. (T 457)

Hume's second argument relies on the claim that what reason does is to discover truth and falsehood (T 458). According to Hume, reasonableness is conformity to truth and unreasonableness is falsehood. Since actions, as Hume thinks he has previously shown, cannot be true or false, they cannot be reasonable or unreasonable (T 415–416, 458). But we do judge actions to be good or bad. Hume takes this argument to show that the goodness or badness of actions cannot be a matter of their being reasonable or unreasonable.[5] He also thinks his argument proves the same point indirectly:

> The merit and demerit of actions frequently contradict, and sometimes controul our natural propensities...as reason can never immediately prevent or produce action by contradicting or approving it, it cannot be the source of the distinction betwixt moral good and evil, which are found to have that influence. (T 458)

Hume concludes that since reason is inactive, "it can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals" (T 458).

Hume's complaint against moral rationalism might lead us to expect that his account of the sense of morals will place a special emphasis on its active character. When we turn to Hume's sentimentalist account of morality, however, he presents us with a spectator theory. By a "spectator theory," I mean a theory that takes the central moral concepts to be those used by spectators in the assessment of character traits and motives—the concepts of praise and

blame, approbation and condemnation, respect and contempt. A spectator theory focuses on how we judge characters and actions, how we decide who is the good person, and how we determine when praise and blame are appropriate. In contrast, an "agent-centered theory" takes the central moral concepts to be those used by agents in deliberations about what they ought to do. Hume is concerned with the assessment component of morality, not its deliberative component. A theory that focuses on the deliberative component will set out a standard of correct deliberation. The good person will be defined from the inside—from the perspective of an agent—as someone who deliberates and chooses correctly. But Hume defines the good person, at least initially, from the outside—from the perspective of a spectator—as someone who inspires praise and admiration. Virtue is loveable and vice hateful in the eyes of their beholders.

Hume, following Hutcheson, takes morality in the first instance to be about what is virtuous and vicious in people and to be about who the good person is. Hume also follows Hutcheson in identifying the moral sentiments as feelings of praise and blame; virtue and vice are defined by reference to these feelings. Hume concludes from his arguments against the rationalists that "To have a sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration" (T 471).[6]

Hume standardly refers to the moral sentiments as the feelings of approval and disapproval and these, he says, are "nothing but a fainter and more imperceptible love or hatred" (T 614). When we survey our own character, love and hatred are replaced by either pride or humility. Hume says:

> 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. (T 575)[7]

Moreover, love and hatred, pride and humility, as described by Hume in Book II of the *Treatise*, are not by themselves motivating feelings (T 367–368). According to Hume, "pride and humility are pure emotions in the soul, unattended with any desire, and not immediately exciting us to action" (T 367). Hume also claims that love and hatred are not by themselves motives, although he argues that they are usually followed by desires which are motives—benevolence and anger, respectively (T 367–368).[8] So, the feelings upon which morality is based are not by themselves feelings of obligation, duty, or indeed any motive at all.[9] Rather they are feelings of admiration or praise, condemnation or blame, which we experience when contemplating someone else's character or our own character.

Hume assumes from the very outset that morality is about what we love or hate, praise or blame in people. We love nothing more, he says, than the

spectacle of generosity and fairness; cruelty and treachery fill us with abhorrence.

> No enjoyment equals the satisfaction we receive from the company of those we love and esteem; as the greatest of all punishments is to be oblig'd to pass our lives with those we hate or contemn. (T 470)

What is important to us is the ordinary and daily character and loveability of those with whom we pass our lives. Moral virtue is, for Hume, simply what we love and respect people for and vice is what we hate and disdain.

The spectatorship assumption in Hume's theory shows up most clearly in his portrait of the good person. Hume's model of perfect virtue is a young man he calls Cleanthes, who is soon to be married (E 269). Hume imagines various of Cleanthes' acquaintances, associates, and friends congratulating the prospective father-in-law on such a happy choice for his daughter. The first person remarks that everyone who has dealings with the groom-to-be is sure of both benevolent and fair treatment. The second person, presumably a lawyer or businessman, admires Cleanthes' abilities, which promise to yield rapid advancement and success in the legal and commercial worlds. The third person met Cleanthes at a party where he was its "life and soul": witty, gallant and well-mannered. The fourth person, a close friend, adds that Cleanthes' cheerfulness "is not a sudden flash struck out by company"—it pervades his whole life enabling him to meet misfortune and dangers with tranquillity and serenity (E 269).

