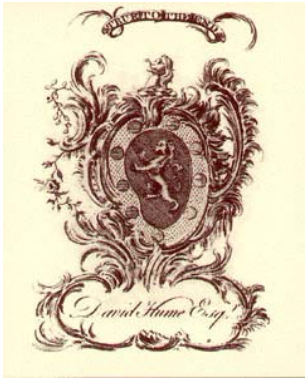

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Hume's Wide View of the Virtues: An Analysis of his Early Critics

JAMES FIESER

Hume discusses about 70 different virtues in his moral theory. Many of these are traditional virtues and have clear moral significance, such as benevolence, charity, honesty, wisdom, and honor. However, Hume also includes in his list of virtues some character traits whose moral significance is not immediately obvious, such as wit, good manners, and dialogue. Mid-eighteenth century critics of Hume's moral theory almost unanimously felt that his notion of virtue was too broad and that Hume should have distinguished between genuine moral virtues, on the one hand, and mere intellectual abilities on the other. According to the critics, grouping the two together devalues the true virtues. Hume was aware that his broad understanding of the virtues was controversial and we know from his letters that he read at least some of these critiques. He nevertheless vigorously defended his position. Although Hume sees this as an issue worthy of defending, contemporary Hume scholarship has neither discussed the nature of the eighteenth century criticisms nor given adequate attention to the success or failure of Hume's position. I address these issues here.

I begin by presenting Hume's defense of his wide view of the virtues as it appears in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*.[1] Then I chronologically present early criticisms of Hume's view, including those by Francis Hutcheson, James Balfour, John Leland, and James Beattie. From these early discussions I suggest that we find three criteria to distinguish between genuine moral virtues, such as justice, and

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less morally urgent intellectual abilities, such as industriousness. The three criteria are: (1) moral virtues are a matter of choice and intellectual abilities are not; (2) moral virtues by themsleves aim at a good end and intellectual abilities by themselves do not necessarily do so; and (3) moral virtues are such that the failure to obtain them incites blame, whereas the failure to obtain intellectual abilities does not incite blame. Although I believe that the first criterion fails, I argue that the second and third criteria provide reasonable ways of distinguishing moral virtues from intellectual abilities.

Hume's Argument

Hume's first account of the wide scope of the virtues appears in Book III, Part iii, of the *Treatise*, published in 1740. His main criterion in determining the virtue of an agent's character trait is whether the action it produces has consequences that trigger symapthetic feelings of moral pleasure[2] in the minds of spectators (T 574-575). In Section 4, entitled "Of Natural Abilities," he argues that the distinction between natural abilities and moral virtues is unfounded since both groups of mental qualities bring forth the same sympathetic moral feelings in the spectator (T 606-614). Anticipating objections, Hume considers several possible points of distinction between natural abilities and moral virtues, but then rejects them all.

First, he considers that the precise feelings elicited in the spectator designate two separate classes. Hume's reply is that the precise feelings elicited by each virtue (for example, benevolence, charity, justice) are also distinct in minute ways. Nevertheless, we still classify all such elicited responses as feelings of moral approval. Second, he considers that natural abilities are involuntary whereas moral virtues are the result of free will. Hume's reply is that many involuntary abilities, such as fortitude, have classically been catalogued as virtues. He adds that there is no conceivable reason why any involuntary quality of an agent mazy not produce sympathetic pleasure in the spectator. Third, Hume considers that habits relevant to moral virtues can be altered through reward and punishment, whereas habits relevant to natural abilities are more fixed and cannot be altered by these means. Hume's reply is that if we are not biased by such moral systems, then this distinction would not even arise.

In *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), published eleven years later, Hume presents the broad nature of the virtues with even greater emphasis. At the very outset, he proposes the following as his method of investigation:

> we shall consider every attribute of the mind, which renders a man an object either of esteem and affection, or of hatred and contempt; every habit or sentiment or faculty, which, if ascribed to any person,

> implies either praise or blame, and may enter into any panegyric or satire of his character and manners. (EPM 174)

After compiling his list of virtues in the various sections of the *Enquiry*, he argues in the Conclusion that the virtues all fall into at least one of four categories according to the consequences they produce. Hume writes: "personal merit consists altogether in the possession of mental qualities, useful or agreeable to the person himself or to others" (EPM 268; see also T 590, 604, 611). Any mental attribute of an agent that brings about such utility or agreeability may be deemed a virtue.

