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KEN O'DAY

In *A Treatise of Human Nature* Hume divides his discussion of the virtues into two types: natural and artificial. This distinction between the virtues gives rise to two primary problems. The first, which I shall call the traditional problem (and with which Hume was primarily concerned), is why the artificial virtues (e.g., justice) should, given Hume's account of virtue, be considered virtues at all. The second problem is more recent and is discussed by J. L. Mackie in his book *Hume's Moral Theory*.¹ According to Mackie, the problem is not with the artificial virtues but with the natural virtues. The essence of Mackie's claim is that the natural virtues are themselves ultimately artificial.

The interesting thing about these two problems is that when set side by side they are in tension. Both push toward the obliteration of the distinction between the two kinds of virtues, but they do so in different ways. The traditional problem suggests that all virtues are natural (and to the extent that justice is thought not to be conformable to the natural model this is commonly used as a foil against such views), while Mackie's problem suggests that all virtues are artificial (ethics, as Mackie might say, is a matter of invention). Together these problems suggest that Hume's attempt to bifurcate the moral terrain is inherently unstable. I shall argue that each of these problems rests upon a mistaken understanding of Hume's distinction between the natural and artificial virtues. When given the proper interpretation neither of these problems threatens the distinction that Hume aims to make.

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However, Hume's attempt to divide the moral terrain is not merely a matter for Hume scholarship. The underlying problem—of which Hume's natural/artificial distinction constitutes one potential solution—concerns how we are to deal with the seemingly different character of virtues like justice and virtues like compassion. Justice and similar virtues seem to be concerned with abstract rules, while virtues like compassion seem far removed from rules and more connected with feelings and emotions. Since this appears to be the commonsensical view, it might be worth asking whether there is any theoretical way to account for it. If such a distinction cannot be made one may be forced to analyze justice in terms of feeling, or compassion in terms of abstract rules—neither of which appears entirely satisfactory. Thus, if Hume's distinction can be defended it may provide the basis of a worthwhile way to divide the moral terrain.

My plan is as follows. In the first and second sections, respectively, I shall explicate the traditional problem and Mackie's problem with Hume's natural/artificial distinction. In the third section I lay out two possible interpretations of Hume's distinction: one of which focuses on the level of motives and the other of which focuses on the level of evaluations. In the fourth section I defend the motive interpretation. In the fifth and sixth sections, respectively, I return to the traditional problem and Mackie's problem and show how the motive interpretation allows for the resolution of each of these problems.

1. The Traditional Problem

Book III of Hume's *Treatise* divides into three parts. The first part "Of Virtue and Vice in General" borrows from the arguments of II, iii, 3 to make the case against rationalism and for the moral sense. In the second and third part, respectively, Hume turns to a discussion of the artificial and natural virtues. The perplexing thing is why Hume begins with the artificial virtues and devotes over twice the space to discussing them. It would seem more natural to begin, as he does in the *Enquiry*, with the natural virtues.² The most likely explanation for this organization is that Hume was aware that justice posed a special problem for the theory he was offering.³ This problem I shall call the traditional problem. The traditional problem, as was noted above, concerns whether Hume's general account of virtue can be adequately reconciled with our moral judgments regarding justice. We must look more carefully at how Hume's account of virtue and justice are at odds.

In Part One of Book III Hume has argued, contrary to the rationalist, that sentiment and not reason provides the basis for all moral distinctions. Morality he says, "is more properly felt than judg'd of."⁴ Given this account of virtue it remains for Hume and his project of providing a "science of man" to explain how we come to have the moral sentiments that we do.

[V]irtue is distinguished by the pleasure, and vice by the pain, that any action, sentiment, or character gives us by the mere view and contemplation. This decision is very commodious; because it reduces us to this simple question, *Why any action or sentiment upon the general view or survey, gives a certain satisfaction or uneasiness*, in order to shew the origin of its moral rectitude or depravity, without looking for any incomprehensible relations and qualities, which never did exist in nature, nor even in our imagination, by any clear and distinct conception. (T 475–476, original emphasis)

Hume's explanation, of course, appeals to the mechanism of sympathy. Sympathy is not a mere synonym for "compassion," but is a psychological mechanism by which sentiments are transferred from one individual to another.⁵ We are constructed such that upon witnessing the effects of a passion on others we infer the passion, whereupon this lively idea of the passion is converted into the passion itself. This transference of sentiment forms the basis of both the natural and artificial virtues *as virtues*. But it is precisely this reliance upon sympathy that introduces the problem. For suppose one witnesses someone to restore a loan to "a miser, or a seditious bigot" (T 497). One would not, through sympathy, feel pleasure upon witnessing such an act. Rather, due to the overall disutility (I use this term loosely) of the act one would feel pain, and so on Hume's account one would call such an act vicious. Nevertheless we find that we do indeed call such acts virtuous or just. In fact, innumerable acts that we call just could fail to fit Hume's sympathy-based account of virtue. These problematic cases pose a genuine difficulty for Hume's theory given the prevalence and importance of justice in our moral practices. The mechanism of sympathy alone, then, cannot account for justice being a virtue. The options for Hume are either to adopt a revisionary approach whereby the non-problematic cases of justice are subsumed under the natural virtues while simultaneously denying that the problematic cases of justice are really virtues at all or to show how it is that the problematic cases of justice can be reconciled with his general account of virtue and its reliance upon sympathy.