Hume's insistence that conscience is active seems to clash with the spectatorship assumption in his theory. The problem is roughly this. Hume's evidence supporting the claim that conscience is active implies that conscience motivates or perhaps even obligates us to adopt and cultivate the virtues. But conscience—or the sense of morals—as described by Hume consists in the non-motivating feelings of love and hate, pride and humility. We experience these when we take up the point of view of spectators rather than of agents. The associate, the businessman, the fellow party-goer, and the friend all admire, applaud, and praise different aspects of Cleanthes' character. Hume's portrait of Cleanthes illustrates the good person as someone who inspires love in onlookers. But if conscience is active, then there is something—more specifically, someone—missing from this portrait of the good person. Where is Cleanthes?

Is the virtuous agent missing on Hume's theory? In asking this question, I am concerned with whether and in what sense conscience or our moral sense is active on Hume's theory. There are three ways in which our moral sense could be construed as active:

1) It may be active in the familiar sense of motivating us to act in light of moral concepts and ideals.

2) The moral sense may also be active in the sense that it is productive and, as Hume says, "raises, in a manner a new creation"—creating, rather than discovering, the distinction between virtue and vice and the ideal of character (E 294).
3) Finally, the moral sense may be active by being the source of moral obligations, requiring us to adopt and cultivate the ideal of virtue.

These three ways in which the moral sense can be active need not be mutually exclusive. It is clearly possible to hold that moral concepts and ideals are created by us and also to hold that they motivate us. Moreover, Hume's claim that the thought of obligation moves us implies both that conscience gives rise to moral obligation and that the perception of obligation by itself motivates us. In this paper I will show that, on Hume's sentimentalist theory, conscience is active in all three senses.

What lies at the basis of Hume's moral theory is an ideal conception of ourselves and, as I will argue, we create the character ideal. But if the moral sense is to be productive, the question for Hume (as for other empiricists) is this: how do we generate a picture of ourselves that goes beyond what is given in experience? Hume holds that all our ideas derive ultimately from experience. In the moral case, the concepts of virtue and vice derive from the loves and hates we experience when we survey a person's character. According to Hume, love and hate are just part of our nature and are experiences that happen to us. And when we look at Hume's account of the causes of love in Book II of the *Treatise,* they are not a very promising source for a moral ideal. The causes of love include not just the "virtue, knowledge, wit, good sense, good humour of any person" but also "bodily accomplishments, such as beauty, force, swiftness, dexterity" as well as the "external advantages...of family, possessions, cloaths, nation and climate" (T 330).[10] In fact, the picture Hume paints in this part of the *Treatise* is not exactly flattering to human beings. For example, he explains in some detail why it is that we love and esteem the rich and powerful (T 357–365). He also claims that we tend to fix our love and esteem on masters before servants, on men before women, and on the rich rather than the poor (T 355–357; 307–309; 341–345). If virtue and vice are defined by reference to what we actually love and hate, then it would seem that the only picture we could have of ourselves is one that copies experience. But we want to know when a person's character is *worthy* of love, rather than when a person's character causes us to love him. If the moral ideal is to be truly an ideal—something worthy of our respect and admiration—we want a normative conception of ourselves, not a purely natural conception, a mere copy of experience.

Hume brings in the ideal element with the regulation of our loves and hates. According to Hume, moral love and hate arise from sympathy, but only

when sympathy is regulated by fixing on "some steady and general points of view."[11] There are two regulative components of the general point of view. The first is that we survey a person's character from the perspective of that person's narrow circle—the people with whom she regularly interacts.[12] Typically these will include the person herself and her usual associates: her family, friends, co-workers, fellow party-goers, and so on. We sympathize with the people who make up a person's narrow circle and we judge character traits to be virtuous or vicious in terms of whether they are good or bad for all the people in the person's narrow circle. The second regulative component is that we regulate sympathy by relying on general rules that specify the general effects and tendencies of character traits (T 584–585). We do not then respond sympathetically to the actual effects of a person's character traits but rather to their usual tendencies.

