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Hume on Monkish Virtues

WILLIAM DAVIE

In the second *Enquiry*¹ Hume denounces the “monkish virtues,” saying that men of sense will regard them as vices because they “cross all . . . desirable ends; stupify the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper” (EPM 270). He includes under this heading, “Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude.” No doubt Hume’s stance regarding the “monkish virtues” does fit into a particular vision of the desirable life, but it may be questioned whether it fits his philosophy with full consistency. In this paper, I will argue that Hume’s explicit formula for identifying virtues fails to justify his rejection of the monkish virtues if it is followed without prejudice.

I. Identifying Virtues

Our whole comprehension of virtue, and our competence to identify it in any community, ultimately derives from our perception of virtue in particular instances. The edifice of morality reaches into the thin air of abstractions and general rules, but it does not begin there and it is always grounded in the concrete experience of human individuals. In the most basic case, what we perceive is not (say) the trait of *kindness* as embodied in George.² We rather perceive the whole phenomenon of George in his particular situation. We pick up information about the person and the surroundings, including bits about motivation, moods, temptations, complications of all sorts, plus the general

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background understanding we have of human nature. We ascertain whether the man's character is useful or agreeable, for himself or others. All this is needed to "pave the way" for the activation of moral sentiment. Then we get an impression (not an idea) of the man's virtue; we feel the warm glow of George's kindness on this particular occasion.

How does *language* figure in our experience of moral differences? We know that as any individual's time on earth mounts up, and as one gains a few years of experience, he or she will gradually acquire abstract ideas and the words which signify them. Here in brief is Hume's account of the formation process (T 17–25). The first order of business is to notice a resemblance among certain objects of experience; we apply the same word to all of them. Thus, we would gather indefinitely many instances in which the word 'kind' is applied to something, or where somebody speaks of 'kindness.' The word becomes associated with a certain custom, or habit of mind, which custom is evoked whenever we hear or speak that word, or at least whenever the word is used wrongly. In that event, the custom fires up some relevant counterexamples for our attention. If somebody asserts, "True kindness is always well-planned and fully reflective," our mind instantly lights upon cases of spontaneous or impulsive kindness. If we should overhear, "She is a very kind person, so people don't like her," we know that something is amiss.

Our competence in handling abstract ideas clearly underwrites the *catalog* that Hume confidently envisions at the start of his second *Enquiry*. We can make two lists, one for virtues and one for vices. In this process, Hume thinks, "The very nature of language guides us almost infallibly" (EPM 174). We can easily appreciate why it should be so. Our moral epithets are mounted on items of direct perception. Our understanding of a particular word is really a custom of associating certain elements of our own experience.

He offers some concrete guides, each of which can be used from one's armchair:

1. A philosopher can "enter into his own breast" for a moment, and consider whether or not he should desire to have this or that quality ascribed to him.
2. He can consider whether the attribution of a particular quality to him would come from a friend or an enemy.
3. He can consider whether a quality, if ascribed to any person, "implies either praise or blame" and whether it "may enter into any panegyric or satire of his character and manners."

We can do these things from our armchair, but notice how firmly we are placed in the social world even here. We enter our own breast, but what we listen for is the verdict of others.³ Whether used separately or in conjunction, these guides will show us, pretty reliably, where to put any given word in the catalog.

"Reliably" is important. Hume's presumption is clearly that any sensible person, any speaker of our shared language, who undertakes the cataloging of virtue and vice, will get the same result as any other. Indeed, that is the philosophical point of the catalog; it is a graphic display of the profound commonality that grounds our moral lives. The common element is not merely a verbal one; our words reflect a deeper reality, a fabric of shared reactions and feelings. The catalog of virtue and vice is a reflection of that fabric, and as such it constitutes a convincing rejoinder to the would-be moral skeptic, who thinks moral distinctions do not mark anything real. The catalog is evidence that they do; moreover, no human being can fail to perceive the kind of differences marked by the moral vocabulary. No wonder Hume dismisses the moral skeptic as "disingenuous" and "superficial" (EPM 169, 214).