2. Mackie's Problem

Given the affinities between Hume and Hobbes it is not surprising that recently a number of philosophers have sought to more tightly tie the connection between the two.⁶ Hume's account of the artificial virtues, no doubt, owes much to Hobbes. However, Hume took himself to be offering a theory that is notably different than that of Hobbes.⁷ Hume's dual account of the virtues was intended to provide a more complete account of morality by fusing the egoism of Hobbes and Mandeville and the sentimentalism of Shaftesbury

and Hutcheson. The success of Hume's theory therefore will turn partly upon whether he succeeds in mating these two different traditions. Can a plausible mixed account be maintained or is such an account inherently unstable as Mackie's problem (and the traditional problem) suggests?

Mackie argues that Hume is unsuccessful in this regard. According to Mackie, Hume's "natural virtues are, after all, a further set of artificial virtues" and he suggests that this "is rather devastating for Hume's theory."⁸ However, Mackie isn't exactly clear about why this is so devastating for Hume's theory. Mackie's argument, therefore, is in need of some reconstruction. A thoroughly artificial view cannot be thought devastating by Mackie because it fails to account for key features of our moral practices, since the artificiality of morality is a key idea of Mackie's own view.⁹ Presumably Mackie must think it is devastating in a less devastating sense. This must be because the mixed view collapses, leaving Hume with only artificial virtues, thereby entailing that he is properly grouped with Hobbes and Mandeville—or so this is how I shall interpret Mackie's argument.¹⁰ It is not that the basic outlines of the Hobbesian view are problematic, but simply that Hume's view turns out to be less novel and interesting than suspected. Hume's theory is a mere extension of Hobbes's.

Let us take a more detailed look at Mackie's argument. Although Mackie's problem is in opposition to the traditional problem, it shares a common source. Just as the traditional problem arises from the failure of sympathetic judgments to coincide with our judgments concerning justice, so Mackie's problem arises from Hume's attempts to reconcile our sympathetic judgments with our judgments in the case of the natural virtues. Once again, our sense of virtue is simply a pleasurable feeling occasioned by sympathy, and our sense of vice a painful feeling.¹¹ But it is precisely this fact, that the mechanism of sympathy is the source of our moral judgments, that introduces a problem for Hume's theory. For how is the consistency and uniformity of our moral judgments to be explained if sympathy is the source of those judgments when sympathy is variable or inoperable? Hume addresses this problem in his discussion of the natural virtues.¹² The general problem, which Hume divides into two related problems, is that of squaring the facts of our moral experience with the workings of sympathy. The first problem concerns the variability of sympathy both intrapersonally and interpersonally. Through sympathy we feel more forcefully in the case of the near person than the distant person, though there is no corresponding variability in our moral judgments of these people. The second problem concerns the fact that we still make moral judgments even when sympathy is not actually operable. Though I may never actually, through sympathy, feel the sentiment that would lead me to ascribe to someone the virtue of benevolence due to the failure of their act to achieve its end or through their inaction, I nonetheless may judge them benevolent.

The problem with Hume's natural virtues, as Mackie sees it, stems from Hume's answer to these two variants of the general problem of reconciling sympathy and our practice of moral judgment. His answer to each of these problems is essentially the same. In response to the first problem, concerning sympathetic variability, Hume writes,

'Tis impossible we cou'd ever converse together on any reasonable terms, were each of us to consider characters and persons, only as they appear from his particular point of view. In order, therefore, to prevent those continual *contradictions*, and arrive at a more *stable* judgment of things, we fix on some steady and general points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation....Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting sentiments, or at least, of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable. (T 581–582, original emphasis)

In response to the second problem, concerning sympathetic inoperability, Hume has the following to say:

To this we may reply, that where any object, in all its parts, is fitted to attain any agreeable end, it naturally gives us pleasure, and is esteem'd beautiful, even tho' some external circumstances be wanting to render it altogether effectual....We know, that an alteration of fortune may render the benevolent disposition entirely impotent; and therefore we separate, as much as possible, the fortune from the disposition. The case is the same, as when we correct the different sentiments of virtue, which proceed from its different distances from ourselves. (T 584–585)

The two problems and their corresponding answers, as Hume acknowledges, are essentially the same. In each case the imagination allows one to counterfactually determine one's sympathetic response: in the first case, the one that one would have from a common perspective; and, in the second case, the one that one would have had if certain conditions obtained.¹³

Regarding Hume's response to the problem of sympathy, Mackie has this to say:

We can ask why there should be this drive towards an interpersonal and impartial system of evaluation. This is not immediately explained by what Hume admits to be the extremely variable operations of sympathy. But the answer is not hard to find. We have this system because it is, in more than one way, useful to have it.¹⁴

Mackie rightly rejects Hume's simple answer that the reason for impartial evaluation involves merely effective communication or the avoidance of contradiction.¹⁵ For it is hard to see why one should be concerned with communication or contradiction if one is a Humean about morality.¹⁶ On Mackie's view impartial evaluation serves the purpose of maintaining and reinforcing the dispositions that comprise the natural virtues.¹⁷