As in the *Treatise*, Hume also defends his broad conception of the virtues in the second *Enquiry*. Initially, he prresented his defense in Part I of Section VI, "Of Qualities Useful to Ourselves." However, in 1764 he moved this discussion to a newly added fourth Appendix entitled "Of Some Verbal Disputes." In this Appendix Hume offers two lines of defense for construing the virtues so widely. First, as in the *Treatise*, he argues that one cannot find a natural basis for distinguishing between moral virtues and natural abilities. He considers possible points of distinction, such as those between voluntary and involuntary, social and private, moral and intellectual, or heart and head, but argues that in each of these cases such distinctions would misclassify important moral virtues (EPM 313). He concludes that, in the absence of any clear distinction between moral virtues and natural abilities, moral virtues must include *all* useful and agreeable qualities that produce moral pleasure in the spectator.

His second argument in the fourth Appendix is based on our broad usage of ethical language, particularly the moral injunctions that we commonly use in reference to moral virtues as well as natural abilities. According to Hume, theologians—who employ their theological methods in ethics—advance the restricted and thereby distorted notion of virtue, which excludes natural abilities. This theological method

> bends every branch of knowledge to its own purpose, without much regard to the phenomena of nature, or the unbiased sentiments of the mind, hence reasoning, and even language, have been warped from their natural course. (EPM 322; see also T 609)

Hume's point here anticipates C. L. Stevenson's argument that ethical discourse is somewhat vague, and that we must preserve this vagueness in our analysis of ethical terms.[3] However, it would be misleading to see Hume as suggesting that ethical theory should be developed out of language analysis alone. Instead, Hume's point is that our broad use of ethical language confirms his earlier argument that there is no natural distinction between moral virtues and natural abilities.

Hume's Early Critics

The first attack on Hume's broad understanding of the virtues probably came in private correspondence from Francis Hutcheson in 1739, from whom Hume solicited comments on the manuscript of Book III of the *Treatise*. Although Hutcheson's letter is no longer extant, Hume's reply is. He responded:

> Whether natural Abilitys be Virtues is a Dispute of Words. I think I follow the common Use of Language. *Virtus* signify'd chiefly Courage among the *Romans*. I was just now reading this Character of Alexander the 6th in Guicciardin. In Alessandro Sesto fu solertia & sagacita singulare: consiglio eccellente, efficacia a persuadere maravigiliosa, & a tutte le facende gravi, sollicitudine & destrezza incredible. Ma erano queste virtù avanzate di grande intervallo da vitii &c. Were Benevolence the only Virtue no Characters cou'd be mixt, but wou'd depend entirely on their Degrees of Benevolence. Upon the whole, I desire to take my Catalogue of Virtues from *Cicero's Offices*, not from the *Whole Duty of Man*. I had, indeed, the former Book in my Eye in all my Reasonings.[4]

Apparently Hutcheson, presumably drawing from Butler's and his own moral theory, had maintained that benevolence is the source of all virtue. Since many of the attributes that Hume listed as virtues do not stem from benevolence, they would then be better classified as "natural abilities." In response, Hume argues that calling them "virtues" follows a common use of language, especially when considering how classical authors such as Cicero used the term.

Almost immediately after the publication of the second *Enquiry*, critics attacked its wide view of the virtues.[5] The first critique appeared in the anonymous pamphlet *Some late opinions concerning the foundations of morality examined* (1753).[6] The author's principal argument against Hume is the following:

> [Hume's] notion is, That whatever, in character or conduct, is approved as useful, is virtue.... We approve of many inanimate things, in view of their being useful; useful herbs, useful medicines, houses &c. Is this sort of approbation then sufficient to characterize virtue? or may we call these inanimate objects virtuous? No, says our author, for, as he tells us, though there is indeed a species of approbation attending inanimate objects, when beneficial; yet it is so weak, and so different from the approbation bestowed upon beneficial magistrates or statesmen, that they ought not to be ranked under the same class or appellation. But let us now take a

> view of that variety of different objects and qualities which he ranks under the same class of moral approbation; and let us enquire, whether the sentiments they produce in us do not differ as widely as the approbation of inanimate from that of rational objects.