Hume asserts that a philosopher "can never be considerably mistaken" in constructing the catalog of virtue and vice. Of course, we *can* be mistaken in our moral judgments about particular cases. We can fail to say what we mean, using the wrong word for a specific feeling-reaction. Or we can have a wrong—for example, inappropriate or hasty feeling-reaction, in which case we will speak in a manner that betrays our haste or biased judgment. Either way, the mistake is pretty easily corrected, in principle at least, by somebody who reminds us of the right word or who points out facts that would change our reaction (our perception) if we took them into account. We are, in a manner of speaking, forced by our shared language to view things from a reasonably objective standpoint (EPM 272). Typically, then, we regard only the person in question and his "narrow circle": "in judging of characters, the only interest or pleasure, which appears the same to every spectator, is that of the person himself, whose character is examin'd; or that of persons, who have a connexion with him" (T 591). What is it like to be this man, or to be his friend, or his child? If we attend to the facts, Hume thinks, our felt reactions should be in alignment from one person to the next. Of course we are fallible creatures, and the alignment may be imperfect. We should never be too surprised if a personal element remains evident even in our most serious and well-considered moral judgments.⁴

Hume seems to be thinking that we are on much safer ground, and much less likely to make a mistake, when it comes to the moral abstractions reflected in the two lists of the catalog. In part, this confidence reflects the strictly limited nature of the task. All we are to do is to tally up two sets of words, "one set of words which are taken in a good sense, and another in the opposite." These words are directly associated with patterns of feeling-reaction, which at bottom may be classified as kinds of pleasure or pain. The difference between pleasure and pain, between the two kinds of response we experience, is so wide, at least in clear instances, that we cannot imagine any serious possibility of error. Everybody knows that 'kind' is taken in a good sense, 'cruel' the opposite.

Now let us return to the start of the *Enquiry*, where we are introduced to the idea of a catalog of virtue and vice. What happens if I try Hume's procedure on the so-called "monkish" virtues? As a preliminary to our fuller consideration, I will do what Hume describes. I enter into my own breast for a moment and consider whether I would want other people to impute various qualities to me. *Fasting?* Yes, as it happens, I would not mind that one, as I have burdened my frame with extra weight. *Self-denial?* Certainly. I am much more afraid of being regarded as self-indulgent. *Silent? Solitary?* Yes, these fit my heroic self-image. Try the difficult ones. *Celibacy?* That would be unwelcome, since I am happily married. *Mortification?* It sounds unpleasant, so I do balk at having this one assigned to me. Plainly, I do not get the result Hume prompts us to expect. Given my reactions, some of these qualities would have to be counted as acceptable, even virtuous.

II. Defending Monkish Virtues (and Persons)

It seems not too difficult to defend the monkish virtues, on Hume's own terms, if we take them up one at a time. Such a procedure should be a legitimate starting place, since the qualities termed "monkish" are separable, one from the next. A person could be celibate without being silent, humble without fasting, and so forth. For illustration, let us consider *solitude*, which we may understand to mean simply *being alone*.

If magnified to its logical extreme, solitude would produce a hermit, one who shuns all manner of social contact, lives alone, eats alone, and converses not at all, unless with animals or trees. We can understand why Hume might resist such a removed form of life, for on his showing it would be like opting out of morality and other human ways of being. Humans are designed to be gregarious and sociable, it is our deep nature, as is evidenced by the ubiquitous power of sympathy, by our capacity for justice, and by the evident pleasure we take in company.⁵

It would not be entirely fair, though, to rest our attention on such an extreme case. Solitude, like so many other things, is susceptible of degrees, and we should remember that, as Hume says in one place,

No quality . . . is absolutely either blameable or praise-worthy. It is all according to its degree. A due medium, says the Peripatetics, is the characteristic of virtue. But this medium is chiefly determined by utility. (EPM 233)

To fairly consider the merit of solitude, we must look toward examples where it is practiced in some reasonable and moderate way.

There may come upon any person times when he or she needs to be alone. Sometimes it is for the sake of performing a fundamental reassessment of one's

life, or for seeking a change in attitude, or even for trying to change some seemingly trivial habit. Anybody who wants to quit smoking cigarettes would do well to remove himself, for a time, from the familiar social environment with its host of cues to smoke, the worst of which are probably other smokers.

