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Susan M. Purviance

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The Moral Self and the Indirect Passions

SUSAN M. PURVIANCE

David Hume¹ and Immanuel Kant are celebrated for their clear-headed rejection of dogmatic metaphysics, Hume for rejecting traditional metaphysical positions on cause and effect, substance, and personal identity, Kant for rejecting all judgments of experience regarding the ultimate ground of objects and their relations, not just judgments of cause and substantiality. Nevertheless, each argues that practical activity is not compromised by the rejection of metaphysical claims that others had taken to be crucial. Kant and Hume thought that political and moral life did not depend upon theoretical knowledge of the nature of the self, free will, or knowledge of the true motives of actions or the character of the agent. Because the grounds of morality and politics were too important to leave to the mercies of speculative metaphysics, each moved their foundations to higher ground, insulating the grounds of practical activity from the threat of metaphysical turmoil and skepticism.

Contemporary philosophers have generally followed Hume and Kant in this regard, but often select very different strategies. Some think that the best way to avoid the problems associated with contemporary scientific ontologies is to separate ethics from the factual domain entirely. Some give moral and political language a noncognitivist interpretation, and others have interpreted values as a projection of the passions and affections of the subject or as the constructions of suitably situated practical reasoners.²

At the same time there has been a resurgence of interest in moral realism. Moral realists think that the objectivity of moral discourse, and hence the

possibility of moral truth, depend upon the existence of moral facts.³ Moral realists have tended to concentrate on the role of facts in establishing the truth of general moral principles, or the rightness or moral value of particular individual actions. For moral realists, moral facts are the states of affairs that make general moral principles or particular moral judgments true. Whether these facts are of a naturalistic sort or not, whether they are literally on a par with natural facts, or whether they simply play the same role in practical knowledge that natural facts play in theoretical knowledge, is an open question. Moral realists often are naturalists, like David O. Brink and Jonathan Dancy, but they may be nonnaturalists, like G. E. Moore.⁴ Ethical naturalism accounts for moral motivation and the cultivation of good character in terms of moral qualities, and many hope to ground it in (or at least show that it is compatible with) the scientific understanding of objects and their relations and qualities. Naturalism is only one option, but realism has received support because it is not clear that antirealists have developed a convincing alternative to the grounding of concepts of moral agency and moral judgment in some sort of moral facts.

Questions about what it means to ascribe responsibility to a moral self and how we can defend a notion of enduring character. Although moral realists have paid less attention to the ontological status of virtues and character traits than to moral principles, their status is equally important. Here the concern is with the sort of metaphysics of the self thought to be necessary to account for moral agency, responsibility, praise, and blame. I shall argue that there is a class of moral facts that justify or perhaps merely vindicate the ascription of *moral powers* to agents, and that these are the sorts of facts another sort of theorist is interested in, whereas the states of affairs that make moral judgments true are the sorts of facts that moral realists have been interested in. In order to distinguish this use of moral facts I shall call this sort of theory a Fact of Agency Theory, and it is a version of this theory that can be found in Hume's discussion of the problem of the self and the indirect passions. A realist metaphysics of morals needs to address two questions, the question of the reality of the qualities which provide the grounds of obligation, and the question of the reality of the moral capacities of agents. Unfortunately contemporary realists have directed their attention almost exclusively to principles that provide the grounds of obligation, focusing on moral principles and moral values as they figure into principles of action. Philosophers need to become more sensitive to the question of whether moral powers themselves need a grounding in moral realism. Ethical skepticism about the validity of moral judgments cuts across the distinction between the moral properties of states of affairs and the moral powers of persons, because an important class of moral judgments does not concern actions directly but traits of character, and because moral praise and blame depend upon both the right- or wrong-making features of actions and the moral capacity of agents.

In the Early Modern period prior to Hume a metaphysical realism of persons, character, and freedom of the will prevailed; the question of the grounds of obligation was derivative. I offer only one example, since realism predicated on the resolution of the free will question is not the sort of realism that Hume principally addresses. Voluntaristic natural law theories, such as those of Thomas Hobbes, Samuel Pufendorf, and George Berkeley, argued that obligation had to be grounded in the knowledge of the existence of the sort of entity with a free will capable of enjoining duties on humankind. For Hobbes, this is the earthly sovereign; for the others, this is God.⁵

Less concerned with the intentions of the Author of Nature, present-day moral realists have different ways of establishing the reality of moral principles. But Hume and Kant's use of moral facts is no less intriguing. While they seek to avoid the metaphysical problems associated with scientific realism, they share the worry about skepticism concerning moral judgments, and argue that morality is, or can be made, objective and impartial, and that morality is best grounded in some notion of moral facts. I believe that these concerns are also ones which are most strongly supported by our prephilosophical thinking about morality. My larger project is to clarify the ways in which we might understand a moral fact; it involves examining Kant's as well as Hume's philosophical motives and strategies. I believe they share a common goal, which is to validate certain kinds of moral facts for practical consciousness and agency which are not available as factual support for theoretical knowledge claims.