For the sake of argument, the author grants Hume's view that a character trait is virtuous if a spectator approves of it because of its utility. Even so, Hume himself recognizes a difference between (a) a spectator's approval of the utility of an inanimate thing, and (b) a spectator's approval of human character traits. According to the author, Hume should also recognize the differences in the spectator's approval of various types of human character traits. First, the author claims, there is a difference between a spectator's response to true virtues and mere "intellectual abilities" such as penetration, courage, industry, and secrecy. The author argues that, although we indeed value these qualities, they do not by themselves make one virtuous since they can each be used for evil purposes. Classic moral philosophers, he argues, discuss such intellectual abilities as virtues only to the extent that they are cultivated for the sake of "worthy and good ends." As to the ancient historians that Hume cites as authorities, the author charges that they did not use the term 'virtue' with philosophical accuracy when describing intellectual abilities as virtues.

Second, the author argues that there is also a substantial difference between the spectator's response to true virtues and to what the author calls qualities "of an inferior nature" such as "chearfulness of temper; politeness and good address; wit; decency; and even cleanliness":

> Compare these two together; and I appeal to you, Sir, or to any other man, whether the sentiment of disapprobation and blame in the one case be not very widely different from what it is in the other; and whether we feel the least of that indignation, with respect to the disagreeable or unpolite man, which we feel with respect to the betrayer and the villain?

In this passage, the author argues that we see a clear distinction between virtues and more inferior qualities when we consider the spectator's disappproval of an agent who lacks these respectively. That is, the spectator feels indignation towards the person who lacks virtue, but not towards the person who lacks inferior qualities.

The brief review of *Some late opinions* in the *Monthly Review* contains a concise summary of the author's attack on Hume's wide view of the virtues. This indicates both that the dispute is intrinsically interesting and that, from early on, this problem in Hume's theory was well publicized.[7] In the same year that *Some late opinions* appeared, James Balfour made a similar attack

against Hume's moral theory in his anonymously published *A delineation of the nature and obligation of morality* (1753).[8] In Section four of that work, Balfour argues sarcastically,

> [Hume] has paved the way to enrich mankind withg the possession of a thousand virtues that were never once dremt of before. For every minister of pleasure, even of the lowest kind, may put in his claim for virtue, and rise in his demands in proportion as he can increase our sensual gratifications. Strange morality indeed! But it is not confined to those functions common to us with the brutes; it even extends itself to inanimate things; so that the beauty of a flower, and the useful qualities of a plant, may assume the name of moral virtue.

Balfour argues here that Hume's theory of utility puts us on a slippery slope that ends in extending virtue to useful inanimate objects. Balfour recognizes that Hume in fact denies that virtue applies to inanimate objects. Specifically, for Hume, the term 'virtue' can only apply to the mental quality of an agent. Nevertheless, Balfour argues that Hume's account of utility "will baffle all his subtilty" to avoid ascribing virtue to useful inanimate things. The heart of Hume's mistake, for Balfour, is that true virtue rests in the proper use that we make of our various useful qualities, and Hume merely lists useful qualities of which one *might* make proper use. Like the author of *Some late opinions*, Balfour also points out that classical moral philosophers believed that misapplied virtues would actually be vices. In his *Philosophical Dissertations* (1782), Balfour continues his attack on Hume's view and describes more precisely what is required of virtues:

> What chiefly distinguishes virtue from other mental qualities is this, that virtue is an active principle, productive of good, from will, intention, and design. It is a living source of good, founded in the two great faculties of the human mind, the will and the understanding. Virtue, therefore, is applicable to man alone, of all the living beings upon earth. It is the proper cause, and not the passive instrument of good, and is estimated not so much from the utility of an action, as the goodness of the principle from which an action proceeds.

In this passage, Balfour argues that true virtues necessarily involve a good intention and are grounded in the faculties of both the human will and the understanding. Natural abilities, by contrast, do not by themselves necessarily reflect a good intention and thus they cannot be genuine virtues. According to Balfour, then, Hume's main error is that he fails to draw

together the various mental qualities under a single good purpose. Without doing this, natural abilities cannot properly be classed as virtues.