Hume explicitly introduces only these two regulative components of the general point of view, but others may be derived from them. For example, the actual composition of a person's narrow circle will vary from person to person and also will vary for individuals during their lifetime. Additionally, in most cases we know at best very little or more often nothing at all about a person's actual narrow circle. Since we are able to morally love and hate people who are spatially or temporally remote from us, this suggests that we do not survey a person through the eyes of her actual narrow circle but rather through the eyes of what would be a person's normal or usual narrow circle.

Taken together, these regulative features define a point of view we can share with everyone—a view from which we may survey a person's character. Thus, the general point of view constitutes the moral perspective, and the judgments that arise from it may be opposed to what we like and dislike from two other perspectives—the perspectives of self-interest and unregulated sympathy. From a self-interested point of view I may well dislike the "good" qualities of my rival because they counteract my interest. But by viewing my rival from the general point of view I am constrained to see her character traits as admirable and worthy of love. Or, to adapt an example of Hume's, from an interested perspective I will dislike my enemy's courage because it is a source of danger and potential harm to me. But by taking up the general point of view and sympathizing with his narrow circle—his fellow soldiers—and by relying on general rules, I will admire his courage as a source of help to them.[13]

In the same way, what we love and hate from the perspective of unregulated sympathy may be opposed to our moral loves and hates.[14] Although sympathy enables us to love people unrelated to us and who will never benefit us, it is essential to Hume's account of the natural, unregulated workings of sympathy that we sympathize more easily and strongly with those who resemble us, are contiguous to us, or are related to us by causation (for example, family members). The loves and hates that result from unregulated sympathy will thus vary with these variations in our relations. From the per-

spective of unregulated sympathy I may dislike the foreigner who was hired over the candidates from my own country because I sympathize more easily and strongly with people who are like me. But by sympathizing with the foreigner's narrow circle and by relying on general rules I will be constrained to admire her good qualities. Or suppose that a male and female are in the running for a faculty position at my university and the male wins. From the perspective of unregulated sympathy, I may dislike the male candidate—even though he is better qualified—because as a woman professor I sympathize more easily and strongly with the female candidate. But again, by taking up the general point of view, I will admire his good qualities.

It is this regulation of our sympathetic loves and hates that makes conscience productive. Although on Hume's account of conscience moral concepts have an empirical basis, the effect of the regulative features is to cut them loose from experience. On Hume's view, we construct our conception of the morally good person. Regulated sympathy works by considering the usual tendencies of a person's character for her usual associates. We sympathize with the person herself and with her narrow circle, and come to love the person for those traits which under normal circumstances are useful and pleasant for everyone in her usual narrow circle. We may thus admire a person's kindness even if, because of some odd circumstance, it happens to have harmful effects on her narrow circle. We may also consider the usual tendencies of a person's kindness for a person's normal narrow circle, even though the person has no one with whom he regularly interacts. We may thus come to admire and love a person's kindness by sympathizing with the general effects on his normal dependents, even though he has no dependents and even if his kindness would have harmful effects on his narrow circle, if he had such a circle.

According to Hume, "the ultimate test of merit and virtue" is this:

> if there be no relation of life, in which I cou'd not wish to stand to a particular person, his character must so far be allow'd to be perfect. If he be as little wanting to himself as to others, his character is entirely perfect. (T 606)

On Hume's view, we arrive at the character ideal by surveying a person's character from various perspectives—that of friend, fellow-worker, neighbor, fellow-citizen, and so on. The ideal of character that results is a picture of ourselves as essentially social beings—that of a good parent, sibling, friend, neighbor, co-worker, and citizen. Even those character traits which are useful or pleasant to the possessor herself are surveyed from a social perspective and are deemed hateful if they have deleterious effects on others or are unpleasant to others. "Courage and ambition, when not regulated by benevolence, are fit only to make a tyrant and public robber," because they are harmful to others

(T 604). And the effect of the regulating features is to idealize this picture. We imagine a person in a wide variety of roles and relationships and by relying on general rules we know what character traits usually have good effects on others. The ideal of character is a construct: an ideal of someone who is perfect in all her roles and relationships. It is an ideal of a completely loveable person.