In this paper, I sketch the contribution of Hume's *Treatise* to the general philosophical position that results from this common goal of the Fact of Agency theorists. The Fact of Agency Theory is just the theory that there are facts that support our belief that we are deliberating and choosing agents responsible for our actions, but that these facts cannot be used to answer theoretical questions about the unity and simplicity of the self. While Hume's contribution to our understanding of moral objectivity has been extensively studied, much less attention has been given to portions of his work that assert the fact of moral experience. Here Book Two of *A Treatise of Human Nature* is crucial, because it identifies the way in which the passions naturally take the self as their object and thus make the self a fact of moral experience.⁶ Hume's treatment of the concept of self and personal identity in Books One and Two reveals how practical concepts of moral agency are the centerpiece of Humean moral facticity. This interpretation of the role of the indirect passions in self-awareness owes much to Jane McIntyre, but I shall argue that problems with her analysis point to the need for a Fact of Agency reading of Hume.

Why Moral Facticity?

Before I turn to Hume specifically I will say a bit more about the general metaethical theory I have in mind. The Fact of Agency Theory holds that there

is at least one undisputable given that grounds practical activity but that cannot be appealed to as a fact for the theoretical understanding. There are a number of reasons for construing this sort of position in ethics in terms of a commitment to moral facticity rather than to moral realism. First of all, moral realism has been very clearly defined in contemporary discussion to exclude any direct reference to a fact of agency. Although it may be argued that nonnaturalist moral realism is also very much a minority view, it is not excluded from consideration by the very terms of the discussion. Secondly, one can more easily discuss the problems of moral agency and moral facticity as logically distinct elements in a theory when realism is set to one side. One is not forced to debate the question of which configuration of these elements is sufficient to characterize a view as realist. By contrast, antirealism is much easier to characterize. Constructivists, projectivists, and noncognitivists all agree that morality cannot be grounded in moral facts, however else objectivity may be secured. Their view is that moral objectivity does not depend upon moral facticity in any way. But Fact of Agency Theory admits some relation between moral objectivity and moral facticity, and this shows that philosophers can hold various positions on what that relation is. So while its appeal to moral facts (facts such as the fact of agency and the fact of moral character) may seem to embed Fact of Agency Theory within the moral realist program, that may be a crude characterization.

The realist/antirealist dispute often frames the notions of moral objectivity and moral facticity in a way that tends to obscure the variety of moral facts. For a useful parallel, consider the formerly widely held belief that *moral objectivity* could only be successfully defended within a foundationalist epistemology. Moral constructivists, while distancing themselves from the realist claim that values are mind-independent and discoverable, assert that they can nevertheless account for the fact that morality is objective and impartial. Their results, though not necessarily conclusive, have been impressive. Moral facticity may be pried loose from the metaphysical pretensions of moral realists with equally surprising results. Just as the constructivist's ability to develop a plausible account of objectivity would not have been predicted by their opponents, the Fact of Agency theorist's ability to secure moral facts while leaving open questions about the role of natural facts in ethics may not sound promising to those who insist upon a univocal theory of facts.

A third reason for setting the Fact of Agency Theory apart from moral realism concerns reductionism. A moral realist generally wants to show that moral facts are not queer, and are as valid for ethical discourse as scientific facts are for scientific discourse. In Fact of Agency Theory, moral facts are not functionally queer—that is, they play the same role in grounding moral discourse as scientific facts do for scientific discourse—but they may still seem queer to scientific reductionists. The project of the contemporary realist often

involves linking up moral and nonmoral facts into one science of human nature in which the moral facts are just a special case of the ontological status of natural facts. Fact of Agency Theory holds that one does not have to go so far to secure moral facticity. One can retain the notion of moral facts and defend the validity of the concept for practical activity, but part ways with the moral realist who tries to link up moral facts with natural facts, or to reduce moral facts to natural facts in a unified ontology. In sharing these two realist tenets, that moral judgment requires objectivity and that practical activity is to be grounded in moral facts, Kant and Hume distance themselves from prevailing antirealist views. They each make use of a metaphysics of morals that they argue is valid for practical activity without insisting that all of its indisputable givens are amenable to theoretical confirmation. But rather than endorsing a unified ontology of facts, they make a distinction between practical vindication and theoretical confirmation of moral facts.⁷

For Hume these facts are first of all the fact of moral self-concern, and secondly the fact of enduring character traits. Allowing the fact of self-concern as a fact for moral knowledge implicates a claim about the existence of the self for that concern to be about, along with the philosophical position that self-ascription is possible.⁸ Together these facts provide the basis for moral discourse about good character and moral obligation. If the speculative metaphysician finds these facts queer or *sui generis*, so much the worse for speculative metaphysics. In order to see how there can be moral facts which are not grounded in the sorts of metaphysical claims underlying natural facts, we need to take a brief look at the dogmatic metaphysics of the self Hume rejected in Book One. I will concentrate first on Hume's general characterization of dogmatism and then on his reasons for rejecting it.