Although we may have some instinctive tendencies to develop these dispositions and to act in these ways,...the precise way in which we approve of them (namely interpersonally and impartially) must, like the rules of justice, be understood as a system which flourishes because *as a system* it serves a social function, helping human beings who are made pretty competitive both by their genetic make-up and by their situation to live together fairly peacefully and with a certain amount of mutual aid and cooperation. Though the psychology of sympathy may play some part, the natural virtues themselves and the fully developed form of the recognition of them as virtues will owe a good deal to conventions and reciprocal pressures.¹⁸

Hence we see why Mackie thinks that the natural virtues are none other than "a further set of artificial virtues."¹⁹ The reason the natural virtues are artificial is that the adoption of the impartial perspective—which Hume invokes to remedy the problem of the variability of sympathy—serves a useful social function by utilizing conventions.²⁰

Having laid out Mackie's objection to Hume's distinction between the natural and artificial virtues, the question that seems to be before us is the following: does it make sense to maintain the distinction between the natural and artificial virtues given that there is a useful and conventional element to both? To be fair to Hume this is the question that Mackie must answer but does not. I agree with Mackie's analysis that there is indeed a conventional aspect to the natural virtues, but nevertheless I still think that there is a principled distinction between the two types of virtues. I shall now endeavor to show what this principled distinction is.

3. Two Interpretations of Hume's Natural/Artificial Distinction

Hume was not the first to make a distinction between two kinds of virtues. Hobbes, for instance, in Chapter VIII of *Leviathan* writes,

These *Vertues* are of two sorts; *Naturall*, and *Acquired*. By *Naturall*, I mean not, that which a man hath from his Birth: for that is nothing else but Sense; wherein men differ so little one from another, and from brute Beasts, as it is not to be reckoned amongst *Vertues*. But I mean, that *Wit*, which is gotten by Use onely, and Experience;

without Method, Culture, or Instruction....As for *acquired Wit*, (I mean acquired by method and instruction,) there is none but Reason; which is grounded on the right use of Speech; and produceth the Sciences.²¹

Now this may not be the same distinction as that invoked by Hume, but the debate among the moral sense theorists and the egoists raised the question as to whether virtue was natural, as the former maintained, or artificial/acquired/conventional/unnatural, as the latter maintained. Given the prominence of this question it remained for Hume to answer whether, on his view, morality has its source in nature or some other origin.

Since Hume has defined virtue as an agreeable sentiment and vice as a disagreeable sentiment, it would seem that whether Hume thinks virtue natural or artificial would depend upon how he thinks we come to have the agreeable and disagreeable sentiments that constitute virtue and vice. The first possibility that Hume considers and rejects is that these sentiments are the direct result of "an original quality and primary constitution" (T 473). To posit such a vast multiplicity of original instincts to account for each and every sentiment in diverse cases "is not conformable to the usual maxims, by which nature is conducted, where a few principles produce all that variety we observe in the universe, and every thing is carry'd on in the easiest and most simple manner" (T 473). This lays the groundwork for Hume's mechanism of sympathy, for "'tis necessary...[to] find some more general principles, upon which all our notions of morals are founded"²² (T 473). Now whether an account of virtue that appeals to sympathy is natural or artificial, Hume suggests, depends entirely upon how "natural" is to be understood. He distinguishes the following three possibilities: (1) nature as opposed to miracles, (2) nature as opposed to the rare and unusual, and (3) nature as opposed to artifice.²³ Hume is interested only in (3), since he claims both virtue and vice are clearly "natural" in each of the first two senses.

But in what does the distinction in (3) consist? Hume is initially quite vague, hinting only that "artifice" is what is "contrived" or "designed." However, in a few places he elaborates on this. He comes closest to offering what appears to be a definition of the two kinds of virtues when he writes,

- 1) The only difference betwixt the natural virtues and justice lies in this, that the good, which results from the former, arises after every single act, and is the object of some natural passion: Whereas a single act of justice, consider'd in itself, may often be contrary to the public good; and 'tis only the concurrence of mankind, in a general scheme or system of action, which is advantageous. (T 579)

However, this comment comes long after Hume has taken himself to have demonstrated the artificiality of justice, and in a number of other passages he seems to offer other definitions. For instance,

- 2) I have already hinted, that our sense of every kind of virtue is not natural; but that there are some virtues, that produce pleasure and approbation by means of an artifice or contrivance, which arises from the circumstances and necessities of mankind. (T 477)

Then, after discussing the motive for acting justly, Hume offers yet another understanding of the distinction:

- 3) From all this it follows, that we have naturally no real or universal motive for observing the laws of equity....Unless, therefore, we will allow, that nature has establish'd a sophistry, and render'd it necessary and unavoidable, we must allow, that the sense of justice and injustice is not deriv'd from nature, but arises artificially, tho' necessarily from education, and human conventions. (T 483)

Lastly, when discussing the sense in which even the artificial virtues are "natural," Hume writes,

- 4) Mankind is an inventive species; and where an invention is obvious and absolutely necessary, it may as properly be said to be natural as any that proceeds immediately from original principles, without the intervention of thought or reflexion. (T 484)