Although Hume's ideal of character is an ideal of someone who is fully loveable, it is not particularly exacting. It is not as demanding as are the ideals typically associated with some versions of Christian, rationalist, or utilitarian moral theories—ideals only the saintly, the highly disciplined, or perfectly benevolent may live up to. Instead, it is a human and humane ideal. This is especially evident in the case of the natural virtues. On Hume's account of the natural virtues, the ideal does not demand the kind of extreme impartiality that is sometimes associated with utilitarianism. This is because Hume holds that, in all our judgments concerning the natural virtues and vices, our sympathetic reactions are to be guided by what is normal and usual in human nature.

> ...we always consider the *natural* and *usual* force of the passions, when we determine concerning vice and virtue; and if the passions depart very much from the common measure on either side, they are always disapprov'd as vicious. (T 483–484, 488–489, 478)[15]

Thus it is normal and usual for us to be partial in our relationships with others.

> A man naturally loves his children better than his nephews, his nephews better than his cousins, his cousins better than strangers, where every thing else is equal. (T 483–484)

And the moral sense approves of this sort of partiality. Moreover, in the case of the natural virtues, the morally best person acts not from the motive of duty but from spontaneous and natural affections.[16] In the case of the natural virtues, then, our sympathetic moral sense will tend to value and so reinforce what is normal and usual in human nature.

With respect to the natural virtues, the Humean ideal does not require human nature to be radically altered, changed, saved or made better. Hume does not think of human nature as bad or evil—in need of redemption—as some religious thinkers have thought. Nor does Hume think of morality as something that tames us, transforming our essentially selfish nature into a more social one and in the process doing violence to our human nature, a view standardly ascribed to his predecessor, Mandeville. As Hume sees it, the verdict of the moral sense is that human nature is loveable pretty much as it is.[17] With respect to the natural virtues, the Humean ideal can only get so far from

what we are actually like.

The idealizing character of the general point of view shows up more when Hume turns to the artificial virtues. The duties that arise from the artificial virtues—respecting property rights, fidelity in promises, obedience to government—are not owed to people because of any special relationship we might have with them but simply because they are fellow-citizens. And in contrast to the natural virtues, the artificial virtue of justice, for instance, might demand more unnatural conduct of us. It might demand that we act impartially, for example, avoiding nepotism. Or, to use Hume's own example, it might demand that a beneficent person restore a "fortune to a miser," an act that would go against his immediate and natural affections (T 497). Moreover, Hume argues that there is no natural motive for justice. Hume surveys a number of passions, such as benevolence and self-interest, and argues that the motive for acting justly cannot be explained by these passions or, indeed, any other natural passion. With respect to the artificial virtue of justice, Hume holds that the standard motive must be the sense of obligation.[18] The just person is moved by the thought that the act is just. In contrast to the natural virtues, in the case of justice it is this motive—the sense of obligation—that the moral sense finds most praiseworthy.

If the ideal of character is a construct, then Hume appears open to an objection that was important to the British rationalists during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rationalists standardly objected to theories that ground morality in any type of positive law. For example, Clarke objected to Hobbes' claim that in civil society right and wrong are determined by the sovereign's will and also objected to divine command theories according to which right and wrong are grounded in God's will. Two criticisms were brought against these views. The first is that if the sovereign makes moral laws and these obligate us, there is still a prior question about what obligates us to obey the sovereign.[19] The second criticism is that if morality springs from positive law then the moral law's content is arbitrary.[20]

Later rationalists brought the second criticism against Francis Hutcheson as well.[21] Hutcheson took the moral sense to be an original faculty, implanted in us by God, which disposes us to feel approval or disapproval when we survey respectively a benevolent or malicious character. Rationalists complained, however, that if the moral sense is merely a faculty implanted in us by God then God could have constituted our moral sense differently, making us approve of malice and so making malice right. Rationalists concluded that obligation can no more depend upon a divinely implanted sense than it can on positive law. In a similar way, Hume makes the moral ideal contingent, a product of our constitution, and this may seem to make the ideal arbitrary as well.