The review of Balfour's *Delineation* in the *Monthy Review* contained an extended excerpt from this portion of Balfour's essay,[9] which, again, indicates the importance of this issue at the time. Hume read Balfour's text and wrote him a warm letter of appreciation. He responded to some of Balfour's criticisms, but not those concerning the wide scope of the virtues. However, Hume does state in the letter that, "If I have occasion to give a new edition of the work, which you have honoured with [an] answer, I shall make great advantage of your remarks, and hope to obviate some of your criticisms" (HL I 174).

In his *A view of the principal deistical writers* (1755),[10] John Leland criticized Hume's wide view of the virtues on the same grounds as Balfour. After citing Hume's wide-ranging list of virtues, Leland argues that even if an agent possessed many of these, the agent could still be "really a bad man":

> But these things make properly no part of moral virtue; nor can a man be said to be good and virtuous on the account of his being possessed of these qualities. He may have wit, eloquence, a polite behaviour, a fine taste in arts, great bodily strength and resolution, and yet be really a bad man. And when these things are separated from good dispositions of the heart, from probity, benevolence, fidelity, integrity, gratitude, instead of rendering a man useful to the community, they qualify him for doing a great deal of mischief.

Leland takes Hume to task not only for the unnecessary attributes he includes under the heading of "virtue," but also for leaving out key Christian virtues, such as humility. Excerpts from Leland's discussion appeared in both the *Monthly Review* and the newly formed *Critical Review*.[11]

Perhaps in response to these early criticisms, in the 1764 edition of the second *Enquiry* Hume removed the word 'virtue' from several key discussions. Most noticeably, he removed the phrase "Virtue or" from the opening sentence of the Conclusion:

> It may justly appear surprising than any man in so late an age, should find it requisite to prove, by elaborate reasoning, that Virtue or Personal Merit consists altogether in the possession of mental qualities, *useful* or *agreeable* to the *person himself* or to *others*. (EPM 268)

In this same 1764 edition, Hume also moved his defense of his broad conception of the virtues from Section VI Part I to the fourth Appendix.

However, these changes did not stop the criticisms. In *An essay on the nature and immutability of truth* (1770), James Beattie also challenged Hume's

wide view of the virtues.[12] Even with some of the references to "virtue" removed from the *Enquiry*, Beattie hunts down a remaining crucial reference to virtue in a note to Section VIII: "It is the nature, and indeed the definition of virtue, that it is a quality of the mind agreeable to or approved by every one, who considers or contemplates it."[13] Unlike the above attacks, which focus on Hume's theory as it appears in the second *Enquiry*, Beattie also examines Hume's account in the *Treatise*. Like the other early critics, Beattie argues that Hume failed to distinguish between two distinct classes of virtues that were commonly recognized by classical writers: moral virtues, such as justice, and intellectual virtues, such as genius. According to Beattie, the source of Hume's problem is that Hume first sees that moral virtues, intellectual virtues, and physical beauty all excite approval, and then Hume concludes that the qualities in question are all in the same category:

> Justice, humanity, generosity, excite approbation; —a handsome face excites approbation; —great genius excites approbation: the effect or sentiment produced is the same in each instance: the object, or cause, must therefore, in each instance, be of the same kind.

Beattie then counters that, in reality, we use the term 'approbation' in three different senses and, thus, the qualities in question are not all in the same category:

> I am conscious, that my approbation of a fine face is different in kind from my approbation of great genius; and that both are extremely different from my approbation of justice, humanity, and generosity: if I call these three different kinds of approbation by the same general name, I use that name in three different significations. Therefore moral, intellectual, and corporeal virtues, are not of the same, but of different kinds.

Again, like his predecessors, Beattie argues that the criterion of distinction between moral virtues and intellectual virtues is that we blame people for failing to cultivate the former, but not the latter. Beattie pushes the issue further and considers precisely why we do not blame people for failing to cultivate intellectual virtues. His answer is that moral virtues are within our power and intellectual virtues are not:

> But why are we thought worthy of blame and punishment for being unjust and not for being homely, or void of understanding? The general conscience of mankind would reply, Because we have it in our power to be just, and ought to be so; but an idiot cannot help his want of understanding, nor an ugly man his want of beauty.

