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SYMPOSIUM

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Response to My Critics

ANNETTE C. BAIER

I thank my critics for their generous compliments on what they find good about my book, and thank them even more for their criticisms. Both my critics query the role given to reason, in my version of Hume's version of our nature. If David Owen is right, I downplay Hume's scepticism, in *Treatise* Book I, about what we can expect of what he there calls our reason, and, if Rachel Cohon is right, I downplay Hume's scepticism in Books II and III about the role of reason in our passionate and active lives. Cohon even charges that my Hume is barely distinguishable from Samuel Clarke. Grave charges!

In response, I want first to concede that in *A Progress of Sentiments* I should have given more space to the section "Of scepticism with regard to reason" than I did, and that, even though I did not purport to more than touch on Hume's attitude to other philosophers, I should have more explicitly acknowledged the background role of Clarke as Hume's target, throughout the *Treatise*, and given more emphasis to Hume's anti-religious aims, which I mention from time to time, but do not dwell on. I could also have given more prominence to Hume's treatment of liberty and necessity, and have said a bit more about Hume's section, "Morality not based on reason." As Rachel Cohon says, I dismiss what, for some, is the distinctively Humean claim that morals excite passions and produce or prevent actions as largely an *ad hominem* move against rationalists who expect their pronouncements about eternal fitnesses, or divine commands, to produce or prevent actions, possibly by exciting fear of divine punishment. The Humean moral sentiment, I claimed, is not an

especially motivating passion, although it does normally produce good will towards those whose character traits it approves, and some dislike of those whose character traits are disapproved. So it may excite some self-dislike, when it is our own character that we find distasteful, or produce some pride, if we pass muster. Hume writes: "There may perhaps, be some, who being accusom'd to the style of the schools and pulpit, and having never consider'd human nature in any other light than that in which they place it, may here be surpriz'd to hear me talk of virtue as exciting pride, which they look on as a vice ..." (T 297). So Humean morals does often excite passions. But pride and humility, Hume claims, are "compleat in themselves," not "attended with any desire" (T 367), so are not directly motivating passions. And even the love and hatred that are felt towards fellow persons for their virtues and vices may, as motivating influences on the will, have to compete with other loves, such as esteem for the rich and powerful. Hume is a realistic and often rather cynical moralist, and has no easy story about how the moral sentiment can produce the virtues of which it approves.

Still, there is some active power in the moral sentiment. It is an impression, namely a sentiment or "peculiar pleasure," not an idea, and so not a belief. In my book I first contrasted Humean sentiments with beliefs in Chapter 1, discussing the conclusion of Book I, and then continued to discuss passions in Chapter 2, on association. There it is said plainly enough that, for Hume, it is pleasure and pain on which most of our passions are founded. (He exempts some instinctive desires.) His own decision to continue with his philosophical journey, after the near shipwreck of Part 4 of Book I, is based, he claims, on the fact that he would be the loser in point of pleasure if he inhibited his philosophical impulses. But it seems that, just as many readers of Hume's ethics do not want to return to Book I to see what Hume said there about passions in relation to beliefs, so some readers of my explication of Hume's ethics and moral psychology prefer to look primarily to the later chapters of my book, and I suppose that I should be flattered at the parallel treatment. I do not take Hume's ethics to be concerned more with "the direction of our conduct" than with "the wheel of our passions." I had discussed the relation of belief to passion long before Chapter 7, on "the direction of our conduct," and even that chapter is prefaced with Hume's claim about the will as an "effect of pleasure and pain." I do not think that I downplayed the role of pleasure and pain for Hume (indeed, in Chapter 9, "A Catalogue of Virtues," I may have over-emphasized the anti-puritan hedonism of Hume's list of virtues). My answer to Rachel about how Hume differs from Clarke is basically very simple: Hume has a different conception of reason from Clarke's theology-based version, he sees reason or "the understanding" as something we share with the higher animals. For Hume our reason is just the language-influenced and more disciplined workings of "the imagination," so it is "the influence of the imagination on the passions" that he dwells on at length

in Part 3 of Book II. And since he does “found” our passions on pleasure and pain, he, not Clarke, could inspire Bentham.