But closer examination of Hume's account of conscience makes the second criticism, that rightness is arbitrary, seem less important. Hume traces

the moral sense to sympathy; sympathy, in turn, is explained by the same associative principles that explain our ability to engage in causal reasoning. Sympathy also accounts for a wide range of our experiences—our sense of beauty, our interest in the news and history, our emotional reactions to novels and plays, our desire for company, and in general our tendencies towards sociability. Sympathy is a deep-seated principle in us. Without sympathy and the associative principles that cause it, we would be unimaginably different from what we are.

There is a way in which the first objection might be turned against the rationalists and to Hume's advantage. If moral standards are created by the will of a sovereign or even God's will, then morality is something external to us and imposed on us from without. But equally, if moral standards are not something we create, but something reason discovers in the eternal structure of the universe, then the source of morality lies outside us. On Hume's reading of the rationalists, reason does not produce anything new but only "discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution..." (E 294). If Hume is correct, then rationalists maintain that the source of morality is external to us. And in that case, we can ask how we can be obligated by something external. The problem about how the moral law or moral ideal obligates us is not whether the moral law or ideal is a construct: something we create. What matters is whether they are imposed on us from without or we impose them on ourselves. As I will now argue, Hume's view shows that moral standards are self-imposed.

This brings me back to the three senses in which conscience may be active. I have argued that for Hume conscience is productive, creating rather than discovering the ideal of character. Morality springs from our sympathetic nature when regulated by the general point of view. The ideal of character we produce as a result is a conception of ourselves as essentially social creatures. Since the ideal is something of our own making, if Hume can also show that we are motivated to live up to it, then he will be moving towards the position that moral motivation is autonomous—a form of self-government. The answer to the question—"How does the moral ideal obligate us?"—is that the ideal is something we give to ourselves. We impose the ideal of character on ourselves.

Hume thinks that sympathy also explains why we are motivated to live up to the ideal. Sympathy, as Hume conceives it, is the propensity to receive by communication both the feelings and opinions of others. And, we enjoy sympathizing with others. Nothing interests us so much as entering into the feelings of others. We languish when left on our own and so we naturally seek out company (T 353). We also want to share our feelings with others, to have them enter into our sentiments.

> Every pleasure languishes when enjoy'd a-part from company, and every pain becomes more cruel and intolerable. (T363)

Perfect solitude, Hume says, is perhaps the greatest punishment we can suffer. Sympathy makes the feelings of others contagious to us and our feelings contagious to them; our minds are mirrors to one another (T 365).

Sympathy explains why we care so deeply about what others think about us. According to Hume, we have a natural, even animal concern in being loveable in the eyes of others (T 316–324, 326). This is what he calls the love of fame. The love, esteem, and praise of others exhilarates us; their hatred, contempt, and criticism makes us miserable. Love is itself a pleasant feeling, so its presence in us causes pride; hate is an unpleasant feeling and so its presence in us causes humility. Moreover, sympathy ensures that the feelings and opinions others have about us—their love or hatred, praise or blame—get lodged in our soul.

Sympathy's internalization of other people's praise and blame, love and hatred has the effect of making us see ourselves as others see us and ultimately valuing in ourselves what others value in us. According to Hume, it is very difficult for us to sustain our own opinions and sentiments when they conflict with those of our "friends and daily companions" (T 316). This is especially so when "our reputation, character or name" are concerned, for these "are considerations of vast weight and importance" to us (T 316). This is so much so that it is almost impossible for us to sustain pride in our own character unless our opinions and sentiments are "seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others" (T 316). We live very much in the eyes of others, heeding their views about us.

Thus sympathy has what Hume calls a "reverberating" or "reflective" character to it (T 365, E 276). Sympathy pressures us to survey "ourselves as we appear to others," valuing in ourselves what others find valuable in us (T 589). And in the moral case, the reflective character of sympathy will pressure us to see our own moral vices for what they are and in so doing disapprove of them. If I fall short of the character ideal by having a trait that is harmful or disagreeable to others but not to me, sympathy also will get me to disapprove of that trait.

> ...one whose character is only dangerous or disagreeable to others, can never be satisfied with himself, as long as he is sensible of that disadvantage. (T 589)

The reverberating aspect of sympathy ensures that we will be sensible of "that disadvantage," making us hateful to ourselves. Hume thinks that sympathy may go so far as to make us disapprove of our own vices, even when they are of real use or benefit to us.