Early critics attacked Hume's wide view of the virtues not only in philosophical works such as the above, but also in biographical sketches of Hume. For example, a 1773 essay in *The Weekly Magazine or Edinburgh Amusement* contains the following critique:

> Our author's notion and definition of virtue is very singular. He says, that it is the possession of such qualities as are useful or agreeable to ourselves or to others.... This picture of virtue, which our author has drawn, is an unnatural groupe of a strange variety of features, very inconsistent, and badly proportioned.... He makes virtue intirely dependent upon the capricious humours of mankind, and even to take its form from the prevailing vices of the age.[14]

A similar attack appeared in the same publication in 1777, just after Hume's death.[15] In the late eighteenth century and in the ninetheenth century, however, critical discussions of Hume's moral theory shifted away from Hume's catalog of virtues and focused instead on his notion of utility. Part of this shift in interest was due to the increasing popularity of utilitarian-type moral theories, first of Paley, and later of Bentham and Mill.

Although eighteenth-century critics found Hume's wide view of the virtues so controversial, contemporary Hume scholars typically do not address the issue. Three exceptions are Páll Árdal, Philippa Foot, and J. L. Mackie. Árdal, though, is happy to accept Hume's final word on the issue:

> [Hume] is perhaps right in thinking that no clear-cut criterion to distinguish the specifically moral is in use by ordinary people. We do not, for example, enquire whether a man's courage is native to him before we call it a virtue.[16]

Like Hume's early critics, Foot attacks Hume for failing to distinguish between talents and virtues, but she goes a step further in her attack and credits Hume in part for the demise of virtue theory in later years:

> one does not find in Hume an account of the differences between skills or talents and virtues and he even says that there is no reason to consider virtue as something distinct. I suppose it is parftly due to Hume's influence that this important topic, which was splendidly treated by Aristotle and Aquinas, is hardly discussed by modern moral philosophers.[17]

In spite of these harsh words, Foot does not offer a basis for distinguishing between talents and virtues. Mackie, by contrast, does suggest a possible means of distinction and he suggests the same criterion of distinction that Beattie did. Following Aristotle's contention that virtues are "dispositions of

choice," Mackie argues that virtues are dispositions that we choose to cultivate, often for reasons of social pressure. Abilities, by contrast, "are not similarly responsive to social pressure or cultivation."[18]

Analysis of the Proposed Criterion

Hume's early critics recognized different classes of good qualities and designated these classes with different expressions, including 'moral virtues', 'intellectual abilities', 'intellectual virtues', 'natural abilities', and 'corporeal virtues'. To simplify these various categories, we will use the following terminology to group together the various qualities specifically mentioned by Hume and his critics:

- *Moral virtues*: probity, benevolence, fidelity, integrity, gratitude, justice, humanity, generosity

- *Intellectual abilities*: penetration, courage, industry, secrecy, genius, wit, good manners, dialogue, eloquence, polite behavior, fine taste in arts, resolution, cleanliness

- *Physical qualities*: beauty, handsome face, health, bodily strength, sex appeal (e.g., the qualities of "good *women's men*)

Before turning to the criteria of distinction between virtues and other good qualities as offered by the early critics, we may first address the last category above, namely, that of physical qualities. Hume himself offers his own criterion to distinguish these from moral virtues. For Hume, the term 'virtue' can only apply to the *mental* quality of an agent:

> The pain or pleasure which arises from the general survey or view of any action or quality of the *mind,* constitutes its vice or virtue, and gives rise to our approbation or blame, which is nothing but a fainter and more imperceptible love or hatred. (T 614)

Consequently, physical qualities cannot be moral virtues. Immediately after this passage Hume offers a detailed account of how we approve of physical qualities such as health, bodily strength, and sex appeal. His reason for discussing these physical qualities is "to justify more fully" his hypothesis about our approval of moral virtues, since the two psychological mechanisms of approval parallel each other. The early critics recognized that Hume offered this distinction, but they were not satisfied with it. According to Beattie in particular, the two psychological mechanisms of approval parallel each other *too* closely, and thus approval of virtue is degraded to the level of approval of physical qualities. However, even if Beattie is correct that

the two mechanisms are too close to satisfy more conservative moral philosophers, the fact remains that Hume does offer a clear and decisive way of eliminating physical qualities as virtues.