Each of these passages focuses on a different aspect in the attempt to distinguish the two kinds of virtues. According to passage (1), the distinction between natural and artificial virtues is captured by the distinction between the consequences of acts versus practices. The good that results from natural virtues occurs after every act. However, this is not so in the case of the artificial virtues, though good arises from the practice as a whole. Passage (2) maintains that the difference lies in the way we come to feel the pleasure or pain that is associated with virtue and vice. Natural virtues "naturally" give rise to pleasure, while artificial virtues only give rise to pleasure as the result of "artifice." However, this alone is clearly an empty distinction, since we cannot make out the distinction by simply appealing to the distinction itself. Passage (3) attempts to distinguish natural and artificial virtues according to whether nature has implanted in us motives that give rise to the actions that are denominated virtuous. Like passage (2), this passage is not self-sufficient since it also relies upon a natural/artificial distinction to make out that very distinction. Finally, passage (4) suggests that the natural/artificial distinction depends upon whether or not there is intervention by thought or reflection. Something is

artificial when there is the appropriate kind of intervention of thought or reflection. Neither passage (2) nor passage (3) can stand on their own. However, this is not to say that they are without interpretive force. Passage (2) points toward the distinction residing in sentiments (i.e., the evaluations themselves), while passage (3) points toward the distinction as partaking in the motives that are the objects of evaluation. Furthermore, I think we can pair passage (1) with passage (2), and passage (4) with (3). For if, as passage (2) specifies, the distinction is concerned with evaluations, then we can appeal to passage (1) as the source of the difference in the evaluations that distinguish the natural and artificial virtues. Since passage (1) specifies that natural virtues give rise to good in every single act, sympathy alone can directly account for the sentiment of virtue in the case of the natural virtues. However, since the artificial virtues do not similarly produce good in every single act, sympathy alone cannot give rise to the sentiment of virtue; hence some additional "artificial" mechanism is required to generate the necessary approbative sentiment. On the other hand, we can accept passage (3), that the distinction concerns motives, and take passage (4) as offering an account of the difference between a natural and an artificial motive. Natural motives do not involve the intervention of thought and reflection, artificial motives do.

The interpretation that arises out of the pairing of passages (1) and (2) I shall call the evaluative interpretation and that which arises from the pairing of passages (3) and (4) I shall call the motive interpretation. The evaluative interpretation holds that the difference between the natural and artificial virtues is that the sentiments that come to us via sympathy are not influenced or reformed by convention in the case of the natural virtues, but are influenced or reformed in the case of the artificial virtues. The motive interpretation suggests that the difference between the natural and artificial virtues lies in whether the motives we have for action are themselves the result of a convention. If the motives are not the result of a convention, the virtue is natural, while if the motives are the result of a convention the virtue is artificial.

4. A Defense of the Motive Interpretation

I shall now argue that the correct interpretation of Hume's distinction between the natural and artificial virtues is the motive interpretation: that the distinction consists in the motives to action and whether they are redirected by thought and reflection. In fact, it will turn out that the only way to give any sense to the evaluative interpretation is if the motive interpretation is true. I will proceed by examining Hume's account of justice and the sense in which it is an artificial virtue.

In taking up the question of whether justice is a natural or an artificial

virtue, Hume begins by noting that the proper objects of evaluation are motives and not actions—the actions being mere external signs of the motives. From this claim that actions are only derivatively virtuous it must be asked what could be the motive that renders acts of justice virtuous.²⁴ Hume considers and rejects, for various reasons, the following possible “natural” motives: (1) a regard for the virtue of the action itself, (2) self-love, (3) a regard for the public interest, and (4) private benevolence.

Having exhausted the plausible natural motives for acting justly Hume turns to a discussion of how the rules of justice might be artificially established and the reasons why we attach praise and blame to the observance and violation of these rules.²⁵ Society is on the one hand necessary given our human infirmity, but due to our limited generosity and the scarcity of goods there are obstacles to its formation. Hume says that there is no solution to this problem in “uncultivated nature,” (T 488) and that the remedy comes from “artifice; or more properly speaking, nature provides a remedy in the judgment and understanding, for what is irregular and incommodious in the affections” (T 489). In other words, our natural motive of avidity (i.e., the passion that seeks to appropriate objects) when allowed to operate unchecked would be disruptive of all efforts to establish society and overcome our infirmity. This natural motive must be restrained for its own sake. This, Hume suggests, is done by the understanding.²⁶

There is no passion, therefore, capable of controlling the interested affection, but the very affection itself, by an alteration of its direction. Now this alteration must necessarily take place upon the least *reflection*; since 'tis evident, that the passion is much *better* satisfy'd by its restraint, than by its liberty, and that by preserving society, we make much *greater* advances in acquiring possessions, than by running into the solitary and forlorn condition, which must follow upon violence and an universal license. (T 492, emphasis added)

We realize that our avidity is best served by its own restraint only after we have partaken of cooperation generated by the natural affections between the sexes. This recognition is subsequently strengthened by custom and habit and a cultivated affection for the pleasures of society. The restraint of avidity by the understanding makes possible conventions securing the stability of material goods. These conventions concerning the stability of material goods constitute the rules of justice. There is, therefore, no original and natural motive to justice since justice requires the restraint of our avidity; rather the motive for justice comes from our avidity itself coupled with a recognition that it is best served by a convention. Finally, Hume adds,

These rules, therefore, are artificial, and seek their end in an oblique

and indirect manner; nor is the interest, which gives rise to them, of a kind that cou'd be pursu'd by the natural and inartificial passions of men. (T 497)