> And this sympathy we sometimes carry so far , as even to be displeas'd with a quality commodious to us, merely because it displeases others, and renders us disagreeable in their eyes; tho' perhaps we can never have any interest in rendering ourselves agreeable to them. (T 589)

The capacity to survey ourselves as others do may even be developed to the point where we come to see ourselves not just as we actually appear to others, but as we *would* appear to them. According to Hume, we may respond sympathetically to what we anticipate someone else would feel if they were aware that an event or action was occurring or was about to occur (T 385). The internalization of others peoples' moral judgments may have the effect that even the *idea* or *thought* that others would disapprove of us would make us hateful in our own eyes. We may thus come to disapprove of some action we are only thinking about doing. On Hume's view, it is possible for us to blush and to be morally ashamed in private.

Hume's view of the moral sense comes close to that of Adam Smith, his sentimentalist successor. According to Smith, everyone likes praise and hates blame and so we learn to see our conduct through the eyes of others. Although conscience or the "man within" is originally a social product, Smith thinks it may become independent of the actual judgments of others. We want not only to be loved and praised but also to be worthy of love and praise and so we come to see ourselves as an ideal moral judge would. To be worthy of love we must live up to the ideal of character. In a similar way, on Hume's view we may come to see ourselves through the eyes of anyone who fully regulates her sympathy, that is, from the general point of view.

The result is that we will be loveable in our own eyes only if we are or would be morally loveable in the eyes of others. And, to do this we must live up to the character ideal. According to Hume, being morally loveable in our own eyes is an important ingredient of happiness.

> Inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct, these are circumstances, very requisite to happiness... (E 283)

Both our sense of ourselves as loveable persons and our happiness are thus dependent upon living up to the ideal of character.

According to Hume, when a person is aware that he lacks a principle "common in human nature" and so falls short of the character ideal, he then

> may hate himself upon that account, and may perform the action without the motive, from a certain sense of duty, in order to acquire by practice, that virtuous principle...(T 479)

The motive of duty arises when our self-conception clashes with the ideal of character. We hate ourselves for failing to live up to the character ideal and this makes us unhappy. We may thus be motivated to cultivate the virtues.

The reverberating or reflective character of sympathy ensures that the moral judgments of others get internalized, lodged in our souls. Sympathy also explains our deep desire to be loveable in the eyes of others. Both have the effect of strengthening and reinforcing our desire to live up to the character ideal. These effects of sympathy are, for Hume, the guardians of virtue.

> By our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world, we bring our own deportment and conduct frequently in review, and consider how they appear in the eyes of those who approach and regard us. This constant habit of surveying ourselves, as it were, in reflection, keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong, and begets, in noble natures, a certain reverence for themselves as well as others, which is the surest guardian of every virtue. (E 276)

Hume thinks that we may even come to care more about our own character—living up to the ideal—than anything else.

> The animal conveniences and pleasures sink gradually in their value; while every inward beauty and moral grace is studiously acquired... (E 276)

On Hume's sentimentalist theory, then, conscience is active in all three senses. Sympathy, when regulated by the general point of view, creates the ideal of virtue. Sympathy also explains why we are motivated to live up to that ideal when we fall short of it. And finally, we can understand how this ideal of character is able to obligate us: since it is our own creation and so our own ideal, the obligation to live up to it is self-imposed. Is the virtuous agent then present on Hume's theory? When we endeavor to live up to the ideal we are that agent: we regulate ourselves in terms of our own ideal of character.

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1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 456–458. The *Enquiries* references are from David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Hereafter, references to the *Treatise* and both *Enquiries* are cited within the text.

2 Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation: The Boyle Lectures 1705 in the Works of Samuel Clarke* (London: J. and P. Knapton, 1738; rpt. New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), 609–10. Selections from the *Boyle Lectures* can be found in D. D. Raphael, ed., *The British Moralists 1650–1800* vol.I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 191–225; the passages cited are at 194–96. Hereafter references to this work are cited as "Clarke," with page numbers from Raphael. That Clarke is Hume's main rationalist opponent is clear from the text. He starts the section entitled "Moral Distinctions not deriv'd from Reason" (T III 1 i) with a fairly accurate precis of Clarke's view (T 456). Hume does criticize the rationalist William Wollaston, but he mainly pokes fun at his theory (T 461–63).