I do not retract anything of what I wrote about the dependency of specific Humean passions on the sort of ideas that provide what Hume calls their “causes.” (By his rules for determining causes in Book I, ideas are strictly part-causes, working with a standing welcome for pleasure or “good.”) When first addressing the question of what exactly Hume takes passions to be, I said: “Hume treats passions, or impressions of reflection, as pleasurable or painful feelings that are introduced by some idea or sense impression” (pp. 43-44). They would not be passions at all without their hedonic core, nor would they be passions, rather than just pleasures and pains, without their idea “causes” or “objects.” Like Davidson’s example of snowblindness, Humean “passions” require a certain sort of cause or causes. As Hume wrote very early in Book I impressions of reflection, such as desire, “arise mostly from ideas,” (T 8) in particular from memories of past pleasures and pains, and of the circumstances in which they were experienced. The “reflexion” that he builds into all the passions is a “return upon the soul” of old pleasures and pains, of pleasure and pain “diversified” and “varied” by the complicated range of their known or believed causes and objects.

Still, Rachel is probably right that that one famous little paragraph is not so silly if taken as a claim about the hedonic core of Humean passions. However, that conceded, I must say that I fail to find it to exhibit “cleverness” or “great logical subtlety.” At best it is harmless, at worst misleading. And although Hume did repeat it in Book III, he did not in the *Dissertation on the Passions*, where it is significantly absent in Section V, nor in the second *Enquiry*. He apparently did not find it of very lasting value. And where exactly is its cleverness supposed to lie? Rachel’s version of “the Standard View” says that it accuses rationalists such as Clarke of a “category mistake,” but the categories were at the time very recent ones, introduced by Hume himself, namely the categories of “impression” and “idea” (Hume’s terminological innovation over Locke and Berkeley). I think Hume’s many critics are in the right in saying that he begs the question in this supposedly subtle argument. If we accept his sharp, at least fairly sharp, distinction between inert impressions and inert ideas, then the argument follows. But in Book I Hume blunted the sharpness of the distinction, in for example his treatment of memory, which sometimes is said to give us “ideas,” sometimes “impressions.” At one point (in her sketch of the Standard View), Rachel has “The Standard View” characterize the difference, for Hume, between ideas and impressions thus: “They have no cognitive content; they are in a way, blind.” Think how odd that construal of impressions sounds if read back into Book I, say into Part 3 where we have that crucial “inference from the impression to the idea,” or into the section “Of scepticism with regard to the senses.” Seeings yield impressions.

so they have to be construed as "blind," without cognitive content. On this view, only idea-copies of impressions have any epistemological role, since only they have a representational role. This really makes nonsense of the role of sense impressions in Book I. Sense impressions, for Hume, have the very same cognitive content as their idea copies. "All the perceptions of the mind are double, and appear both as impressions and as ideas" (T 3). Causal inference, that vital cognitive operation, has to involve an "inference from the impression to the idea," and Hume is even willing to promote certain ideas, convictions that we did once have a particular now not-too-well-remembered impression into impressions, to get the right sort of inference to yield a new belief (T 106). Sense impressions must be able to play the role of starting points for inferences, and in Book II (at T 290), Hume explicitly likens transitions between passions to causal inference. I think that the "Standard View" of Hume which Rachel outlines must at best be standard only in histories of ethics. It could not be standard in histories of epistemology in which Hume figures. (And, indeed, it is not the view of Hume's moral psychology and moral judgment which MacIntyre, her "standard historian" of ethics, himself takes in *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?*, for example, at p. 303.)

Of course it is fairly easy for me, in my self-appointed role of reader of all of Hume's book, to play off the readers of Books II and III who neglect Book I against those who read mainly Book I, and vice versa. My book's main claim to originality of aim (not really at all original, since Kemp Smith's had the same aim) lay in its attempt to give a reading that did justice to the whole book. I have tried to dislodge Rachel's defense of the allegedly "standard view" that anti-cognitivism is the most important aspect of Hume's ethics, in part by appeal to the cognitive role of impressions in Book I, but I am of course not denying the vital role of our capacity and welcome for pleasure as a standing partial cause of almost all Humean passions. No belief could cause any passion except in a pleasure-bent and pain-averse animal with desires, and memories of what satisfies them, and none could cause the moral sentiment except in someone capable of turning passions on themselves, and of sympathy, and of its reasonable correction. (See T 350 for Hume using "reasonable" in this sense. It is, by the way, that "original existence," anger, at those who punish us which is there said to vary, depending on how "reasonable" we are.) "Reason alone" could excite no passions, nor motivate any actions. But then nor would pleasure and pain alone be enough to count as a passion, or a sentiment. To get the "compleat cause" (T 175) of a Humean passion, both ideas and impressions are needed.