The Humean Self: Rejection of Dogmatic Metaphysics

Character-centered ethics is concerned with the metaphysics necessary to account for moral agency, responsibility, praise, and blame. Hume rejects realism regarding personal identity in the form of a substantial self because it is not only untenable but superfluous. He rejects the dogmatist's claim to know a substantial soul, but also rejects Locke's claim that the idea of the self can be derived from experience. Locke argued that, although whatever substance the person may inhere in is unknown and unknowable, the idea of personal identity is grounded in unity of consciousness via memory or psychological continuity. Hume disputes this, since he can trace the idea of a self to no impression or group of impressions (T 251-253). He concludes that the identity which thought leads us to attribute to the self results from the imagination's confounding a related succession of impressions with the view of a single unchanging object, the self. The propensity to sustain belief in this fiction of the self, to ignore its diversity and to ascribe to it a unity, is so strong

that even careful thinkers succumb to the illusion. Not merely our language but also our thought is affected, because we actually form a fictitious idea (T 254; 255).

After Hume's Book One treatment of personal identity and his further remarks in the Appendix (T 633-636), it would seem that the notion of self or substantial soul is groundless. Perceptions are each distinct existences, and he says that "no connexions among distinct existences are ever discoverable by human understanding" (T 635). However, as Jane McIntyre points out, Hume distinguishes between what thought or understanding can give us as an account of personal identity, and what the *passions* can do to cement perceptions into a notion of self.⁹ The passions that do this work are the indirect passions of pride, or self-esteem, and humility, or self-reproach.

So what does Hume do with the traditional metaphysics of the self? In Book One he signals his willingness to accept a concept of self or substance derived from the understanding, but only if that concept can be appropriately grounded in perceptions "which inhere in something simple and individual" or in the mind's perception of some real causal connection among the perceptions. In other words, the concept must be grounded in the scientific fact that all perceptions are single and distinct existences. This shows that Hume adheres to a reductionist or univocal understanding of facts at this point. Since the concept cannot be appropriately grounded in real causal connections or external or internal perceptions, he is forced to abandon traditional metaphysical foundations for the moral concepts of agency, character, and moral responsibility and develop a new metaphysic of morals. If the self acts, if actions have moral worth in virtue of the motives from which they spring, and if persons can be held accountable to moral and legal standards, something new is needed. The account of the unity of the self must arise out of something other than Book One principles of the origin of ideas which produced the fictional idea.

The metaphysical conclusion of Book One is that the simple self is not discovered as an object for thought. It cannot be an object for the understanding except erroneously, since the idea of self is caused by principles of association and the workings of the imagination as it slurs a succession of related impressions into one continuous stream. McIntyre shows us that, even if the self cannot be a direct object for the understanding or thought, the self is nevertheless a direct object for the passions. Our evidence for this is the phenomenon of self-concern. She concludes that there are two accounts of personal identity in the *Treatise*, each with its own purpose:

The task of a theory of "personal identity as it regards the imagination" is to explain why we attribute identity to the mind. The task of a theory of "personal identity as it regards our passions" is to explain

why we are concerned with our past or future actions. ("Personal Identity," 547)

We react to situations with self-concern because of the indirect passions of pride and humility. Of course we can take pride in such things as our appearance, our relations, our property, even our climate and our native tongue (T 306), but in each case the cause of our pride must reflect upon or stand in some relation with ourselves. Some of these things may not be within our power to create or control, at least not directly or individually, any more than traits of character are wholly volitional. Nevertheless, the concern that persons take in actions as their own provides the practical foundation for the concept of the self as an agent and as a subject of moral evaluation.¹⁰

What then are the implications for moral self-knowledge? If the simple self is not an object for the understanding, how can it be the object of the self-directed passions? How can we make sense of the facticity of the self? An alternative account of the facticity of the self is needed if we are to make sense of the reality of moral experiences—the experience of character evaluation in self-ascription, for example. The Fact of Agency theorist will argue that because each of us views our actions as our own, we are agents for all practical purposes. The taking of an action to be my own is actually part of the felt quality of reflection on the action, since I feel the pleasant or painful consequences of my actions and tendencies of character as related to myself through the operation of these indirect passions. All this occurs naturally as a function of pride and humility, which are self-referential by their very nature.