3 Clarke, 202, 214

4 Hume rarely uses the term "conscience" (T 310, 458, 545, 551). At various points in this paper I use "conscience" as a neutral way to refer to the source of our moral concepts. Adam Smith, Hume's successor, also uses "conscience" as does Joseph Butler, a contemporary of Hume's. Bishop Butler uses this term in his *Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* and in his *Dissertations*. Selections from the *Sermons* and the *Dissertations* are to be found in Raphael's collection, *The British Moralists: 1650–1800*. Although one of the primary issues in eighteenth century British moral philosophy was whether ethics is a matter of reason or sentiment, Butler at critical points straddles these views. For example, in the *Dissertations* Butler refers to the dictates of conscience or the principle of reflection as a "sentiment of the understanding" or a "perception of the heart" (379). Hume, of course, sides with the sentimentalist Francis Hutcheson on this issue and so in using the term "conscience" I do not mean to impose Butler's views on Hume. Although Hume follows Hutcheson, he rejects Hutcheson's postulation of an unexplained moral sense on the ground that it is unscientific. The moral project, as Hume sees it, is to discover the

fundamental principles of the mind which explain the origin of moral concepts. As I subsequently point out, Hume argues that the "moral sense" itself may be explained by more fundamental principles of the mind. Hume traces the moral sense to the operation of sympathy and he explains sympathy in terms of the three associative principles—resemblance, contiguity, and causality—and the transference of vivacity. In using the term "conscience" I do not mean to imply that Hume holds, as Hutcheson did, that we have a special moral faculty or sense.

5 A rationalist like Clarke might well respond to this argument in the following way. We judge actions to be good or bad, and that is a kind of truth. Reason discovers truth, so reason does discover good and bad. Of course, this argument would commit the rationalist to a kind of realism. Hume, however, cannot simply reply by saying that realism is false since this argument is supposed to be one of his arguments against realism. Christine Korsgaard alerted me to this possible response.

6 Hume also defines the moral virtues as those character traits in people that are useful and agreeable to the possessor or others (T 591, for example). In taking this view, Hume shows another disagreement with Hutcheson. Hutcheson identifies virtue solely with the benevolent affections.

7 There is some debate about how to interpret these passages. Hume repeatedly says that approval is a pleasant sentiment (T 470, 471, 574, among other places). He also claims that it is a calm sentiment (T 473). The debate concerns whether approval is a unique pleasure which causes love or whether approval is to be identified as a species of love—a calm sort of love. I do not think that this issue can be resolved on textual grounds alone. Pall S. Ardal reads Hume in the latter way. (Pall S. Ardal, *Passion and Value in* Hume's Treatise [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966; 2nd ed. 1989].) I have taken the same position in this paper. Additional passages in which Hume connects approval and disapproval with love and hate are to be found in the *Treatise* at 470 and 473.

8 Hume is quite clear in claiming that love and hatred are not by themselves motives. He says that there are two ways to explain the conjunction of benevolence and anger, both motivating desires, with love and hatred. The first is that love and hatred not only have a cause and object but also an end "which they endeavour to attain, *viz.* the happiness or misery of the person belov'd or hated..." According to this hypothesis, "love is nothing but the desire of happiness to another person, and hatred that of misery" and so "the desire and aversion constitute the very nature of love and hatred" (T 367). But Hume rejects this account. Benevolence and anger are desires, Hume insists, separate from love and hatred and their conjunction is just a brute, inexplicable fact about us. So, although Hume holds that pride and humility, love and hatred are instances of pleasurable and painful sensation, and that these are the "chief springs" of the mind (T 574), his considered view cannot be that all passions or all pleasurable and painful sensations are motives. Moreover, the conjunction of benevolence with love or moral approval only explains why, when I morally approve of someone, I have some motivation to promote her happiness. It does not explain why my approval or love gives me

some motive to act in the ways that I approve of. This is what Hume needs in order to hold that love and hatred, approval and disapproval are "active." For a fuller discussion of these issues, see my "Is Hume an Internalist?" *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, January, 1988, 69–87.