Many people find that solitude promotes insight as well as affording an opportunity for change. This has ever been so; it is not just a fact about our noisy, bustling culture. Several of the world's great religious leaders have spent a stretch of time alone before returning to the world to preach what they have discovered or invented. (Hume might wish they had stayed in society and missed their insights.) Similarly, many of our great thinkers have embraced solitude for the sake of their ideas. Newton remained predominantly a recluse for extended times, with little social contact and no close relationships; his focus was exclusively on his work.⁶ The same may be said of the young David Hume in the spring of 1729, as he began to work out the ideas for his philosophy. True, Hume seems to have overdone it, overheating his brain and falling into the Disease of the Learned.⁷ But there is no doubt that his solitary labors were amply rewarded. He was ready to write the *Treatise*, the main part of which was composed in France, at La Flèche, a small, quiet, country town with a large library and few distractions.

What happens if we consider a monkish *person*, one who reveres and adheres to the whole train of monkish virtues, who has chosen a permanent monkish stance in life? Such a one is Ignatius of Loyola, who became the founder of the Jesuits. Ignatius is interesting because it seems he was in full possession, as a young man, of all the things Hume regards as desirable. He was from a wealthy family and he is described as "a lively and trim young man, very fond of court dress and good living."⁸ At about age thirty, he was badly injured in battle; a cannonball struck his legs. To pass the time while recuperating from his injury, he read the only available books, which were stories of the lives of saints. Over time, he found the prospect of their kind of life, a monkish existence, so to speak, more and more agreeable to him. And in the end he decided to devote the rest of his life to that way of being.

We know from his great popularity that Ignatius must have been pretty agreeable and/or useful to others, certainly to others of a similar lifestyle. But this is all that can be required for virtue, namely, the man finds his life agreeable and his "narrow circle" responds to him favorably.

Are monks useful to themselves, or to the larger society of which they are a part? Well, the Jesuits built and maintained the library that Hume used at La Flèche; that was surely useful. In our own day, the monks of New Skete have developed and promulgated a gentle, effective program of dog training. For many years the Christian Brothers operated a fine winery in California. These are meaningful contributions to society.

In summary, it appears that we should approve of some monks, at least, and that some of those monkish qualities should be restored to the virtue column.

III. The Rejection of Monkish Virtues

Let us review Hume's rejection of the monkish virtues in the *Enquiry*. We want to be sure to give his idea a fair and sympathetic reading.

By the Conclusion of his *Enquiry*, Hume has established that "every quality which is useful or agreeable to ourselves or others is, in common life, allowed to be a part of personal merit" (EPM 270). Any quality which is *not* useful or agreeable will never be counted as a virtue by sensible people who operate "without the delusive glosses of superstition and false religion." This forms the putative basis for Hume's attack. He pronounces:

Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues; for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends; stupify the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper. We justly, therefore, transfer them to the opposite column, and place them in the catalogue of vices; nor has any superstition force sufficient among men of the world, to pervert entirely these natural sentiments. (EPM 270)

Some preliminary observations. First, it is worth noting that Hume's remarks about these would-be virtues have nothing in particular to do with *monks* or with people living a life inspired by religion. Natural though it is that Hume should associate this cluster of qualities with religious characters known to him, the point is broader than such an association would allow. Nonreligious people may at times approve of solitude, silence, and the rest. Second, we are given no reason to think that the qualities labeled "monkish" naturally belong together, form a "train," or constitute a "system of morality," as one recent writer suggests.⁹ It is true that "monkish" qualities can cling to one another, in a manner of speaking; celibacy might be easier to sustain if one were also to embrace solitude, and fasting could be one handy form of self-denial. But we are not dealing with a "moral system" in the sense of something that could imaginably compete with Hume's system. What Hume would understand by a moral *system* is a reflective philosophical account of what morality is, such as the one presented by Hobbes or Hutcheson, not some particular collection of practices or propensities. With the qualities termed "monkish," we have a mere collage of would-be virtues. Of course, Hume's system should accommodate whatever is truly of value in such a collage, even if it has been assembled by monks. Third, the list indicates a variety of *practices*

which would not ordinarily be considered virtues or vices, although one might engage the latter in pursuing such practices. A person can be silent in many ways—for instance, as a punishment (or a treat) for one's spouse. A particular silence might be petty and vengeful, another sweet and thoughtful. We would have to examine the particulars of the case before allowing ourselves any moral reaction.¹⁰