The artificiality, then, on this view is based not on the mere fact of there being a convention or some form of artifice, but rather on the fact that the direct or natural pursuit of a passion does not lead to its satisfaction and that instead reason must apprehend an alternative way (i.e., a convention or artifice) that will allow the passion to be satisfied. In other words, the convention or artifice is one regarding motives for action. To say that the artificiality consists in reason or reflection altering a pre-existing passion/motive to create a new motive that wasn't there before or to redirect a motive is to support the motive interpretation. The conventional aspect must take place at the level of motives for action, and not merely on the level of judgments, for a virtue to be artificial. This two level interpretation, which distinguishes the level of motives from the level of judgments, is supported in the following passage:

'Tis the voluntary convention and artifice of men, which makes the first interest take place; and therefore those laws of justice are so far to be consider'd as *artificial*. After that interest is once establish'd and acknowledg'd, the sense of morality in the observance of these rules follows *naturally*, and of itself; tho' 'tis certain, that it is also augmented by a new *artifice*, and that the public instructions of politicians, and the private education of parents, contribute to the giving us a sense of honour and duty in the strict regulation of our actions with regard to the properties of others. (T 533–534, original emphasis)

Note that Hume refers to two kinds of artifice. The convention that operates on motives is primary, while the convention that operates on evaluations is secondary. So it is not the mere existence of a secondary convention on evaluations that renders a virtue artificial, but rather a primary convention that functions at the level of motives. Now justice may well have a secondary convention, but it should be noted that there could be no such secondary convention (in the case of justice) unless there were a primary convention establishing the rules of justice in the first place.²⁷ That is to say, approbative sentiments could not attach to the rules of justice unless there are indeed rules of justice, and for this to be the case there must be a primary convention. It is for this reason that no sense can be made of the evaluative interpretation without the motive interpretation. The motive interpretation is indeed the foundation of Hume's distinction. Thus we see that justice and the artificial virtues have a double conventional structure: they involve conventions at the primary level of motives *and* at the secondary level of evaluations.

5. The Traditional Problem Reconsidered

I now return to the traditional problem to see what implications the motive interpretation of Hume's distinction has for it. Recall that the traditional problem suggests that justice is at odds with Hume's sentimentalist account of virtue. There are cases in which in our moral practices we clearly denominate an action just even though there is no apparent reason why we ought to do so under Hume's account of how sympathy generates moral sentiment. What do the two interpretations of Hume's distinction imply about this problem?

If we accept the evaluative interpretation—natural virtues are those where the evaluative sentiments are uninfluenced by conventions and artificial virtues are those where evaluative sentiments are influenced by conventions—then there would seem to be no intelligible answer to the traditional problem. A mere convention at the level of evaluations cannot supply the missing sentiments or override the opposing sentiments that define the problematic cases. For instance, in the case of restoring a loan to a miser a convention concerning evaluations cannot provide me with an agreeable sentiment when sympathy provides me with a disagreeable sentiment. What would be the basis of such a convention? In other words, why would we adopt a convention to feel an agreeable sentiment in such cases and how could we even do so? The difficulty of this question points out the ad hoc character of the evaluative interpretation as a solution. Thus, if Hume seeks an answer to the traditional problem (as I think he did), then he must understand the distinction in some other way.

It seems that what is required is some way for sympathy to get beyond the particular case, otherwise the appropriate sentiment cannot be secured. The motive interpretation allows for just this. Recall that the motive interpretation suggests that artificial virtues are those where the motives to act are the result of conventions. So respecting certain rules regarding property is a virtue because doing so allows for the passion of avidity to be better satisfied. The totality of rules that allow for avidity to be better satisfied constitute the system of justice. Once this system or practice is in place it then becomes possible for sympathy to approve of the problematic cases. The reason for this is that one is not sympathizing with the results of the particular act (as in the case of the natural virtues), but with the results of the practice as a whole. This is to say, as Hume does say, that one sympathizes with the "public interest." Since one is sympathizing with the practice as a whole the virtue of the problematic cases, despite their unfortunate results, can be explained. It must be stressed that this kind of sympathy can only be accounted for if there is already a system of rules in place that, in some sense, defines the public interest, and for this the motive interpretation is required. On the evaluative interpretation there can be no sympathy with the public interest since there is as yet no practice which defines the public interest. Thus only the motive interpretation

of Hume's distinction allows for an intelligible answer to the traditional problem.

This is, I think, an outline of the answer that Hume was trying to give to the traditional problem. And though it is an intelligible answer to the problem, it does introduce some problems for Hume's particular theory. The primary problem concerns Hume's own understanding of sympathy. Sympathy, as we have seen, is understood to be a mechanism by which sentiments are transferred from one individual to another. We see the effects of a passion and form a lively idea that is converted into the passion itself. But if this is the way sympathy works there is a problem in understanding how we could conceivably sympathize with something as abstract as the public interest. The term "sympathy" seems here not to refer to a mechanism by which sentiments are transferred, but rather a cognitive apprehension of the value of a system of rules followed by a judgment of approval. An impartial perspective seems built into sympathy with the public interest, whereas in the case of the natural virtues the impartial perspective comes about only given the variability of sympathy. Thus, to effectively answer the traditional problem Hume must understand the distinction in the sense of the motive interpretation and he must broaden his understanding of sympathy in a way that may require some revision in his moral psychology.