9 Francis Hutcheson who also uses the terms "approbation" and "disapprobation" to refer to the moral sentiments holds that motivating and justifying reason are completely separate. He denies that justifying reasons, which presuppose a moral sense, motivate. Hutcheson states this view in his *Illustrations Upon the Moral Sense* which may be found in D. D. Raphael, ed. *British Moralists: 1650–1800*, Vol. II, 304–11.

10 Hume argues that the causes of both pride and love are the same. Pride is evoked when the pleasant quality is mine; love is evoked when the pleasant quality is someone else's.

11 Hume discusses the claim that moral approval arises only when our sympathy is regulated by the general point of view in the *Treatise*, 581–587. He introduces the two regulative components of the general point of view in response to two possible objections to his claim that sympathy is the source of the moral sentiments. The first objection is this. Hume traces the moral sentiments to sympathy and he explains sympathy in turn in terms of the operation of the more fundamental associative principles—resemblance, contiguity and causality. It is an essential part of Hume's account of the sympathy mechanism that our ability to sympathize with others varies with variations in our relations. So, for example, I will sympathize more easily and strongly with people who are my friends, family, fellow citizens, fellow workers, and neighbors than with strangers and foreigners. The objection is that although sympathy may vary, our esteem and approval do not, therefore, our esteem does not proceed from sympathy (T 580–581). The second objection is that "virtues in rags" is still esteemed. Sympathy, as Hume initially explains it in Book II of the *Treatise*, works by looking at the actual effects of a person's character traits but "virtue in rags is still virtue; and the love, which it procures attends a man into a dungeon or desart, where the virtue can no longer be exerted in action, and is lost to all the world" (T 584).

12 I take Hume's use of the phrase "narrow circle" to be a shorthand way of referring to what he identifies as the point of view from which we survey a person's character and make moral judgments. We consider a person from the point of view of those who have any "commerce" with the person we are judging. Thus Hume says that "We approve of a person, who is possess'd of qualities *immediately agreeable* to those, with whom he has any commerce..." (T 590). These are the people to whom the person's character matters most and they comprise the person's narrow circle. I do not mean to suggest that everyone's narrow circle is narrow. Most people's sphere of influence is rather narrow and so we only have to consider the effects they have on their family, friends, co-workers and so on. However, some people—politicians or military leaders—will have a much wider and extensive sphere of influence. In these cases we judge the character traits in terms of whether they are good or bad for all the people they substantially affect. Moreover, Hume's discussion about surveying a person's character through the eyes of her narrow circle all occur in his account of the natural virtues. As I argue, it is not clear that with respect

to the artificial virtues we are to survey someone's character from the point of view of their narrow circle. There it seems more appropriate to say that we survey a person's character from the standpoint of a fellow-citizen (T 582, 583, 590, 591, 602, 603, 606).

13 In the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Section V, Hume opposes Hobbes' and Mandeville's "selfish" accounts of morality. He argues that moral approval and disapproval, love and hate are not to be traced to self-interest but rather to sympathy. Hume, following Hutcheson, argues that the selfish school is unable to explain our judgments of praise and blame, love and hatred (E 216 note at 274–275).

14 I use "unregulated" sympathy as a shorthand way of talking about sympathy as Hume describes it in Book II of the *Treatise*. Hume explains sympathy in terms of the associative principles and he thinks that our ability to respond sympathetically with others varies with the variation in our relations with them (T 318).

15 Hume argues that in the case of the natural virtues there is a coincidence between what is normal and natural in human nature and what is pleasant and useful. This is why the moral sense has a tendency to approve of what is normal and natural in human nature.

16 I argue this point in "Is Hume an Internalist?"

17 Hume certainly is not committed to the view that every human being is morally good or that we love all human beings or even humanity in general. Hume explicitly denies that we have a love of humanity as such (T 481). My point is that in the case of the natural virtues, the moral sense approves of human nature pretty much as it is because it judges in terms of what is normal and natural for human beings.

18 For a fuller discussion of this claim, see "Is Hume an Internalist?"

19 Clarke, 219, 221.

20 Clarke, 195–196.

21 For example, John Balguy brought this criticism against Hutcheson. Selections from Balguy's *The Foundations of Moral Goodness*, Part I, are in Raphael, 389–408; this criticism is at 390.

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