Hume's rejection of this cluster of qualities is prompted by the idea that they go against the whole flow of a normal human life. If he is right, if these qualities really do "harden the heart" and "sour the temper," it is small wonder that they have no place in a morality based on principles of humanity and sympathy. But there are questions of fact here. Let it be granted that some people, perhaps monks who prize celibacy, fasting, silence, solitude, and the rest, *also* have hardened hearts and sour tempers, stupified understandings and obscure fancies. We find them to be gloomy, delirious, and dismal. But what causes what? In the *Enquiry* discussion, Hume does not provide evidence that the practice of celibacy or solitude (say) occurs prior to the hardening of a heart or the souring of a temper. It is just as easy to imagine the reverse linkage, where a sour temper and hard heart produce solitude and celibacy. We need some further argument or evidence, which it appears we will have to supply for ourselves or find in some other arena. In the next section, we will scan a broader selection of Hume's writings in a search for clues to his thought. First, though, we should examine some purely philosophical ways of defending Hume's condemnation of the monkish virtues.

The Reflexivity Test

One possibility is that Hume is (tacitly) depending on a *reflexivity test* for identifying would-be virtues.¹¹ Annette Baier claims that

The whole of the *Treatise* searches for mental operations that can bear their own survey, sorting those that can (causal reasoning in its naturalistic and non-metaphysical employment, virtues and the moral sentiment which discerns them) from those that get into "manifest contradictions" or self-destructive conflict when turned on themselves.¹²

Consider the application of this test to virtues and vices. Baier proposes that

Humility as a virtue faces a paradox, namely that the very approval of it seems to threaten to destroy the thing approved. Pride in due pride presents no paradox, and neither does shame for shame, but pride in shame and shame for pride are at best unstable, degenerate cases of reflexivity.¹³

The paradox alluded to here arises if we think of humility as a kind of self-hatred or a sense of one's own baseness, so that approval of it would tend to make us like ourselves better or think ourselves less base, thereby destroying to some extent the target of our approval. The snake eats its tail.

At first blush, the reflexivity test seems promising, but it proves difficult to apply in many instances. For one thing, it does not work at all with many traits of interest; there is no evident way to apply politeness to itself, nor bravery, celibacy, silence, and so forth. Another problem looms when we ask when, in what circumstances, we might cogently raise the right sort of question. Suppose a man is obviously proud of his daughter's thoughtfulness and kind heart; can we confront him with our question, "In this instance, are you proud of being proud of your daughter?" Do we really suppose that he should, upon reflection, be able to answer affirmatively? While it is true that our question does not provoke a paradox, at the same time it does not make any obvious sense. We should expect a rebuff from the proud father, or sheer puzzlement.

In the actual run of life, our reflexivity question would be a strange one indeed. How, then, are we to understand Hume's interest in reflexivity? At the Conclusion of Book III of the *Treatise*, Hume does say that according to his philosophy, "not only virtue must be approv'd of, but also the sense of virtue: And not only that sense, but also the principles, from whence it is deriv'd. So that nothing is presented on any side, but what is laudable and good" (T 619). He is implicitly contrasting his own philosophy with those that would *not* glean approval all the way down—for example, those that would derive morality from a selfish impulse. His own view has a pleasing advantage. When we are pondering the merits of different philosophical pictures of morality, we will surely be drawn to the beauty of the account based on sympathy. But the present point is that little or nothing in this observation does or should feed through to moral practice, or to our business of identifying virtues and vices. The "reflexivity" is a feather in the cap of a philosophy, but that is all.

The Self-Other Parity Principle

Here is another possible slant on our topic. It seems pretty clear that Hume does endorse a Principle of Self-Other Parity, "according to which a quality independently deemed of value necessarily causes love or pride as it is realized interchangeably in other or self."¹⁴ Many passages in Hume's ethical writings reflect this idea. For example, he writes that

these two particulars are to be consider'd as equivalent, with regard to our mental qualities, *virtue* and the power of producing love or pride, *vice* and the power of producing humility or hatred. In every case, therefore, we must judge of the one by the other; and may pronounce

any *quality* of the mind virtuous, which causes love or pride; and any one vicious, which causes hatred or humility. (T 575)

If this principle is sound, it may prove helpful in determining whether any quality is a virtue or otherwise.

Underlying the parity principle, I suggest, is a fundamental belief in the objectivity of value; the goodness or badness of anything or any quality is the same for all of us. That is *why* a given quality will cause love *and* pride, depending on where it is placed (in another person or in oneself). So whatever we say regarding a particular quality, it must be admitted to apply to others as well. If I am proud of my own frugality, for instance, I should love or admire that quality in others as well.