So what can "reason alone" do? I now come to David Owen's challenge, that I have over-estimated its powers, on Hume's account, even within Book I, which deals, it seems, with reason's province, the understanding. Can I cite some passage that typically only the moral philosophers read, to knock David's case for Hume as a sceptic about the scope and role of reason as he by

the end of Book I takes reason to be? Well, in my book I cited not just the rules for finding out what really causes what, but some bits from late in the *Treatise*, such as Hume's admittedly odd claim that he had attempted to base his own account of morality on pure reason (T 546), and his emphasis on the importance of intellectual abilities ("all the advantages of art are owing to human reason," T 610). I now, in my equally self-appointed role of reader of all Hume's books, especially of *The History of England*, cite some passages from Hume's post-*Treatise* writings, which I take to confirm my claim that Hume's campaign against the rationalists who exaggerated the scope of the powers of what they called "reason" seems to have achieved a self-declared victory within the *Treatise*, and not to have been continued in the *Essays*, *Enquiries*, or *Histories*. More than that, Hume later engages in the typical behavior of a victor in a campaign: he appropriates the vanquished's goods. In particular he appropriates the word 'reason', with its undeniable rhetorical power, to name the mix of human faculties that he values most highly. So, in the second *Enquiry*, he can say that, in social animals, "instinct supplies the place of reason" (EPM 308, note). "Reason and forethought" are there credited with the invention of the social artifice of property. (In the *Treatise*, actually, a very similar claim is made at T 493 for the "understanding.") In the *Enquiry* it is as if "reason" absorbs the calm passions that "reason" in a narrower sense should be serving. The *Essays* are devoid of any antirationalist arguments or sentiments, unless it counts as anti-rationalist to emphasize the role of taste. It surely can count as critical rationalism, not anti-rationalism. But of course it could equally well be called critical empiricism.) In *The History of England* "reason" becomes virtually synonymous with "civilisation," the force that distinguishes the less from the more barbarous exemplars of human nature and human society. So Hume can, in Appendix One, write of "virtue, which is nothing but a more enlarged and cultivated reason," and, in discussing the reign of King Alfred, write "as good morals and knowledge are almost inseparable in every age, though not in every individual, the care of Alfred for the encouragement of learning among his subjects was another useful branch of his legislation and tended to reclaim the English from their former dissolute and barbarous manners." (Once we get an E-text for all Hume's works, these rash textual claims of mine about the *History* could be easily checked.)

In my book I said that this relaxed use of "reason" that Hume eventually allows himself could be seen as Ciceronian. It is in fact closer to Shaftesbury's use. In the first part of *Characteristicks*, "Sensus Communis, An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour," Shaftesbury takes civilized conversation, in particular wit, even ridicule and raillery, to be the best practice in the exercise of reason, "according to the notion I have of Reason" (Part I, Section IV). Condemning the "ridiculous solemnity and sour Humour of our Pedagogues," Shaftesbury gives an eloquent defence of freedom of thought and speech, in particular of irreverent and witty speech, the best sort, he believes, to employ

against solemn bigots and false pretenders to wisdom. Hume was perfectly familiar with uses of the word "reason" which did not restrict it to "demonstration" nor to any purely intellectual operation, but let it stand for whatever combination of factors it takes to make us more reasonable in our sentiments, even when that includes the cultivated sense of humour that Shaftesbury is defending. Still, as Hume would remark, and as David agrees, these disputes are merely verbal.