Hume's text supports this view:

Having thus in a manner suppos'd two properties of the causes of these affections...; I proceed to examine the passions themselves, in order to find something in them, correspondent to the suppos'd properties of their causes. *First*, I find that the peculiar object of pride and humility is determin'd by an original and natural instinct, and that 'tis absolutely impossible, from the primary constitution of the mind, that these passions should ever look beyond self, or that individual person, of whose actions and sentiments each of us is intimately conscious. Here at last the view always rests, when we are actuated by either of these passions; nor can we, in that situation of mind, ever lose sight of this object. For this I pretend not to give any reason; but consider such a peculiar direction of the thought as an original quality. (T 285-286)

Hume then says that there are two properties of the passions which must be supposed to contribute to their causation: their relatedness to the self as object, and their tendency to particular contrary sensations, pain for humility

and pleasure for pride. The second original quality for which reason cannot begin to account is the distinctive feeling of the contrary emotions of pride and humility. Since feeling itself convinces us that pride is pleasant and humility painful, it is in vain to dispute these verdicts of feeling, just as it is in vain to dispute the givenness of a self for practical judgments and practical activities. Putting these two facts of moral experience together, which Hume calls original indisputable qualities of the mind, he arrives at what he calls the "true system" of a double relation of impressions and ideas necessary for practical activity. Nature has made the self a fact of moral experience by means of the indirect passions; reason would vainly try to infer a self from this fact or dispute this fact. The cause exciting each particular passion (such as a morally reprehensible action) is itself discerned according to the felt quality of the passion in question (as painful or bad or inferior) (T 286). Self-apprehension is never neutral in feeling.

Note here that Hume refers to "self, or that individual person, of whose actions and sentiments each of us is intimately conscious" and not to self as a succession of related ideas and impressions. When he describes the self as an individual person, he names it as an originator of actions. This prepares us for the way he will locate the self in a social world. It becomes visible to others and subject to their judgments of moral character and personal merit. By characterizing it this way, Hume suggests that the problem of self is not simply the problem of whether it is a simple or composite entity, but rather a problem of whether it can be known and understood in isolation from other selves. Each of us is intimately conscious of ourselves via these reflexive passions, but our actions and even our sentiments are also on view for others. By reflection we discover that certain passions "are determin'd to have *self* for their *object*, not only by a natural but also by an original property" (T 280).¹¹ It is this thin notion of moral self which is established as a fact for us, and not the soul of old. Nicholas Capaldi shares this view of self-concern via the passions as the basis for taking the self as a fact of moral experience. In commenting upon Hume's rejection of the memory criterion for personal identity, Capaldi writes:

The memory that *discovers* the idea of the self is the memory of how the indirect passions give rise to the idea of the self as their object. This shows clearly that Hume's discussion of personal identity with regard to *thought* [italics mine] presupposes what he says about personal identity with regard to the *passions* [italics mine]. It shows, as well, that the complex idea of the self or personal identity is known only in retrospect. One cannot directly confront one's self or turn the self (as opposed to the idea of self) into an object.¹²

We are now in a position to see how this account departs definitively from the moral realist position on self and moral self-ascription. The moral realist

either intuites the unity of the self, infers its existence, or offers a criterion of psychological continuity which resides in thought (Lockean or Parfitian memory),¹³ not feeling. The question for the naturalist moral realist is what to make of Hume's passionist foundation for self-ascription. Do the passions present an intuition of the self, or evidence from which a real self may be inferred? The Fact of Agency theorist answers no to both questions, arguing instead that passions present a moral fact—in other words, a fact necessary for practical activity but not sufficient for theoretical knowledge. The practical self is constituted by activity rather than intuited or inferred from evidence.

This interpretation has another advantage: it confirms that Hume links moral objectivity and moral facticity with the existence of the self. If my understanding of Hume's position on self-concern via the indirect passions is correct, then this form of self-presentation is incorrigible, immune to the skepticism that enters into a concept of personal identity via any metaphysical account of the self. Hume would certainly want to secure his ethics against this threat. It is important not to view this as an intuition of an entity via feeling, otherwise a fissure appears where the skeptic can reintroduce the problems of the understanding that occupied Book One.

If Hume is right, self-awareness is no longer a philosophical problem. The self becomes a familiar object of consciousness because it is a common object of our passions. Pride and humility are strong passions with frequent causes given in experience that carry their object to consciousness with great frequency and intensity (T 279). The practical concepts of shame and pride are derived from the elements of subjective experience that make possible the correlative objective principles of moral responsibility. Through them the moral self takes itself to possess a reputation or character.¹⁴ Since these practical concepts of pride, humiliation, moral responsibility, character, and reputation have meaning only in relation to the self as an agent, and since the fact of the existence of such a self as ground for agency is given by the passions and not by the understanding, Hume's theory provides a Fact of Agency foundation for moral judgments of character.

Problems with McIntyre's Unified Ontology of the Self

Recall that both moral realists and Fact of Agency theorists want to head off skepticism about moral judgments. This interpretation certainly foils skepticism; will McIntyre's interpretation do so as well? Clearly she is aware of the danger of Hume's contradicting himself on personal identity when he moves into Book Two. Hume needs to make sure that the theory of the passions does not require the existence of the simple self that he has repudiated, and McIntyre is at pains to establish that he sustains his position: "The object is self, or that succession of related ideas and impressions, of which we have an intimate memory and consciousness" (T 277). The object is

the entity the imagination fictitiously takes for a persisting identical self, subject to the limitations of memory and what can be brought into consciousness simultaneously. The moral self is that slurred set of perceptions to which the indirect passions attach prideful pleasure or painful humiliation on the basis of an action or character attributed to it. On her reading, Hume carries forward the scientific ontology of distinct perceptions as the basis for the account of the moral self in Books Two and Three.