By a natural leap of thought, someone might form the idea that the parity principle suggests that a person will *only* approve of particular qualities in another if he finds those same qualities in himself. And along these lines, Hume does say that “men naturally, without reflexion, approve of that character, which is most like their own” (T 604). No doubt there is an element of psychological truth in this observation, but would we want to recommend it as a device for identifying virtue? Annette Baier seems to flirt with that idea when she remarks:

To be facetious, the circularity of appealing to the survey and judgment of cheerful friendly wit-loving people to get approval of cheerfulness, friendliness and wit seems to be taken [by Hume] to be a wholly virtuous circularity.¹⁵

We would have to be facetious here, for such circularity is surely not virtuous, and it seems doubtful that Hume would seriously endorse it. If this were Hume’s stance, we could dismiss his blunt attack on the monkish as circular and question-begging. The suggestion would be that he appeals to cheerful, fun-loving people for an assessment of silent, solitary, monkish fellows, and that hardly seems fair.

But we do not yet have the whole story. Our tendency to approve of the character most like our own reflects the operation of “an immediate sympathy,” and it is admittedly powerful; we do “enter with more warmth into such sentiments, and feel more sensibly the pleasure, which arises from them” (T 604). However, further experience and “reflexion” can expand our sphere of approval and may even prompt departures from the parity principle. Suppose I hire a bodyguard to protect me from a stalker. The bodyguard is ferocious, courageous, hypervigilant, and prone to violence. I “love” him for these qualities, that is, I esteem him as a virtuous warrior. In this case, I would not be proud to have those same qualities attributed to me; I want to be gentle, mild-mannered, and somewhat absentminded. There’s the rub. Suppose I attend a

monk in his cloister, watching as he enters the third day of his fasting, suffering his hunger in silence as he sits alone in some dark room. I realize, let us allow, that this monk is highly regarded and loved by his "narrow circle" of associates. Certainly I do not want to join them; I am not drawn to them; I would not be proud to display their form of life as my own. However, I would have to say the same of the present-day Amish community of Pennsylvania, and I know that social psychologists report that the Amish routinely test out as among the *happiest* people in the nation. On Hume's showing, it seems clear that I have to approve of them. I have to allow that what they count as virtue, a form of life that does without modern conveniences and that strikes me as constrained and narrow, is entirely legitimate.

Stealing Hume's Thunder

Recently, Robert Shaver¹⁶ has suggested that Hume, in attacking monkish virtues, targeted only "*useless austerities and rigours, suffering and self-denial,*" and his interest is restricted to such cases. Hume need not object if there are alleged to be cases in which the austerities and rigours are useful. But we should be careful here. There is a danger of begging the question or else of stealing Hume's thunder.

Hume's "thunder" lies in the insistence that the monkish qualities are *vices*, which is to say, their possession makes a person morally worse than he would otherwise be. Vices are harmful and disagreeable qualities. It is worth noting that we do not think vices are morally neutral or permissible in cases where they happen to prove harmless or even useful—for example, a dishonest man's reputation precedes him and renders his cheating ineffective, or a violent maniac is put to good use in time of war. Such cases do not affect what we want to say about dishonesty or the propensity for violence.¹⁷ Of course, every virtue and every vice is to some extent vulnerable to the vagaries of context and circumstance. Thus, wit is a wonderful quality, but it is not everywhere appropriate to be witty; even the brightest joke about bombs is unwelcome in an airport terminal. Or take *cheerfulness*, which generally carries great merit, for it "communicates itself to all around" and brightens their spirits; yet even cheerfulness can be immoderate or offensive in some circumstances (one's friend has just stepped on a land mine). Clearly such possibilities do not diminish the value of wit or cheerfulness. By the same token, if the monkish qualities were indeed vices, an occasional benefit derived from being monkish would not increase their value a whit.

Of course, the root question is *whether* the monkish qualities are vices. If they are, we do not want to lower ourselves to a close examination of their potential usefulness in some cases. (Compare how we would feel if the "sensible knave" were to ask us to explain what is wrong with cheating in cases where it will not be detected.) On the other hand, if the monkish collage is

viewed as *good* by some sane and responsible people, as useful or agreeable or both, we have reason to think these are not vices at all.