What is not so trivial is the issue of whether Hume's own sort of causal reasoning is, in *Treatise* Book I, implicated in the self-destruction of "reason" which is enacted in the section "Of scepticism with regard to reason," and at the most despairing point of the conclusion of Book I. David makes a plausible case for an affirmative answer, and I suppose that the title given to Section IV of the first *Enquiry*, which deals with causal inference, namely "Sceptical doubts concerning the operations of the understanding," might seem to add confirmation to that reading, at least until we read on to the solution to those doubts. I construed the scope of Hume's despairing scepticism about reason, in *Treatise* Book I, Part 4, as scepticism about the scope of what I termed "intellectualist" reason, namely Hume's "demonstration" supplemented by an oddly a prioristic version of probability-estimation, all framed by the causal claim that reason should be construed as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect. But when the reason in question is demonstrative, and granted to be fallible, and when the chances of error are calculated and recalculated after iteration, the "truth" to be expected as the effect of this "reason" suffers "a continual diminution." David thinks that it is the reason analyzed and used in Part Three, that is to say, Hume's own version of "the reason of animals" at its human best, that "disintegrates under its own gaze" in Part 4, and cites passages that do indeed support that view. Yet the kind of probability-estimation whose iteration supposedly leads to the fatal result is not that empirically checked and corrected sort which Hume had described in Part 3. Had he been using his own version of "philosophical probability," he would have needed empirical evidence on the frequency of errors in higher-level probability calculation, as compared with lower level, and on whether we typically err by under- rather than over-estimating the probability of our own errors. But no such empirical data are used in the odd reasoning outlined in T I 4 i. Maybe Sextus or some other ancient sceptic reasoned that way, but a good Humean empiricist certainly shouldn't. And if Hume himself were to reason that way about his own reasoning in the *Treatise*, could he have even finished Book I, let alone gone on to try to establish his version of morality on "solid argument" and "pure reason"? Or are we to construe all this as what Shaftesbury could call critical "reasoning," namely turning the laugh on oneself? Hume is willing at times to do just this, but I do not think he mocks experience-corrected causal reasoning. He does briefly smile at his attempt to improve it by his rules (at T 150), but he ends the same section celebrating the

"authority" of his own account (or "system") of our beliefs and the inferences by which they are formed. I think we make nonsense of the larger Humean project, which is a causal project, unless we see the main target of attack in Book I, Part 4's examination of "Sceptical and other systems of philosophy" as the method of "systems" other than his own.

David points out, quite correctly, that Hume's version of "demonstration," like Descartes' and Locke's, is not syllogistic. He takes that to mean that it does not aim at "formal" validity, since the only version of formal logic at their disposal was that given in medieval developments of Aristotle's syllogistic. This seems to me astonishingly unappreciative of the formal achievements of Descartes (in the *Rules* and the *Geometry*) and of Leibniz. None of the three great so-called rationalists had much time for the syllogism, but they did claim formal validity for their "demonstrations," that is they claimed that formal contradiction would result from acceptance of their premisses along with denial of their conclusions. I took Hume's "demonstration" (which at times I loosely, and with admitted anachronism, termed "deduction"), to be just what Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz took it to be. That is, I took it not to be limited to mathematical reasoning, although Hume seems to believe that it is used to best purpose there. But he does examine other attempted "demonstrations," for example in the section "Why a cause is always necessary." These particular arguments all are seen to fail, but not because they do not concern quantity or number. The case of Locke is a little more complicated. It was partly because I think Locke is often Hume's target in his early *Treatise* delimiting of the scope of "reason" (and is maybe even included in the targets of the Book III section, "Moral distinctions not deriv'd from reason") that I expanded Hume's target in Book I from reason as "demonstration" to reason as "intellectualist."

It is indeed a tricky matter to chart the shifting senses of "reason" within the *Treatise*, let alone in the writers Hume read. But it may be easier to locate the targets of Hume's attacks on the false pretensions of some philosophers' versions of reason. I take it that, after the youthful campaigns against targets such as Samuel Clarke were out of his system, Hume settled into a more peaceable frame of philosophical mind, realizing that more might be lost than gained by continuing to carry on about the limits of reason. (He did not, after all, want to ally himself with the "Wee Frees," the Methodists or other religious enthusiasts, who elevated faith and fear of God about mere human reason.) He contented himself with siding with Shaftesbury, and taking reason to be that mix of capacities which gives us critical and self-critical ability, that which makes us reasonable. Then he could and did grant that version of reason the highest moral and cultural value. But we philosophers who have not gone on to become historians of and commentators on culture enjoy our little intra-philosophical infighting, so it is understandable that many readers of the *Treatise* want Hume to have some clear set of enemies. Many of his admirers

love him precisely for his adolescent call to anti-religious and anti-puritan rebellion: "Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions!" Hume, unlike many of us, had to grow up, and consider issues more culturally vital than cognitivism versus noncognitivism, rationalism versus antirationalism. He became, like Shaftesbury before him, most concerned with tolerance versus bigotry, civilization versus barbarism, and, in that cause, reason, whatever guise it came in, was far from being the worst enemy.

Again, I thank my critics, whose judgment is, I hope and trust, "my best instruction."