On my view, Hume repudiates the substantial self in Book Two, but in every other way he sets aside the view that self is apprehended merely as a succession of related ideas and impressions.¹⁵ Instead he constructs an account of self that makes it clear why we are entitled to make moral judgments about our practical activity. As Capaldi notes, this account does not directly ground self-reference in the capacities of perception, memory, or imagination. The moral self is a self of practical activity given not in terms of perceptions suitable to the understanding but in terms of passions, forces which do not have as their function the synthesis of perceptions into new concepts for the understanding.¹⁶ The force of passion makes action possible not only in the direct passionate desire for some object, but also in indirect passionate self-regard and self-concern.

Others agree that Hume overwrites, corrects, and emends the theory of experience presented in Book One. In Chapter 1 of *A Progress of Sentiments*, Annette Baier argues that the *Treatise* is designed to show how a progress of sentiments occurs when the whole mind investigates the whole mind, presenting a view of human nature that is more adequate to our experience than a view that is derived from the understanding alone. Donald Livingston develops a similar point in relation to the temporal passions, which govern how we feel about our past experiences and anticipate future ones: the *Treatise* is to be read as a philosophical drama in which claims about the nature of experience in Book One must be reinterpreted in light of the explanatory force of the discussion of self in Book Two.¹⁷

McIntyre's interpretation of Hume's theory of self-concern emphasizes philosophical continuity with the negative conclusions of Book One. She refers to a "present self" standing in relation to a nexus of past and future impressions and ideas, and relies heavily on the principles of mental association to make her case.¹⁸ The self we are concerned about is a present self standing in relations of resemblance and causation to various past actions, thoughts, and perceptions. This is not identical with a past self or future self—that is just the point of rejecting traditional Rationalist metaphysical realism and instead pursuing a practical strategy for a practical concept of self.

But how does this work? Shame, which is a consequence of perceived or felt responsibility and implies agency, arises as the result of two circumstances: the past act is related to me (via the principles of mental association, resemblance and causation), and it is of the kind that evokes feelings of pain

or displeasure ("Personal Identity," 552). However, talk of a present self standing in relation to a nexus of past perceptions linked by principles of mental association suggests a theoretical account of the self embroiled in the sort of metaphysical issues Hume sought to avoid. It also falls short of his goal. The realist metaphysician would ask how the present self really relates to the past self and future self, as the theory of the passions suggests. After all, what is this "present self," if not itself a nexus of perceptions standing in relation to other perceptions? If it is not a single entity, then how can it stand as a real distinct object in relation to other objects and be acted upon by these passions of pride and humility? Indeed, all the self-referential language of McIntyre's analysis becomes metaphysically suspect: "...at least sometimes, I act out of concern for a future collection of perceptions that will bear to me, now, the relation I bear to my past" ("Personal Identity," 550). According to the Book One analysis this timeless "I" would have to be broken down into a shifting collection of perceptions, in which case the meaning of the claim would be lost. For if the "I" which I am now is capable of standing in relation to a future collection of perceptions and bearing the same relation to the "I" that I will be then that it bears to that same collection of perceptions, as considered in my past, then there is some self-identical "I" which can be re-identified through these changes. But surely the arguments repudiating the metaphysically identical self and rendering it but a fiction of the mind preclude this interpretation of self in Book Two.

Can McIntyre interpret the self-referential nature of the passions without committing to a real self? She argues that Hume does not replace the Book One account; he merely supplements it:

Our feeling of concern for the past and the future no more guarantees a substantial self than the feeling of indifference proves that the will is free (T 408). When Hume turns to the self-regarding passions in Book 2 his treatment is the same: the feeling of pride reveals the self as its object, but the identification of this self as a connected succession of perceptions (T 277) has been independently established by the account of personal identity in Book 1. ("Personal Identity," 549)

Rather than being extended through time via a persisting substance, the self acquires a past via principles of causation and resemblance which link past impressions, thoughts, and actions to present ones ("Personal Identity," 550). Supposedly, this self can bring past impressions into present consciousness, making it more than a bundle of mental contents. The Book Two self, however, has the force of the indirect passions which act on the recalled or latent past impressions, thoughts, and actions. They take possession of these elements and make them felt as mine, as reflecting on me. Self-concern must be a concern for something real—myself. Unfortunately, McIntyre conflates the issue of the reality of the self with the issue of the substantiality of the self.

If Hume derives the idea of self anew in Book Two, then the self is more than a connected succession of perceptions, just as a non-deflationary account of self-concern requires.