Setting aside the issue of physical qualities, we turn to the criteria offered by the early critics for distinguishing moral virtues from intellectual abilities. We find three distinct criteria in their discussions: (1) moral virtues are a matter of choice, whereas intellectual abilities are not; (2) moral virtues by themselves aim at a good end, whereas intellectual abilities by themselves do not necessarily do so; and (3) moral virtues are such that the failure to obtain them incites blame, whereas the failure to obtain intellectual abilities does not incite blame. We will consider each of these in turn. The first suggestion—that moral virtues are acquired by choice, whereas intellectual abilities are not—may quickly be dismissed. When we consider intellectual abilities such as wit, cleanliness, good manners, and dialogue, it is clear that we may cultivate these by choice.

The second crfiterion of distinction is that moral virtues by themselves aim at a good end, whereas intellectual virtues by themselves do not necessarily do so. This criterion has much in its favor. When we consider the above list of moral virtues, they appear to be unified in some underlying notion of good. An indicator of this is that each of the moral virtues appears inconsistent with the corresponding moral vices of the other moral virtues. For example, if I have the *moral virtue* of integrity, it does not seem possible for me to be malevolent, unjust, or inhumane. By contrast, it appears that I could have any of the *intellectual abilities*, such as industry, and consistently have a major moral vice such as malevolence. Balfour vividly illustrates this point in a passage that he quotes from Maximilien de Béthune.[19] In this passage de Béthune describes a man that he met who excelled in every imaginable intellectual ability. The passage is so extraordinary that it is worth quoting in full:

> His genius, says he, was so lively that nothing could escape his penetration, his apprehension was so quick, that he understood every thing in an instant, and his memory so prodigious, that he never forgot any thing. He was master of all the branches of philosophy, the mathematics; particularly fortification and designing. Nay, he was so thoroughly acquainted with divinity, that he was an excellent preacher, when he pleased, and could manage the controversy for, or against, the Protestant religion with the greatest ability. He not only understood the Greek, Hebrew, and other learned languages, but all the jargons of the moderns. He entered so exactly into their accent and pronunciation, to which he joined such a perfect imitation of their air and manners, that not only the people of the different nations in Europe, but of the several

> provinces of France, would have taken him for a native of the country. He applied this talent to imitate all sorts of persons, which he performed with wonderful dexterity; and was accordingly the best comedian in the world. He was a good poet, an excellent musician, and sung with equal art and sweetness. He said mass; for he would do every thing, as well as know every thing. His body was perfectly proportioned to his mind. He was well made, vigorous and agile, formed for all sorts of exercises. He rode a horse well, and was admired for dancing, leaping, and wrestling. He was acquainted with all kinds of sports and diversions, and could practice in most of the mechanical arts.

However, after listing the man's intellectual abilities, de Béthune continues by listing the same man's vices:

> Reverse the medal, says Sully: He was a liar, false, treacherous, cruel, and cowardly, a sharper, drunkard and glutton. He was a gamester, an abandoned debauchee, a blasphemer and Atheist. In a word, he was possessed of every vice, contrary to nature, to honour, to religion, and society: he persisted in his vices to the last, and fell a sacrifice to his debaucheries, in the flower of his age; he died in a public stew, holding the glass in his hand, swearing, and denying God.

Balfour comments on this bizarre portrait that the man described "must appear so thoroughly vicious; and the more dangerous from all those extraordinary qualities both of mind and body which accompanied it...."

Critics such as Balfour have indeed detected something that is mysteriously missing from Hume's moral theory. A running theme in the history of moral philosophy concerns whether each moral virtue must be grounded in or serve some higher moral principle. Plato holds this view insofar as he argues that the four main virtues of courage, temperance, wisdom, and justice rest on a properly developed reason. Thus, for Plato, if I have one virtue, then I must have them all. Plato illustrates this view in the *Laches*, in which Socrates argues that the true virtue of courage requires wisdom, and for that reason courage cannot serve an evil end. Seventeenth and eighteenth century moral philosophers followed Plato's lead and commonly held that duties and their corresponding virtues are grounded in eternal and immutable general principles of natural law. Hutcheson, as we have seen, argued that genuine virtues derive from benevolence. Hume's response to Hutcheson is perhaps the only indication of why Hume departed from the traditional theory of unified virtues. Again, his response to Hutcheson is that "Were Benevolence the only Virtue no Characters cou'd

be mixt, but wou'd depend entirely on their Degrees of Benevolence." Although cryptic, it appears that Hume here denies the theory of unified virtues because he believes that each virtue has its own special characteristics.