Shaver alludes to "A Dialogue," where Hume points out how *different* moral practices were among the Greeks and the French, although they are seen to employ the same underlying moral principles. Plainly, Hume is prepared to acknowledge that a list of virtues quite unlike his own can be valid, given the appropriate social and economic circumstances. So what about monks and the monkish, who undoubtedly value their own form of life as useful and agreeable? Shaver replies in Hume's behalf: "But the monk, unlike the Greeks and the French, is simply wrong: his virtues 'serve no manner of purpose'."¹⁸ There is a question of fact here, and it seems doubtful that Shaver, or Hume, has answered it aright.

IV. Religion, Morality, and Style of Life

Let us look more closely now at the kind of case Hume must have had in view. What is the impact of religion on moral life, according to Hume?

Religion is commonly thought to have close connections with everyday morality, the idea being that morality is dependent on religious belief for its backing (both enforcement and sense). It is well known that Hume's account of morality makes no room for any necessary link with religion. Morality finds its backing, for Hume, in the specific processes of the human mind and body. It remains possible, however, that religion may prove to have significant contingent connections with everyday moral life. There are two kinds of possible linkage. Certain morally significant structures of human character may cause the occurrence of some religious beliefs and attitudes. And some religious beliefs and attitudes, once formed, may in turn produce practices that are morally significant.

Regarding the former type of linkage between religion and morality, Hume observes in his essay, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," that certain states of character—weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance—are "the true sources" of superstition. Here is his explanation of how it happens:

The mind of man is subject to certain unaccountable terrors and apprehensions, proceeding either from the unhappy situation of private or public affairs, from ill health, from a gloomy and melancholy disposition, or from the concurrence of all these circumstances. In such a state of mind, infinite unknown evils are dreaded from unknown agents; and where real objects of terror are wanting, the soul, active to its own prejudice, and fostering its predominant inclination, finds imaginary ones, to whose power and malevolence it sets no limits. As these enemies are entirely invisible and unknown, the methods taken to appease them are equally unaccountable, and con-

sist in ceremonies, observances, mortifications, sacrifices, presents, or in any practice, which either folly or knavery recommends to a blind and terrified credulity.¹⁹

It should be abundantly clear to anyone who knows Hume's ethics that those states of character that cause superstition are certain to attract moral censure from humanity. Global terror of the unknown and the attendant sense of weakness are disagreeable both to the person who wallows in them and to anybody nearby. And nothing could be more useless than a fear with no real object, or a feeling of weakness hinged to such a boundless fear. Morality can only condemn such excessive and inappropriate emotional reactions.

Consider now the other kind of connection, where superstition, under some circumstances, will produce vile offensive practices. As Hume says more than once, *the corruption of the best things produces the worst*. Here is an illustration from *The Natural History of Religion*:

Where the deity is represented as infinitely superior to mankind, this belief, though altogether just, is apt, when joined with superstitious terrors, to sink the human mind into the lowest submission and abasement, and to represent the monkish virtues of mortification, penance, humility, and passive suffering, as the only qualities which are acceptable to him.²⁰

The problem is, how can a human court the favor of an infinitely superior deity? The superstitious person's thought process here is not immediately obvious; why should an infinitely superior deity be supposed to favor *these* qualities? In another passage Hume addresses this question:

In restoring a loan, or paying a debt, his divinity is nowise beholden to him; because these acts of justice are what he was bound to perform, and what many would have performed, were there no god in the universe. But if he fast a day, or give himself a sound whipping; this has a direct reference, in his opinion, to the service of God. No other motive could engage him to such austerities. By these distinguished marks of devotion, he has now acquired the divine favour; and may expect, in recompense, protection and safety in this world, and eternal happiness in the next.²¹

So the idea is that a person might seek suffering and discomfort *for purely religious reasons*. One's motivation in such a case will be unmistakable, the superstitious person thinks, as it could never be (at least to humans) if one were to seek joy, cheerfulness, or tranquillity for purely religious reasons. The latter qualities are useful and agreeable in themselves, for singularly earthly reasons.

By this remarkable twist of thought, a person is brought to embrace certain practices *because* they are useless and painful. In this curious manner, religious beliefs lead the superstitious to welcome evils of a serious, character-damaging kind. It is worth noting, though, that the seed for this program can only get started in the soil of a bad character; it requires that ungrounded terror which prompts superstition in the first place.