The arguments of the Appendix help to show why Hume could not take the principles of mental activity to provide an adequate alternative metaphysics of the self as subject of moral experience. Hume consistently says that the goal of a theory of personal identity is to account for "self or substance" (T 633). Then he reviews the prospects of a theory of mind in which there are "principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness" (T 636). Until this portion of the Appendix, Hume had argued fairly confidently that there were such principles performing the function of linking up mental contents, but now, and specifically in response to the Book One treatment of personal identity, he has doubts. What we are directly aware of is a feeling of connection between ideas: "It follows, therefore, that the thought alone finds personal identity, when reflecting on the train of past perceptions, that compose a mind, the ideas of them are felt to be connected together, and naturally introduce each other" (T 635). But this feeling of connectedness does not fulfill the goal of the understanding to explain the principles that actually unite successive perceptions in consciousness. McIntyre's interpretation, which starts with the Book One account of principles of mental association and builds a present self linked to past and future, makes it seem that the goal of the understanding has been achieved and that it must be achieved in order for Hume to account for practical activity in Books Two and Three. Yet none of this apparatus introduces the idea of self in Book Two.

In the Appendix Hume admits that the account of the self in Book One is inadequate for the understanding. McIntyre argues that the principles of mental association are sufficient to the realist task, since they solidify the relations between the impressions of the passions. These relations are taken to be sufficient to show that those qualities and actions really are mine, so that I really am responsible for them. This means that Hume wrongly repudiates the Book One account of personal identity, when all he should do is acknowledge that it needs to be supplemented with pride and humility.

Perhaps McIntyre's reading of Humean personal identity will work as an account of concern for myself as the subject of experiences. Yet if I have self-concern, it is not for myself as a subject of experience, but for myself as a person of good or bad character, as someone responsible for laudable or reprehensible or perhaps morally indifferent acts. It makes more sense to see the indirect passions as offered as the foundation for self-concerned responsibility and agency, not for self-concerned suffering. McIntyre concedes this when she writes:

In thinking of *myself* in the future I am thinking of the actions that follow from my motives, intentions, and character, rather than of some substance in which they inhere. ("Personal Identity," 553)

McIntyre foists onto Hume a highly vulnerable realist position. To reject a substantial self it is not necessary to reject a real self. If the self is neither simple nor strictly identical through time but is extended through time ("Personal Identity," 550), then the self is known to be real by the understanding. Alternatively, one can understand the concept of self in Books Two and Three solely as a concept that organizes practical activity. Think of it this way. I (whatever I am) feel myself engaged with results of actions and consequences insofar as I feel or take those actions to be mine. My taking those actions to be mine is a function of this engagement, and not a consequence of some intellectual apprehension of practical activity as mine. A Kantian would say that the taking of some passion or action to be one's own is not a function of self-reflection or apperception; it is a felt quality of the action. Hume reminds us that this felt quality of passionate self-concern is not an *intuition* of self.

Can There be Character without Personal Identity?

Earlier I said that Hume posits at least two moral facts: the fact of moral self-concern and the fact of character. Indispensable to any virtue theory is an account of enduring propensities to feel and act the same way in similar circumstances. Hume refers to these propensities as character. Luckily these propensities to practical activity are regulated by an indisputable given, a fact of self-concern which confirms a self to be concerned about. This is true even though the understanding, try as it might, cannot adequately explain how the principles of mind can unite successive perceptions.¹⁹ Hume resolves this problem nicely. If character is a matter of passions, and passions are dispositional mental qualities, then character is apprehended directly, since we feel what our own passions are telling us: that we are worthy of praise or blame for our actions.

In "Character: A Humean Account," McIntyre argues that the role of the self-regarding passions provides the necessary ontological foundation for a Humean concept of character:

Though he cannot explain the features of persons as states of an underlying mental substance, it should not be concluded that Hume can therefore provide *no* account of character traits. Hume's realism about character must be integrated, however, into his overall metaphysical and epistemological position.²⁰

Character is dispositional mental qualities or passions. Since dispositional mental qualities are something internal to the agent and not merely expectations of an observer, they constitute the person in an enduring, non-substantial way. We come to know of these enduring qualities by means of causal inference ("Character," 200; 203), inferring a person's character by observing her actions, gestures, movements, and so on. Therefore on this view character is best understood as a sort of *causal power*. McIntyre opts for a systematic Hume who constructs character out of our disposition to infer a cause for every effect. Since similar effects (actions) are inferred to have the same cause, character is thought to be durable and constant ("Character," 197).