However, even if Hume's response successfully answers Hutcheson's theory of benevolence, it does not fully address the larger issue of unified virtues as pressed by Balfour. One might still hold to a theory of unified virtues without reducing them to benevolence or any other higher moral principle as Hutcheson does. One might simply recognize as a matter of experience that the moral virtues comprise a consistent set of values, each of which has its own special characteristic. We may also recognize as a matter of experience—which Balfour does—that intellectual abilities do not comprise a consistent set of values. It appears, then, that the victory goes to Hume's critics concerning this criterion of distinguishing between moral virtues and intellectual abilities.

The third criterion of distinction is that moral virtues are such that the failure to obtain them incites blame, whereas the failure to obtain intellectual abilities does not incite blame. On this criterion, moral virtues do appear to differ in kind from intellectual abilities. Although this may not be immediately evident when considering benevolence and cleanliness as virtues, it becomes more pronounced when grouping malevolence and uncleanliness as vices. Accordingly, a spectator's pleasurable response to an agent's benevolent act and clean appearance may not differ significantly (T 608). However, we would expect the spectator's painful response to differ significantly regarding a *malevolent* act in contrast to an *unclean* appearance. This raises a further problem about punishment; for without a natural basis to distinguish vices such as malevolence from personal defects such as uncleanliness, punishing one and not the other would be at worst capricious and at best artificially imposed. Thus, by blurring the distinction between vices such as malevolence and personal defects such as uncleanliness, Hume creates problems for a natural theory of retribution.

Naturally-based theories of punishment were common in eighteenth century discussions of morality. For example, in his *Dissertation of the Nature of Virtue* (1736), Joseph Butler discusses the natural tendency to punish some actions rather than others:

> And thus there is in human creatures an association of the two ideas, natural and moral evil, wickedness and punishment. If the association were merely artificial or accidental, it were nothing: but being most unquestionably natural, it greatly concerns us to attend to it, instead of endeavouring to explain it away.

Interestingly, within Hume's writings we can also find a natural basis for punishment insofar as Hume groups resentment and the desire to punish one's enemies as instinctive desires (T 417, 439; EPM 201). This inclination to punish is specific to an agent's provoking action, and not merely a reaction we have against enemies in general:

> When I receive any injury from another, I often feel a violent passion of resentment, which makes me desire his evil and punishment, independent of all considerations of pleasure and advantage to myself. (T 418)

From this instinctive desire we can establish a natural distinction between moral vices and personal defects: an agent's character trait is a *moral* vice only if (a) it produces feelings of moral pain in the spectator and (b) it incites the spectator's desire for punishment. By contrast, a character trait would be a *personal defect* only when (a) obtains but (b) does not. It would then be a small step to establish a natural distinction between moral virtues and intellectual abilities. A moral virtue is a character trait such that its corresponding vice is a "moral vice" (as defined above). By contrast, an intellectual ability is a trait such that its corresponding defect is a "personal defect" (as defined above).

Once again, it seems that the victory goes to Hume's critics concerning this final criterion of distinguishing between moral virtues and intellectual abilities. These two successful criteria may in fact be two sides of the same coin. If we see that true moral virtues are unified either in a common value or simply as a consistent package, then we can better see the urgency in adopting them—even to the point of punishing those who fail to acquire them. In any event, the possibility of distinguishing moral virtues from intellectual abilities was open to Hume. Had he adopted it, his moral theory could have stood much as it does now, with only a few classificatory alterations. Given the fact that he held firm to his position for at least thirty-six years in the face of numerous criticisms, we may speculate about why this was so important to him. First, in the *Natural History of Religion*, Hume contends that it is very easy for us to be virtuous, and indeed, it requires little effort: "all virtue, when men are reconciled to it by ever so little practice, is agreeable."[20] From that perspective, all of the virtues that Hume lists fall into a single group with nothing to differentiate them with respect to their difficulty. Second, and more importantly, in the Conclusion to the second *Enquiry*, Hume insists that the sole criteria of moral virtue, or "personal merit," consist of utility and agreeability:

> It may justly appear surprising that any man in so late an age, should find it requisite to prove, by elaborate reasoning, that

> Personal Merit consists altogether in the possession of mental qualities, *useful* or *agreeable* to the *person himself* or to *others*. (EPM 268)

If these are the only criteria of virtue, then any character trait that has these effects must be deemed virtuous. To the extent thaat these are the *only* criteria of virtue, then, there is no basis for making further distinctions between "intellectual abilities" and genuine "moral virtues." Perhaps it is Hume's drive for a simple criterion of moral virtue that inclined him to hold his ground on the broad nature of moral virtues. This, at least, is the explanation for Hume's error that the anonymous author of *Some late opinions* offers:

> You seem pleased with him [i.e., Hume] for having reduced the system of morals into a narrow compass, by resolving the whole into a single principle. But here we must differ; for I am afraid, the love of simplicity has betrayed him, as it has many before him, into considerable errors.