6. Mackie's Problem Reconsidered

The motive interpretation of Hume's distinction allows an intelligible answer to the traditional problem. We must now examine what implications the motive interpretation has for Mackie's problem. First, we must see how Mackie understands Hume's distinction. Mackie writes,

The artifice consists in the cultivation of a sentiment in favour of every act that honesty requires, including those that are not beneficial to the agent or to the public or perhaps to anyone.²⁸

This statement appears to be an expression of the conjunction of passages (1 and (2), and so supports the view that Mackie accepts the evaluative interpretation. This explains why Mackie thinks that the natural virtues are not natural after all. For if an artificial virtue is simply one in which the evaluative sentiments are altered by a convention, then Mackie is surely right that the natural virtues are really artificial since the impartial perspective does indeed involve a convention to correct and render uniform our sentiments.

But what if we adopt the motive interpretation of Hume's distinction? Does Mackie's problem remain? Mackie's concern about the natural virtues is that Hume's invocation of an impartial perspective to capture the uniformity of moral judgment is a useful conventional system that serves a social function. Mackie claims that just as Hume's account of the artificial virtues is

sociological, so is his account of the natural virtues at least partly sociological.²⁹ But does a convention concerning the evaluations occasioned by sympathy render Hume's account of the natural virtues artificial? If the motive interpretation of the distinction is right, then it would seem that there is no good reason for thinking that the natural virtues are artificial. The convention in the case of the natural virtues concerns evaluations, it is a kind of secondary artifice. Now the artificial virtues do, as we have seen, partake of this secondary artifice—the judgments regarding justice are aided by a system—but the primary artifice is that which alters the structure of the motive to be just and thereby establishes a practice by which the public interest can be defined. It is this primary artifice that is essential to the artificial virtues, rendering the motive “oblique” and “indirect.” The convention that Mackie attributes to the natural virtues is of the secondary kind—it concerns the nature of the evaluations and does not infect the motives themselves. Thus, if the motive interpretation is correct, there seems to be no reasonable way to maintain that the natural virtues are artificial.

Mackie, it seems, has two possible replies. First, he could argue that even though the motives in the case of the natural virtues are not altered or rendered oblique and indirect, it is still the case that, “this uniform system of evaluation serves as a steady encouragement of the dispositions that count as natural virtues and as a steady discouragement of the contrary vices.”³⁰ In other words, the convention strengthens pre-existing motives insofar as a system of uniform evaluations helps to reinforce the dispositions that constitute the various natural virtues. But this response is not sufficient. Aside from the fact that this kind of alteration is neither oblique nor indirect, Hume seems willing to entertain the idea that the system of evaluation is largely independent of motives for action—contrary to this reply.³¹ For instance, when discussing the seeming conflict between extensive sympathy and limited generosity, Hume writes, “Sentiments must touch the heart, to make them controul our passions: But they need not extend beyond the imagination, to make them influence our taste” (T 586). This division between evaluations and motives is further supported when Hume allows for the correction of our language (i.e., evaluations) without the correction of our sentiments (T 582). The division between moral judgments and motives for action is even maintained in the case of the artificial virtues. For instance, in an amendment to the *Treatise* Hume writes, “This latter Principle of Sympathy is too weak to controul our Passions; but has sufficient Force to influence our Taste, and give us the Sentiments of Approbation or Blame” (T 670).

Second, Mackie may want to suggest that the natural virtues are a species of the artificial virtues. This is a way of acknowledging the differences, but attempting to maintain the ultimate similarity. That similarity consists in the fact that both are useful systems that are established for mutual advantage.³² Now the artificial virtues are indeed useful—they make society possible and so

allow us to remedy our natural infirmity by enabling us to acquire as many things as possible to satisfy our avidity. And Hume does something like admit that the natural virtues are "useful": "That many of the natural virtues have this tendency to the good of society, no one can doubt of" (T 578). However, to make this rebuttal even plausible it is necessary to say why the mere fact that both kinds of virtues tend toward the good of society should override or negate the fact that there is a principled distinction between them concerning the motives for acting in accord with them. Unfortunately, Mackie does not do this nor is it clear how it could be done.

The principled distinction between the natural and artificial virtues provided by the motive interpretation is alone sufficient to forestall the upshot of Mackie's argument that Hume is a Hobbesian and does not have a distinct view. But to provide some further assurance that Hume is not a Hobbesian I think it would be helpful to briefly point out two important differences between Hume's account of the artificial virtues and Hobbes's account. A careful comparison shows that Hume's account of the artificial virtues, though most certainly influenced by Hobbes, is notably more limited in scope. The difference in scope concerns the breadth of the ends which an "artificial" system of rules is said to serve. Hobbes starts from the fundamental all-encompassing end of self-preservation—where self-preservation is understood to subsume all other ends—to generate a complete array of rules. The artifice on Hobbes's account is therefore complete. Hume, on the other hand, in the case of justice, starts from the specific end of avidity (i.e., the possessive passion that seeks to acquire objects) to generate rules concerning property. For Hume to legitimately be considered a Hobbesian he would have to aim to account for the whole of virtue in the way that he accounts for justice. But he does not do this. Nowhere in Hume's discussion of the natural virtues do we find him utilizing theoretical conceptions (e.g., game theory) that are anything like the Hobbesian theoretical conceptions he relies upon in the case of the artificial virtues. This is not to say that one cannot attempt to do so (as Mackie seemingly wants to do). Hume's rather limited reliance upon the Hobbesian conception of morality to explain justice and the rules concerning property only serves to show that he apparently thinks that a similar account could not work for those virtues he calls "natural" and so supports the view that he conceives of the natural virtues as importantly different. Second, not only are Hume's artificial virtues narrower in scope than Hobbesian morality, it is also the case that what makes something a virtue for Hume is importantly different than what makes something a virtue for Hobbes. Virtues for Hobbes are rules that provide for mutual advantage regardless of what sentiments we have toward them, but for Hume virtues are those character traits or motives that produce in an observer an agreeable feeling. It just so happens that on Hume's view the observance of the rules of justice (which in a sense are rules of mutual advantage) produces an agreeable feeling in an observer. Mackie's