I agree that Hume is a realist about character, but I think that McIntyre's view risks reducing the essential characteristics of ourselves as agents to mere objects of thought and constant conjunctions of ideas. Reading the concepts of passion and character (and thereby virtue) back into the inadequate theoretical conceptions of Book One (perceptions and ideas) distorts the development of the *Treatise* and forces an ontological reductionism on Hume that he need not embrace. One can agree that "if character functions as a cause of action, it must involve passions" ("Character," 201), without agreeing that character *is* passions, and that passions *are* perceptions. Hume classifies the indirect passions as impressions and not ideas (T 1), and later more specifically as violent reflective impressions (T 276), but that is not all that they are—indeed, to the extent that they appear to us as perceptions their real nature is distorted, since perceptions are partial and fleeting views of real, enduring qualities. If passions are only mental perceptions, character is reducible to perceptions via the passions and then subsumed in the "bundle of perceptions" that make up the self. However, if this view is correct, Hume faces a serious problem: a bundle theory of character. For how can he be a realist about the unity of character, if he cannot be a realist about the unity of these character traits? And if there is no unified character to serve as the object of moral judgment, then the same problem that plagued personal identity in his Appendix critique of the Book One self recurs here. Without an account of the unity of character, neither moral judgment nor moral activity will make sense. This is important because we make moral judgments about the whole person and not just about some isolated dispositions.

Suppose instead that Hume's character realism takes character to be a moral fact we are aware of directly, rather than known only by inferring enduring qualities of the practical self as a conclusion of a causal inference. If the existence of causal powers remains in doubt, then the existence of whatever justifies praise and blame would also have to remain in doubt. The virtue of this interpretation is that it again eliminates one avenue for metaphysical skepticism.

McIntyre seems to be aware of the skeptical problem, but addresses it only obliquely in her discussion of sympathy:

We do not merely have ideas of other people's feelings and emotions: sympathy enables passions to be *communicated*, not merely *represented*. This explains Hume's greater realism about character than about other causal powers. ("Character," 204)

Hume's greater realism about character than about other causal powers is not adequately accounted for in terms of a uniform pattern of causal inference. It follows naturally from a Fact of Agency view, because such facts are immune to skeptical doubts about confirmation from the standpoint of the understanding and its representations. This leads to an astounding, but I believe correct, conclusion: even the characters of others are a matter of direct apprehension through a felt quality that is communicated to us by sympathy. Although we may revise our beliefs about anyone's character (even our own) in light of new experiences, the way in which we come to experience character makes it an indubitable fact of moral experience. The gap between an object and how it is represented to us does not exist.²¹ If that epistemic gap does not exist, skepticism cannot gain a toehold. The causal powers model with its puzzling graded levels of "greater and lesser realism" strains to account for this astounding result.

Conclusion

Hume takes the reality of character as a fact from the standpoint of moral evaluation and agency: we really have a character that is the cause of actions and the subject of moral evaluation. Even though we experience no unity of the thinking self, we do experience the steady unifying tendency of the passions, the process by which current elements of consciousness and practical activity are affected by past associations and future hopes. These "changes" accompany our perceptions whenever we perceive states of character or objects connected to the idea of ourselves.

The indirect passions of pride and humility are the basis of a practical judgment that one is in fact an agent. They give rise to a concept of self that is sufficient for practical self-criticism. This sort of fact will not fit the classification of the materials of the mind into the matters of fact and relations between ideas that were the subject matter of Book One. That is why Hume goes on to develop a theory of self-concern and practical activity that is not liable to the problems besetting our knowledge of matters of fact. It might seem that the distinction between matters of fact and relations between ideas precludes our taking the self as a fact for practical activity, but only if we insist on carrying forward in a doctrinaire fashion a distinction primarily aimed at regulating theoretical judgments. The self which bears moral ascriptions is

given as a fact by the passions and not by the understanding, and is valid only for practical activity.

Each of us wants to act in such a way as to reinforce what we see as the positive aspects of our character and to avoid acting in ways that reinforce the negative ones. The device of sympathy opens up a public world of moral selves seeking approval and avoiding disapproval. The relation between the moral self and the indirect passions is criterial, but the relation between the moral self and character is constitutive. Morally I am my character, since even if I act to change it, my propensity to so act and the ideal of good character toward which I strive are also expressions of my character.

One final comment on the general position to which Hume has contributed so much. Hume and Kant offer very different options for Fact of Agency Theory. Some would argue that ethics should ultimately account for agency in a fact of reason. The Kantian fact of reason, which reveals the spontaneity of the will, is not the sort of fact the scientist studies. If so, the Fact of Agency theorist has reason to prefer Kant's version, since Kant separates character, the grounds of obligation, and the motive to be moral from the domain of natural facts and empirical concepts. However, if it is desirable for ethics to pursue a project not so far removed from experimental psychology, then one will prefer Hume's version. Hume's practical concept of the self, with its enduring dispositions of emotional response and its propensities to action, goes beyond what can be independently confirmed by empirical methods. Hume offers facts of moral feeling and self-concern as an explanation of what causes us to take ourselves and others as moral persons. His system of reflectively ascertained and endorsed passions and affections, regulated by sympathy and adjusted by reason, produces the purely practical concept of a moral self. His is a novel response to the skeptic's challenge; whether it is decisive is another matter.