NOTES

1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, second edition revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), hereafter abbreviated "T"; David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, third edition revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975); references to the second *Enquiry* only, abbrediated "EPM."

2 For Hume, a spectator's sympathetic feeling of pleasure is an approving sentiment of moral pleasure just in case it (a) produces further feelings of love, hate, pride or humility in the spectator (T 473), (b) has an agent's mental quality as its object (T 472), and (c) arises impartially, without consideration of the agent's relation to the spectator (EPM 272; T 472).

3 C. L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), 34-35.

4 Letter of 17 September 1739 to Francis Hutcheson, in *The Letters of David Hume*, edited by J.Y.T. Greig, 2 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), I 32-34; hereafter abbreviated "HL."

5 All of the early responses discussed below are reprinted in *Early Responses to Hume's Moral, Literary and Political Writings*, edited by James Fieser (Bristol:

Thoemmes Press, 1999). The first printed response to the second *Enquiry* was William Rose's review of that work in the *Monthly Review*, 1752, Volume 6, 1-19. Rose's review consists mainly of extended excerpts and impartial summaries. Although he does not criticize Hume for his wide construal of the virtues, Rose's choice of excerpts and summaries clearly emphasizes Hume's wide understanding of the virtues.

6 *Some late opinions concerning the foundations of morality examined. In a letter to a friend* (London: R. Dodsley, 1753), 24-31.

7 Review of *Some late opinions...* in the *Monthly Review*, 1753, Volume 8, 400. The reviewer's summary is as follows:

> After this he proceeds to consider that idea of approbation, which mr. Hume makes to include the whole of the moral feeling, and upon which he founds the distinction betwixt virtue and vice; and here he takes a short view of that variety of different objects and qualities, which the author of the Enquiry ranks under the same class of moral approbation; and endeavours to shew, that the sentiments they produce in us differ as widely as the approbation of inanimate from that of rational objects.

8 [James Balfour] *A delineation of the nature and obligation of morality with reflexions upon Mr. Hume's book, intitled, An inquiry concerning the principles of morals* (Edinburgh: Hamilton, Balfour, and Neill, 1753), 105-109; 116-123.

9 Review of James Balfour's *A delineation...* in the *Monthly Review*, 1753, Volume 8, 364-372.

10 John Leland, A *view of the principal deistical writers of the last and present century*, Volume II (London: B. Dodd, 1755) (Letter 21 in Volume I of the 1757 edition).

11 Review of John Leland's *A view of the principal deistical writers...* in the *Monthly Review*, 1757, Volume 14, 465-477, and in the *Critical Review*, 1756, Volume I, 193-208.

12 James Beattie, *Essay on the nature and immutability of truth in opposition to sophistry and scepticism* (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid and J. Bell, 1770), 421-448.

13 Beattie's copy of the second *Enquiry* was from the 1767 edition of Hume's *Essays and Treatises*, which, like the 1764 edition, had several references to the word 'virtue' removed.

14 "Character of the Works of David Hume Esq," in *The Weekly Magazine or Edinburgh Amusement*, 1773, Volume 22, 233-234.

15 "Tobias Simple," "Strictures on the account of the life and writings of David Hume," in *Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Review*, 1777, Volume 38, 289-292.

16 Páll S. Árdal, *Passion and Value in Hume's* Treatise (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 160-161.

17 Philippa Foot, "Hume on Moral Judgment," in her *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 75.

18 J. L. Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory* (London: Routledge, 1980), 129.

19 Maximilien de Béthune, duc de Sully, *Mémoires des sages et royales œconomies* (Amsterdam, 1652-1762); translated into English as *Memoirs of Maximilian de Bethune, duke of Sully, prime minister to Henry the Great* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1756).

20 David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, edited by James Fieser (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 70.