claim was that Hume's natural virtues are artificial, with the implication that they fit into the Hobbesian mold. However, a careful examination of Hume's theory has shown that not only is there a principled distinction between the two kinds of virtues, but that Hume's limited aim with the artificial virtues provides further support that the natural virtues are indeed different.

To summarize, both the traditional problem and Mackie's problem suggest that Hume's distinction between the natural and artificial virtues is inherently unstable. The former suggests that Hume's general account of virtue cannot sustain the virtue of justice, while the latter suggests that a conventional aspect of the natural virtues renders them artificial. Each of these problems was shown to rest upon a mistaken conception of Hume's distinction. According to the evaluative interpretation, the sentiments that give rise to the natural virtues have not been influenced by conventions, while those that give rise to the artificial virtues have been subject to the influence of conventions. If this interpretation is correct, then Hume's distinction is indeed in trouble. However, a careful examination of the *Treatise* reveals that this is not the interpretation that Hume held. Instead we find that Hume held the motive interpretation. According to the motive interpretation, the difference between the natural and artificial virtues is to be found in that the motives to the latter, but not the former, have been redirected by a convention. This interpretation both allows Hume a way to account for justice being a virtue and clearly distinguishes his theory from that of Hobbes. Hence, the Humean attempt to divide the moral landscape seems to be a legitimate one that is not in danger of collapsing as both the traditional problem and Mackie's problem suggest; and though Hume's distinction is not without its own problems, it may provide the contemporary moral theorist with the beginnings of a fertile way to distinguish justice from other virtues.

in this particular, are as wide of nature as any accounts of monsters, which we meet with in fables and romances. So far from thinking, that men have no affection for any thing beyond themselves, I am of opinion, that tho' it be rare to meet with one, who loves any single person better than himself; yet 'tis as rare to meet with one, in whom all the kind affections, taken together, do not over-balance all the selfish. (T 486–487)

And,

Some philosophers have represented all moral distinctions as the effect of artifice and education, when skilful politicians endeavour'd to restrain the turbulent passions of men, and make them operate to the public good, by the notions of honour and shame. This system, however, is not consistent with experience. (T 578)

Hume's disavowals of self-love are even more forceful in the *Enquiry*.

8 Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 123.

9 See Mackie, *Ethics*, especially Chapters 5 and 8. Notwithstanding Mackie's view, those who think an artificial morality fails to account for important features of our moral practices (and give those moral practices sufficient weight) will find this charge, if correct, to be devastating. There may even be a sense in which Mackie thinks that an artificial morality fails to account for our moral practices insofar as our moral practices presuppose that morality is "objective," but this is hardly devastating for Mackie since he thinks that this presupposition is just plain false. Hence Mackie does not give our moral practices much weight. What is needed, he claims, is some kind of "error theory." Seen in this way, Mackie is more revisionary than Hume.

10 I believe this interpretation is supported by what Mackie writes:

Protagoras, Hobbes, Hume, and Warnock are all at least broadly in agreement about the problem that morality is needed to solve: limited resources and limited sympathies together generate both competition leading to conflict and an absence of what would be mutually beneficial cooperation. (*Ethics*, 111)

Though he does admit that "there are some differences in their sketches of the solution."

11 Concerning virtue and vice, Hume writes,

An action, or sentiment, or character is virtuous or vicious; why? because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind. In giving a reason, therefore, for the pleasure or uneasiness, we sufficiently explain the vice or virtue. To have the 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. We go no farther; nor do we enquire into the cause of the satisfaction. We do not infer a

character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. (T 471)

This view, that the sense of virtue is a mere feeling, is not entirely consistent with Hume's remarks about the operation of sympathy in his account of the virtues. See note 13.

12 Though it is not entirely clear why it should not be a problem with the artificial virtues as well. That it indeed poses a problem for the artificial virtues though Hume does not discuss it there is simply due to the fact that he postpones a complete discussion of moral obligations until he takes up the natural virtues (see T 498).

13 One serious problem with Hume's impartial perspective is that this answer to the problem engendered by sympathy seems to conflict with his earlier claims concerning the nature of virtue and vice. Before Hume claimed that virtue "is more properly felt than judg'd of" (T 470), while he now seems to be admitting that virtue involves "abstract notions" (T 585)—i.e., judgments. Various attempts have been made to come to grips with this problem. Both Barry Stroud and Mackie suggest a "projectionist" account of Hume's notion of virtue. On such an account it is said that from the fact that an object gives rise to a certain sentiment in us we project onto the object a moral quality. The basis of moral distinctions remains sentiment, but they take on a judgmental quality. See Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 71–75, and Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 185–186.