NOTES

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1 All references to Hume are from David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). Hereafter abbreviated as T.

2 For an overview of moral realism and antirealism see David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); David McNaughton, *Moral Vision* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); and *Morality and Objectivity*, edited by Ted Honderich (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985). On projectivism see Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). On constructivism see Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980): 515-72, as well as his "Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy" in *Kant's*

Transcendental Deductions, edited by Eckart Forster (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1989), and his *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

3 See Brink, 14; 17-25.

4 G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903). Jonathan Dancy, in *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 67, argues that moral principles amount to a reminder of the sort of importance that a property can have in a particular circumstance.

5 See J. B. Schneewind, *Moral Philosophy from Montaigne to Kant*, 2 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and "Pufendorf's Place in the History of Ethics," *Synthese* 72 (1987): 123-155.

6 Others will prefer to treat these passages not as claims of moral fact but as explorations of the phenomenology of moral experience. Both views deserve careful consideration.

7 Fact of Agency Theorists also depart from a kind of "hard" moral realism by admitting mind-dependent moral facts. (On this point they are in agreement with soft moral realism.) Arguably, Immanuel Kant's so-called Fact of Reason is best interpreted as a moral fact of this sort. See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Book I Chapter I Section I, "Of the Deduction of the Principles of Pure Practical Reason," translated by Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956; Prussian Academy Edition, 43-44). Kant's and Hume's versions rely heavily on mind-dependent facts verifiable only from the first-person standpoint, which is perhaps an unwarranted restriction on Fact of Agency Theory, which I take to be compatible with the view that some crucial moral facts emerge only in an intersubjective context.

8 Sydney Shoemaker and Roderick Chisholm share the view that self-reference is not precluded by arguments in the *Treatise*. See Shoemaker's "Self-reference and Self-awareness," especially Section II, 85-89; as well as "Introspection and the Self," and Chisholm's "On the Observability of the Self," Section IV, 99-106, all reprinted in *Self-Knowledge*, edited by Quassim Cassam, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

9 Jane L. McIntyre, "Personal Identity and the Passions," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27 (1989), 545. Hereafter, "Personal Identity."

10 See also Pauline Chazan, "Pride, Virtue, and Self-Hood: A Reconstruction of Hume," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 22:1 (1992): "...for Hume pride and the idea of the self come into being simultaneously: pride and the idea of the self will be shown, on Hume's view, to be the joint effects of a certain train of perceptions" (46).

11 Immediately following this sentence Hume defends his claim that the connection between the presentation of the idea of self and the occurrence of pride or humility is natural and not artificial by pointing out the steadiness and constancy of its operation. Although he does not elaborate the point here, it is reasonable to assume that he meant to rule out the force of social convention in creating such a connection. The quality that determines the object of pride and humility is an original one "inseparable from the soul."

12 Nicholas Capaldi, *Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 172-173.

13 Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), and Christine M. Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 18:2 (1989).

14 See also Annette C. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), Chapters 6 and 8.

15 Although Hume defines self as the succession of ideas and impressions of which we are now conscious or which we could bring into consciousness through memory, and as that connected succession of perceptions (T 277), it is only in the causal account of how indirect passions are raised that he continues his use of principles of mental association. (See for example T 282-284). He does not use principles of mental association to help us understand how the indirect passions take the self as their object. He simply says that the process of self-ascription is natural and original.

In T II ii he distinguishes between our attention to the objects that may be comprehended by the mind via a succession of impressions, and our judgment of how such objects may be of use to us, or reflect well on us, if they are ours. For this to be the case, these "other objects" must be distinguished from self as subject of pride or humility. The succession-of-perceptions account of the self will not support this distinction, because there is no nonarbitrary way to carve up successions of perceptions into external object successions (a picture of the external world) and internal object successions (a picture of self). It is difficult to understand how this distinction between myself and my apprehension of objects could be maintained. By contrast, if Hume distinguishes the self as an object from other objects just in terms of its being what the view always fixes on when pride or humility is aroused in us, the distinction is given by a property of thought "natural from the constancy and steadiness of its operations" (T 280).

16 See Capaldi, 171-172: "Just as pure epistemology is incoherent and leads to scepticism when we try to understand ourselves as if we were disembodied minds, so the concept of ourselves cannot be obtained in pure thought."

17 See Donald Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 118-130.

18 See also Chazan, 48-49. Capaldi's interpretation stands midway between McIntyre's and mine with respect to the role of the principles of mental association and the shift from self as thinker to self as doer. Capaldi refers to these as the "I think" and "we do" standpoints, with the latter developed most fully in Books Two and Three of the *Treatise*.

19 This is not to claim that self-concern always results in actions which best promote the moral or the prudential interests of the self.

20 Jane L. McIntyre, "Character: a Humean Account," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7.2 (1990), 195. Hereafter, "Character."

21 As McIntyre tells us, "in this respect, sympathy seems to present us with a kind of knowledge of other minds" ("Character," 204).

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