Let us acknowledge that Hume's analysis of the (twisted) religious underpinning of the perversely self-denying or self-destructive practices of certain persons is an accurate depiction, which is to say, people of that ilk really have existed. Hume was probably acquainted with a few of them, and his exposure must have left a sour taste indeed. We can readily comprehend why Hume would look askance *at such persons*. But this admission does not warrant the wholesale rejection of the practices or qualities prized by those twisted persons. It might even turn out that various religiously inspired "monkish" qualities have a manifest utility and agreeableness (think of the Amish). In that event, Hume's philosophy should endorse those qualities as virtues, I believe, despite their (ugly) origin in superstition.

In Hume's defense, we might plead that he did not have the Amish for objects of comparison. Times have changed, and religion has retreated from its position of global dominance. Hume's bold pronouncements were true, or true enough, in his own day and age. His observations led him to believe in no uncertain terms that religion is a virulent disease, "a cancer destroying the moral fiber."²²

It is believable, too, that Hume might have been willing to follow our thought, namely, that persons who practice the whole collage of monkish virtues may for all of that prove to be admirable and useful members of society. (Here we may think of the young David Hume, driven by his ideas and by fierce ambition, or of many other philosophers.)

We may fairly conclude that Hume's real sticking point regarding the monkish virtues concerns their sometimes-religious underpinning. Even if it should turn out, in particular instances, that various religiously inspired monkish qualities have a manifest utility, even if these virtues prove to be agreeable to some people, Hume might continue to look askance at them. If that is so, we would have to conclude that Hume's moral prejudice against religion is on display in his remarks about monkish virtues.

NOTES

A version of this paper was read at the 25th International Hume Conference, Stirling, Scotland, 1998. I would like to thank the commentator, Maria Montes, and the audience on that occasion for their useful comments and questions. I would

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1. David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, in *Hume's Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). References in the text are abbreviated by "EHU" and "EPM" followed by the page number in that edition. References to Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), are abbreviated by "T" followed by the page number in that edition.
2. Compare R. Cohon: "When we contemplate a character trait, in the standard case we are not generalizing from a number of past instances of feeling approval to the conclusion that the trait has the tendency to cause approval. We occurrently experience the sentiment of approval on contemplating this trait. And on this basis we form a *bona fide* belief that the trait is good." From "Hume on Feeling and Knowing Virtue," a paper presented at the 24th International Hume Conference, Monterey, Calif., 1997, 4.
3. Cf. Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991), 198–199.
4. See William Davie, "A Personal Element in Morality," *Hume Studies* 24 (1988): 191–205.
5. Compare this passage from the *Enquiry*:

Were the human species so framed by nature as that each individual possessed within himself every faculty, requisite both for his own preservation and for the propagation of his kind: Were all society and intercourse cut off between man and man, by the primary intention of the supreme Creator: It seems evident, that so solitary a being would be as much incapable of justice, as of social discourse and conversation. (EPM 191)
6. Anthony Storr, *Solitude* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 164–165.
7. E. C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1954), ch. 6, "The Disease of the Learned."
8. Candido de Dalmases, S.J., *Ignatius of Loyola* (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985), 32.
9. John W. Danford, *David Hume and the Problem of Reason* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), 144.
10. It is interesting to note that sometimes we find it difficult to *tell* what makes one man's conversation or silence annoying or unpleasant, while another's is agreeable and soothing. This may happen even when our reaction to the person is strong and unmistakable. While it is true that we have a huge vocabulary for human traits of excellence and defect (Hume indicates "a thousand" or more, [EPM 243], our powers of articulation are limited, and the subtle variations we encounter in the moral environment suffice "to baffle all the pride of philosophy" (EPM 267).
11. For an excellent discussion of this notion, see Michael B. Gill, "A Philosopher in his Closet: Reflexivity and Justification in Hume's Moral Theory," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 26 (1996): 231–256.

12. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 97.
13. Ibid. 216.
14. James King, "Pride and Hume's 'Sensible Knave'," a paper delivered at the 24th International Hume Conference, Monterey, Calif., 1997, 5, and published as the preceding essay in this volume of *Hume Studies*.
15. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 217.
16. Robert Shaver, "Hume's Moral Theory," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 12 (1995): 325–326.
17. Hume is careful to note that "the tendencies of actions and characters, not their real accidental consequences, are alone regarded in our moral determinations or general judgements" (EPM 228 n).
18. *Hume's Moral Theory*, 325.
19. David Hume, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 74–75.
20. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and The Natural History of Religion*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 163.
21. Ibid. 181.
22. See Donald T. Siebert, *The Moral Animus of David Hume* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 95–104.