14 Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 122.

15 However, just as the impartial perspective must be motivated by more than effective communication, it must also involve more than the merely useful as Mackie maintains. For part of the answer as to why we make corrections in such cases surely concerns the fact of fairness to those we judge given the contingencies of time, distance, and circumstance. That it does not merely involve effective communication is evident given that we could very well communicate despite the variability of sympathy due to differences in time and space and whether virtue achieves its end so long as we index our judgments. For instance, I could very well say "From far away I judge her act worthy of little esteem" or "Though she would rescue someone in need; she never had the opportunity so I do not judge her virtuous." The fact that our moral practice is not like this is indicative, I believe, of there being deeper principles of fairness operative in our judgments. It would be morally problematic, though not necessarily problematic for communication, to make our *judgments* in this manner. If this is right, then Hume's theory illegitimately takes on the objective and impartial perspective that is characteristic of rationalist theories due to his misleading invocation of the need for effective communication.

16 The concern with communication and contradiction both seem to indicate that morality involves judgments and not feelings prior to the assumption of the impartial perspective, but it is hard to see how this is possible on Hume's view since it is seemingly the impartial perspective itself that renders moral *judgment* a possibility. Contradiction could become a

concern once such a framework is in place, but it cannot be the motivation for such a framework since feelings cannot be understood to contradict one another.

17 Mackie cites this as something that Hume contributes to Hobbes's theory, and says that with these "secondary instincts" that Hobbes's theory "becomes less like a house of cards" (*Ethics*, 113). However, on Hume's view it is unclear how much influence evaluations have on motives. Hume seems to vacillate between the view that evaluations do not influence motives and that they do.

18 Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 123.

19 Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 123. Nonetheless, Mackie is willing to maintain that there are some differences between the natural and the artificial virtues. He does not deny that sympathy is a natural mechanism and that it has a seemingly larger role to play in the natural virtues than in the artificial virtues. He writes,

We need not deny that sympathy plays some part here; but I have argued that it cannot, by itself, provide a sufficient explanation either of our taking this common point of view or of the practical force of the moral system that we then adopt. (Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 125)

20 Unfortunately, Mackie is not quite as clear as he could be about the way in which the conventions that constitute the impartial perspective are useful. Conventions in the case of justice and property are "useful" in the sense that they allow us to better satisfy our passion of avidity. Presumably Mackie must think that in the case of the natural virtues there is some passion that is better satisfied by the adoption of the impartial perspective, but it is unclear what such a passion could be (is my motive to do benevolent acts better satisfied by there being a uniform system of evaluation?). Hume has no all-encompassing conception of self-interest, though I suppose that this might be what Mackie is guilty of reading back into Hume.

21 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Richard Tuck (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 32–35, original pagination.

22 However, Hume does not seem at this point to realize that the general mechanism of sympathy and a multiplicity of instincts are not the only possibilities. One could posit a basic instinct of benevolence to account for at least a certain class of virtues, as Mackie notes that Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume, later on in his *Enquiry*, all do.

23 Distinction (1) was invoked by the religious and distinction (2) by Shaftesbury.

24 This may raise interesting questions of how acts of justice can be "moral" at all if the motive for acting justly is, as Hume suggests, self-interested. This problem seems to be generated by the more fundamental problem concerning the tension in Hume's theory between motives and judgments or evaluation.

25 That Hume, when explicating the artificiality of justice, discusses in much greater detail the motives for acting justly as compared to how sentiments

attach to those acts seems, by itself, to lend credence to the motive interpretation.

26 This reliance upon reason poses a problem when juxtaposed with Hume's anti-rationalism. Note that this is not the only such passage. Hume also writes,

Nor is such a restraint contrary to these passions [i.e., avidity]; for if so, it cou'd never be enter'd into, nor maintain'd; but it is only contrary to their *heedless and impetuous movement*. (T 489, emphasis added)

And,

Human nature being compos'd of two principal parts, which are requisite in all its actions, the affections and understanding; 'tis certain, that the *blind* motions of the former, without the direction of the latter, incapacitate men for society. (T 493, emphasis added)

What all of these passages reveal is that reason far from being the slave of the passions is on the contrary, according to Hume himself, the liberator of the passions.

27 Hume himself appears to acknowledge as much himself when he writes.

Any artifice of politicians may assist nature in the producing of those sentiments, which she suggests to us, and may even on some occasions, produce alone an approbation or esteem for any particular action; but 'tis impossible it should be the sole cause of the distinction we make betwixt vice and virtue. For if *nature* did not rid us in this particular, 'twou'd be in vain for politicians to talk of *honorable or dishonorable, praiseworthy or blameable*. (T 500)

28 Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 81. Mackie also goes on to quote passage (1).

29 That Mackie refrains from saying that the natural virtues are wholly sociological ought to be a clue that there may indeed be a principled difference between the two kinds of virtues.

30 Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 122–123.

31 As I noted earlier there is a fundamental ambiguity and problem in Hume's theory regarding motives and judgments. See notes 17 and 24.

32 To the extent that this is possible. For some difficulties, see note 20 and the following discussion distinguishing Hume and Hobbes.

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